Bridging the gap: what can the contemporary church learn from Urban Saints in its ministry to tweenagers?

By Joanne L. Foster

Submitted for the degree of

Master of Theology, Ministry and Mission

Children, Young People and Family Specialists

Durham University

TMM42360

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Module: TMM42360

Name: Joanne L Foster

Date of submission: 29th May 2022

Word count: 15690

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the regulations
of the MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission
Children, Young People and Family Specialists

Statement of originality

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ABSTRACT

Whilst it has been recognised that tweenagers (those aged between 10-12) are at a greater risk of leaving the Church, there is little research as to how we can better understand and minister to this unique group who don't reside fully in either children or youth work. This study analyses whether Urban Saints, a parachurch organisation, could blur the edges of these defined demographics and ensure continued engagement both with and from this vital group. It is underpinned by the work of practical theology where the theological significance of practices both in church and Urban Saints are examined.

The aims and objectives of this research are twofold: Firstly, to investigate the faith and religious beliefs of tweenagers in order to establish why they might leave the church. Secondly, to analyse the Urban Saints ministry model and its effectiveness at retaining tweenagers. A literature review regarding how the Church ministers to tweenagers alongside an understanding of their developmental changes and faith development was undertaken. Empirical research using a mixed methods approach was followed involving a survey which was completed by 15 Urban Saints leaders followed by a focus group with 4 participants and 1 interview. Finally, a mini ethnography was carried out for one month at Urban Saints Guildford. Data triangulation was used to compare findings.

The results recorded that the Church hasn't always recognised the physiological and psychological changes which tweenagers face that can be detrimental to their faith development and attitude towards church. Unintentionally, the Urban Saints ministry model is impactful for retaining and ministering to tweenagers, specifically through creating belonging and identity, emerging leaders, the intermingling of ages, and a relational youth work approach. In turn, these allow for a *miracle of the turn up* where the practices impact activities that go beyond a gathering to something transformational for all those involved.

What the Church can learn from the Urban Saints model is drawn together in the final chapter through recommendations that will not only help minister more effectively to tweenagers but also bring together children and youth work models which have predominantly remained separate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The acute fall in church attendance and in the religious beliefs of children and young people is well documented, compelling the Church into urgent action.[1] This decline may have been further accelerated by the effect of a global pandemic with those in church leadership reporting that delivering effective children and youth ministry is the greatest challenge they are facing (Barna, 2020). However, Brierley (2002) revealed those between ages ten and twelve are at greater risk, a group referred to as 'tweenagers'. In other contexts, the term is somewhat outdated, but for the purpose of this research, it is helpful. Although there are disparities surrounding the age bracket of a tweenager, the term is better applied as an indication of behaviours and thought patterns rather than as a defined age range. For example, Prince (2012) notes "they are taking on the actions and values of a teenager" (p.32). Tweenagers are transitioning from primary to secondary school, in-between childhood and adolescence, and at church, find themselves too old for children's work yet too young for youth groups. Whilst Brierley and subsequently Goodwin have examined how children and youth ministers can better retain tweenagers, this research is now anachronous, especially considering the changes to the social and religious landscape that tweenagers find themselves navigating. There is an urgent need to examine why tweenagers are still disengaged with the Church, and primarily gain an increased knowledge of their faith and religious beliefs in order to minister more effectively to this age group.

1.2 Research focus

Brierley's (2002) research on church attendance and the religious beliefs of tweenagers is largely focused on Sunday School participation, however, there is reference to midweek groups. Curiously, attendance at midweek parachurch groups, such as Crusaders, remained stable rather than in decline (p. 218). Although attendance levels at midweek groups are notably smaller than Sunday School, this data could propose that midweek groups are not losing tweenagers, a hypothesis

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[1] For example Brierley (2000), Voas and Watt (2014) and GS 2161 (2020).

which requires further examination and is given greater weight by Goodwin (2012) who found that tweenagers were positive about parachurch groups (p.81).

As a Children's pastor, I have direct experience of seeing tweenagers who were enthusiastic, fully involved and had an active faith, become disengaged and eventually leave the church. It was while employed at St Saviour's in Guildford that I encountered Urban Saints and the beneficial effect they have on the young people. Many also attend the surrounding churches, yet there is a strong allegiance, with comments often made such as, "why can't church be more like Urban Saints?". Moreover, those who seemed to leave church were still committed to Urban Saints.

Scanlan studied the organisation and offers a convincing argument that Urban Saints influence the boundaries of church life because they function outside the conventions of the Church. This research was based on two ethnographic case studies of which St Aidan's is of relevance. Scanlan (2017) demonstrates that belonging is formed by the "intermingling of ages" (p.123), a practice not always used in the Church, which often separates by age.

Consolidating Scanlan's and Brierley's research, there is evidence to indicate that through innovatory practices, Urban Saints are able to engage and retain tweenagers more successfully than the Church, and it is this premise that will be explored. There is an apparent analysis gap, with few studies examining the impact of midweek groups, which I hope to bridge, whilst drawing together children and youth work models, that often remain separate. Moynagh (2017) describes new ecclesial communities which could reverse church decline (p.121). Urban Saints could well be included as an ecclesial community which has the potential to impact in such a way as to help the church retain tweenagers.

1.3   Aim of study

The aim of this study is:

Firstly to understand the Urban Saints ministry model and its effectiveness at retaining tweenagers. Secondly to offer a strategy that will be useful for Children and Youth leaders in helping them minister effectively to tweenagers.

The following objectives have been identified in helping to achieve the aforementioned aims:

- Establish a greater comprehension of the faith and religious beliefs of tweenagers and an increased understanding of the principal causes for why they stop attending church.
- Examine the Urban Saints model for ministering to tweenagers and assess its effectiveness in retaining children and young people.
- Formulate recommendations for a model that could help children and youth leaders minister effectively to tweenagers.

1.4   Scope

It is important to acknowledge that whilst this research is focused on the Church's role in tweenagers leaving the Church, there are other factors that can affect their faith development, such as the influence of family and peer groups.[2] However, the scope of this research has been bounded to church related aspects.

1.5   Outline structure

Chapter 1 provides background information on the disheartening picture of the decline in church attendance particularly with those aged between 10-12, but also suggests that Urban Saints is experiencing attendance contrary to this trend. The focus of this research is discussed and justified, and the overall research aims and objectives are identified.

Chapter 2 begins with a historical review of how effective the Church has been in its ministry to children and young people. It then focuses on the characteristics of tweenagers and how developmental changes and faith development during adolescence influence their attitudes to church and the Christian faith. An evaluation of Urban Saints is then presented and their ability to influence the children and youth ministry boundaries within the Church is examined.

Chapter 3 details the rationale behind the research methods used including the means for collecting the data and the analysis approach which was adopted. In addition, the limitations and approaches used to minimise potential problems are also discussed.

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[2] Hancock (2020) found that 55% of Christian young people are influenced by their families and friends in the way they think about God and spirituality.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the survey, focus group and mini ethnography, uncovering that while there is no one-size-fits-all Urban Saints group there are elements which are effective at retaining tweenagers, particularly when the original Crusaders model is maintained.

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the practices of Urban Saints in discussion with wider literature and a church context, seeking to formulate a model which could help children and youth leaders better retain tweenagers.

Chapter 6 sets out conclusions from the research and presents recommendations that could help the Church remain connected to their tweenagers, as well as acknowledging the limitations of the study and proposing opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This chapter begins with a historical review of how effective the Church has been in its ministry to children and young people. It then focuses on the characteristics of tweenagers, specifically how developmental changes and faith development during adolescence might influence their attitudes to church and the Christian faith. An evaluation of Urban Saints is then presented, reflecting on their ability to influence the boundaries of children and youth ministry.

2.2   The Church's work with children and young people

The Church's direct work with children and young people was limited up until the 17th Century, with the home being the primary influence of Christian nurture and instruction. As Griffiths (2009) highlights, the drawback was that those children and young people who were not part of a faith community had no mechanism for becoming Christians (p.17). This was significantly addressed when the effects of industrialization and the Enlightenment engendered an effective method of evangelising to children and young people: the Sunday School Movement. Studying the development of the Sunday School Movement depicts a changing world in which the Church sits incongruously, unable to adapt its approach to children and young people – and it was tweenagers who suffered the most.

The Industrial Revolution precipitated enormous changes to the political and physical landscape. Consequently, the Sunday School Movement was developing at a time when churches were proving unable to adapt to this cultural shift and where, as Priestley (2007) writes, children's concept of a church service was "straight-backed pews and services lasting two hours" (p.125). The Sunday School Movement was to address this by transforming the 18th Century Church, thus causing church attendance and child evangelism to rise rapidly in the ensuing century and generate practices that would have a global bearing, still observed today.

Whilst Sunday Schools existed in some limited form from the 16th Century onwards,[3] it was Raikes' 1783 work which "initiated the Sunday School Movement" (Ferguson, 1981, p.2). Whilst didactic by intent,[4] Griffiths (2009) contends that Raikes' Sunday afternoon 'experiment' resulted in a transformational approach to child evangelism where at the turn of the century a remarkable "85% of the child population was in contact with a church or Sunday school" (p.47). There is insufficient data to identify the proportion of tweenagers in this number but what is clear is that figures began to slowly drop as the Sunday School Union established a schooling model.[5] No longer in one large group, Sunday School ranged from the cradle to the senior department,[6] using teaching methods that would be detrimental to retaining tweenagers.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the Sunday School was viewed as inadequate. Swayed by educational psychologists, Archibald (1909) voiced that the Church had "failed to keep pace with educational movements of the day" (p.3). Placing significance on paid teachers, training, and graded classes, his legacy was a 'decentralising' teaching model. Archibald's obituary reads that he "revolutionised the Sunday School Movement" (Priestley, 2007, p.136). Whilst arguably this was true in America, it was contrary in Britain which saw Sunday School attendance continue to plummet, particularly in the senior group.

To counter the attrition in attendance within older age groups religious institutes suggested that they remain in church.[7] Archibald (1909) offered an improved proposal which was to "turn the young people into teachers and helpers" (p.65). Whilst Archibald recognised the needs of tweenagers, the reality was hard to put into practice and by the start of World War Two Cliff (1986) notes that the Church had no enthusiasm for keeping them (p. 252). It was shortly after the war that youth work began, although uniformed groups such as Crusaders had been in existence some time before. This should have been a time of aiding transition for tweenagers, but it seems the opportunity was missed and instead ministry to children and youth remained separate.

Whilst youth work was experimental in its approach, ministry to children stagnated, hindering it from adapting to the evolving environment. Coupe argues that the policy

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[3] For example, catechism taking place before confirmation classes could be term as Sunday School.
[4] Snell (1999) writes "it is a phenomenon in the history of education which is without parallel" (p.123).
[5] Cliff (1986, p.216).
[6] See Archibald (1909, p.22) for a summary of the different departments.
[7] Cliff (1986, p.216).

of moving the Sunday School from the afternoon to the morning, was the primary reason for subsequent decline, causing " the Church to lose half its children over one generation" (Griffiths, 2009, p.58). During the latter half of the 20th Century, both church and Sunday School experienced a continual decline in attendance, signposting that the peak of the Sunday School movement had passed. Against a backdrop of pluralism and globalisation in the 1980s, Sunday School was seen as increasingly unreconstructed and its reliance on previously successful practices prevented it from being countercultural when it most needed to adapt.

Arguably the Sunday School did not meet the needs of tweenagers, as Brierley's work confirmed. The falling numbers of tweenagers attending church correlates directly with increasingly negative attitudes towards Christianity. Francis and Craig (2006) note that "attitude[s] towards church became less positive between the ages of 8 and 14" (p.95). Despite various working parties addressing the decline, the General Synod (2019) acknowledged that "it is not always clear that the church is sufficiently focused on the engagement in ministry with children and young people" (p.2). Currently three-quarters of Anglican churches have less than 5 under 16's and over a third have none (Fowle, 2021), and churches are struggling with children and youth provision (YouthScape, 2016). It is without question that knowing how to retain the younger generation is an urgent yet challenging task. In knowing the *how* we need to understand *why* tweenagers are walking away. To minister effectively to tweenagers a fresh understanding of the characteristics of this group is needed, examining sociological, psychological, and physiological changes and how these impact their attitude to Christianity.

2.3   Understanding tweenagers

Since the 1950's, the consumer market has been interested in the tweenager demographic. Recognising the distinguishing characteristics of this group, Lindstrom and Seybold (2005) state that "today's tween-ager is different from what we have seen among past generations. They've grown up faster, are more connected, more direct, and more informed" (p.1). Tweenagers today are 'Generation Z' and not only the biggest cohort in recent times but arguably the most influential. Adopting generational theory, Lindstrom and Seybold's observations could be further developed.

Generational theory is a sociological framework which outlines that "a generation is defined by the key social, political and economic events experienced during its youth and which come to shape its collective approach to public and private life in adulthood" (Collins-Mayo *et al*, 2006, ix). Whilst this can help give an overview of generational traits, the lack of consensus in defining the generational boundaries makes meaningful application problematic. Furthermore, Clyne (2015) argues that "generationalism" can lead to stereotypical attitudes from adults towards young people (p.30). Additionally, most of the research on Generation Z stems from America and therefore poses another dilemma of applying cultural differences to generational theory. Whilst recognizing that generational theory can be problematic, it does provide an understanding of how tweenagers make sense of the world.

Generation Zs are exposed to infinite amounts of technology, where smartphones have impacted every aspect of their lives, including the very nature of childhood and delaying adulthood (Emery White, 2017). To reinforce this physiologically, in The Lancet, Sawyer *et al* (2018) conclude that puberty occurs much earlier and therefore "the transition period from childhood to adulthood now occupies a greater portion of the life course than ever before" (p.223). This review will now examine the research surrounding adolescence, a time associated with "storm and stress",[8] and the physical, emotional, and cognitive changes that take place.

Psychosocial theorist Erikson developed an 8-stage sequence of age-related crises throughout one's lifetime in which tweenagers experience an 'identity crisis'. This concept involves searching for self and personal identity, through a heightened search for personal values, beliefs, and goals (McLeod, 2018). Marcia expanded Erikson's theory, identifying further sub-categories and where "crisis is a period of identity development, during which the adolescent is choosing among meaningful alternatives" (Goodwin, 2012, p.48). Whilst these theories are not without criticism, it aids those working with tweenagers to understand that this is an intense time for them to navigate, as well as the importance of teaching the biblical perspective on identity.

Piaget, and subsequently Kohlberg, propose theories that offer a useful understanding of the pressure points tweenagers face. Tweenagers are at the beginning of making moral choices for themselves, therefore it is important that they be given the space

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[8] Termed by Hall (1904).

within groups to ask questions regarding their faith. Beckwith (2004) writes: "Spiritual teachers of children need to understand that spiritual development is related to, and intertwined with, all the other types of development through which a child progresses" (p.42). Arguably, the Church has not been good at recognising this, especially as tweenagers are in a transitional period yet often still in children's ministry.

Influenced by Erikson, Kohlberg, and Piaget, Fowler (1981) synthesised a 6-stage faith development flow running from infancy through to adulthood. Applying this concept, tweenagers are progressing from a "mythic-literal" faith (where they recognise customs and religious accounts) to a "synthetic-conventional" faith (where they adhere to beliefs without full comprehension). However, the early onset of physical and psychological changes could suggest that Fowler's framework needs to be less prescriptive. Tweenagers today are possibly moving to the "individual-reflective" stage of faith, transitioning from purely accepting what one is told to analysing and reflecting on your own faith. The leap to an individual and owned faith could be a factor in why tweenagers withdraw from church, so it becomes imperative to guide them through this process.

Influenced by Fowler, Westerhoff (2012) argues that there are four faith development styles. Tweenagers progress from "experienced faith", where faith becomes an effective experience rather than theological, to "affiliative faith", where faith is imitated from those around them. It is vital to ensure two things – a belonging to, and participation in a community of faith. If this is missing in a tweenagers church community, they are not likely to stay. Westerhoff's "community of faith" pivots around participation of all ages and has been the backbone of the argument for children being in church services rather than in their own age specific groups.[9]

Westerhoff's work is rooted in an American perspective of Christian education with some inevitable challenges when applying to a church setting in the UK. Nonetheless, examining the faith and spiritual development of tweenagers clarifies how their faith is nurtured. Tweenagers are now in a post-Christian society which will inevitably affect faith formation and further challenge the developmental approach. Shepherd (2016) argues there needs to be a shift in our approach to faith formation – moving away from linear development but rather to faith being generated. Past research might allude to

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[9] For example Beckwith (2004).

the conclusion that a degree of faith is retained by tweenagers who have left the church as faith is more private.[10] However current findings indicate that it is now more common for young people not to have thought about spirituality at all (Hancock, 2020). That said articulating belief can be difficult, and consequently hard to measure.

Faith development theories raise the question of how we can generate space for tweenagers in which faith can be experienced, and both belief and belonging can be strengthened. Shepherd (2016) concedes for a greater emphasis on "build[ing] communities within which young people can experience God and engage in forming personal faith" (p.118). Parachurch groups could be more effective at this; arguably they have not seen the decline in attendance that the Church has experienced and are viewed more positively.

2.4   Urban Saints

Urban Saints (previously known as Crusaders) was formally established in 1915 whilst the Sunday School Movement was at its most successful. The founder, Albert Kestin had a similar experience to Raikes when he had a chance encounter walking the streets of London and noticed a group of boys playing instead of being in Sunday School. Their response for not being in Sunday School was boredom and it was Kestin's solution which would then launch a movement that was to impact not only those that attended but also the Church, for the century that followed. The movement grew very quickly creating a 'crusader identity' for boys aged from 8 to 18 but also recognised the importance of caring for tweenagers.[11] Urban Saints offered belonging and identity through community and fellowship, alongside "simple ecclesial practices" (Scanlan, 2017, p.47) unlike the Sunday School Movement, which was experiencing significant decline because of its intensely biblical religiosity which was out of touch from the realities of the new century.

Urban Saints similarly experienced a time of decline from the 1960s and 70s.[12] To address this trend radical changes were implemented such as mixed-gender groups and establishing midweek groups, resulting in a return to steady growth. It was under the leadership of Matt Summerfield that Urban Saints reinvented itself, something the

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[10] Such as 'bedroom spirituality' (Collin Mayo *et al*, 2010, p.45).
[11] See Crusaders; Magazine (1942, p.149).
[12] Noted by Scanlan (2017, p.51).

Sunday School was unable to do. From a simple emblematic change, of Crusaders to Urban Saints, through to full systemic changes, such as the intermingling of ages rather than separate age groups, they have demonstrated an ability to be reshaped by the environment they are part of whilst retaining their core beliefs.[13]

Reflecting on Urban Saints juxtaposed with Raikes Sunday School model, there are two similarities which deserve exploring, namely their relationship with the Church and missional focus. Both institutions were set up separately from the church yet were impactful on ecclesial communities, albeit short lived for Raikes' model. Griffiths (2009) demonstrates that Raikes' model included church attendance for Sunday School participants which resulted in rapid growth membership. This perhaps was short lived due to the lack of ownership, as Briggs (2007) notes: "the Sunday School had been brought to the church from without, not originated from within" (p.49). When the Sunday School was brought to the Church, it failed to see the potential of how the two could work together, as outplayed when incorporating Sunday School classes to Sunday mornings.

The relationship with the Church and Urban Saints has adapted over the years. Being able to operate independently from denominational structure, Ward (1996) observes how Urban Saints, in the 1950s, inspired and shaped church youth work and subsequently led to groups being affiliated to churches.[14] In the 1970s there was a new focus on 'serving churches' which Summerfield expanded in his time of leadership as exemplified in "energize", a web-based training and curriculum resource which churches subscribe to. Despite this time of reinvention, Urban Saints have seen themselves as operating outside the boundaries of church yet being able to successfully "work alongside the churches [introducing] boys and girls to a local church" (Scanlan, 2017, p.60). It is this ambiguity with the church that gives Urban Saints a unique position of influence. By operating outside of the Church, it has been free to develop without restraints and maintain its missional focus.

Raikes' Sunday School model is replicated in the missional DNA of Urban Saints, each having bible study, worship, and prayers as key components. Raikes and Kestin, whilst 100 years apart, were both influenced by evangelicalism in how they ministered to

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[13] Scanlan (2017) details how Summerfield has widened its networks through church connections and other groups yet maintained its missional focus (pp.58-59).
[14] p.7 and p.48.

children. Scanlan (2021) notes that "from the beginning those setting up Crusaders were firmly committed to the ethos of evangelicalism" (p.77). Whilst Booth and Cliff argue that Raikes cannot be classified as Evangelical, Griffiths (2009) identifies that although Raikes background was not Evangelical *per se*, his Sunday School model was evangelistic (p.37). Ward (1996) supports this when he notes the diversity and complexity of Evangelicalism as a movement but also one of innovation, which both Raikes' Sunday School model and Urban Saints share. Through a mapping analysis of Urban Saints, they stand out as remaining dynamically transformational, particularly during the pivotal point of the 1980s, unlike the Sunday School Movement.

2.5   Covid – ministering in a global pandemic

It is not possible to carry out this research without reflecting on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 and the challenge this presented for those ministering to children and young people. The main observation was that whilst churches tried to recreate 'online' what they did pre-pandemic, this ultimately revealed the gaps in discipleship, resulting in a decline of online engagement.[15] Furthermore, Holmes *et al* (2021) found the pandemic to have had an adverse effect on faith formation. Given that cultural events shape the approach to adult life, there is an urgent need for ministry to tweenagers to change.

2.6   Conclusion

It seems unimaginable that at one point large numbers of children from non-Christian homes attended church. Yet did the Sunday School ever truly engage those who were aged 10-12? How the Church responds to the changes in adolescence is crucial. Whilst smartphones have infiltrated into every corner of a tweenagers life, this is a generation that desire face to face interaction and value experiences which deepen relationships (Barna, 2018). To reach and keep this generation there needs to be a change from a prescriptive schooling approach, and instead providing opportunity for exploration and nurturing belonging. Arguably, Urban Saints is positioned to disrupt the boundaries of children and youth ministry within churches. The next chapter will detail the methodology used to capture the empirical data, to gain a greater

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[15] See Holmes (2021).

understanding of the Urban Saints ministry model and its effectiveness in retaining tweenagers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

In the form of a literature review, the previous chapter established the research objective of gaining a greater comprehension of the faith and religious beliefs of tweenagers and why they leave the church. It also highlighted the stark contrast in retention level of tweenagers between Urban Saints and the wider mainstream church. Therefore, to identify the Urban Saints model and its effectiveness at retaining tweenagers, empirical research was carried out. This research is located within practical theology, where ultimately the theological significance of the practices of Urban Saints and children's ministry are being examined.

Osmer (2008) identifies four key tasks to practical theological interpretation, and these have been loosely followed (p.4):

- The descriptive-empirical task (gathering information that helps see patterns).
- The interpretive task (drawing on the humanities/science to explain why these patterns are occurring).
- The normative task (using theological concepts to interpret "best practice").
- The pragmatic task (determining strategies of action).

Whilst Osmer's approach was designed for ministers, its flexibility has proven useful as an approach to reflect on the practices of Urban Saints. Bass (2000) argues that "practices are not just acts, they embody beliefs" (p. 3). Recognising that there is a connection between what we do (activities) and forms of communal life, Swinton and Mowat (2016) write: "practices then contain values, beliefs, theologies and other assumptions which, for the most part, go unnoticed until they are complexified and brought to our notice through the process of theological reflection" (p.20). Moreover, Shepherd (2011) demonstrates that practices can be both formal and informal, both of which sustain the Christian life of the group (p.38). This methodology chapter will therefore detail the research methods used that give insight to these practices and underpinning beliefs, including the means for collecting the data and the analysis approach which was adopted. In addition, the limitations and potential problems with the adopted research methods will also be discussed.

3.2   Research strategy

Assessing the retention rate of Urban Saints groups alongside gaining insight into both their formal and informal practices, and underpinning beliefs, the methodology required both quantitative and qualitative approaches. To allow for this, a mixed methods research design was adopted. Mixed methods is a relatively new approach which by definition "draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study" (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007, p.4). Denscombe (2010) comments that it "can provide a fuller and/or more complete explanation of the phenomenon being studied" (p.135). Furthermore, this approach bridges the gap between researchers being forced to choose the positivist scientific model associated with quantitative methods and the interpretative model associated with qualitative ones, thus allowing for a more pragmatic approach (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p.17).

There are different strategies to the mixed methods approach which essentially revolve around the order and weighting of the quantitative and qualitative stages. A sequential mixed method process was adopted in three phases, initially the quantitative section and then subsequent qualitative sections. Phase 1 enabled measuring Urban Saints retention of tweenagers, followed by Phases 2 and 3 which involving a detailed exploration of the beliefs and practices of Urban Saints. As this research is primarily examining the practices and underpinning beliefs of Urban Saints, more weight was given to the qualitative aspect of this research design.

The mixed method design is not without its challenges, including the time intensive nature of both collecting and analysing the data. Other weaknesses arise from methodological 'purists' who believe that research methods cannot be mixed (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). However, given the different inquiry components of exploring the practices and beliefs of Urban Saints alongside the measurement of the retention of tweenagers, a mixed method approach was seen as preferrable. Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods has played a part in enabling practical theologians to develop a clear picture of the realities they speak about (Cameron *et al*, 2010, p.23). Data collection methods included a survey, focus group and a mini ethnography, which took place between December 2021 and February 2022.

3.3   Research methods and process

To carry out research with Urban Saints required access to be negotiated with different gatekeepers within the organisation. Initial contact was made with the Chief Mission Officer (CMO) and subsequently, the leader of an Urban Saints group. The contacts were positive, and the research had the full support of Urban Saints. Ethical approval was obtained from St Padarn's,[16] and their code of practice was adhered to throughout. Whilst recognising that this research did not "involve more than minimal risk,"[17] information sheets and consent forms were given to all the participants at the different research stages. [18] Following GDPR requirements, all the data collected was anonymised and names were only used when permission to do so was given. Electronic data was password protected ensuring confidentiality.

Phase 1: Survey

Aiming to gain a comprehensive and 'data rich' (Miller, 2017) view of Urban Saints groups an on-line survey was sent to all the leaders in December 2021. There are Urban Saints groups which operate in different ways namely pure groups or those who are linked with churches or other organisations. To gain a picture of how Urban Saints retained tweenagers, the survey was sent to only the pure groups of which there are 75. Participants had to be over the age 18 and either help at or lead an Urban Saints group as a volunteer or paid staff. For GDPR purposes the survey was distributed directly by Urban Saints. The survey totalled 38 questions and was used to identify which Urban Saints groups had large numbers of tweenagers, the retention rate of those that attend and the practices of these groups. The questions were a mixture of close ended and open ended. Whilst wanting to gain an overview of how different Urban Saints groups run, participants were also given the opportunity to express their perspective using their own language, thus giving a more rich and complex view (Denscombe, 2021). To limit the "response burden" (p. 63), thought was given to the time it would take to complete, which was no more than 15 minutes. At the end of the questionnaire participants were invited to be part of a focus group, which would lead

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[16] See Appendix i.
[17] See Denscombe (2014, p.406).
[18] Examples of which are in Appendix ii.

to Phase 2 of the research. There was a 20% response rate of which 5 participants requested to be part of a focus group.[19]

<u>Phase 2: Focus Group</u>

This next phase necessitated the recognition of a significant minority from the survey completed. Those who had requested to be part of the focus group had high numbers of tweenagers and were from a cross section of the country. Consideration was given to conducting interviews with each of the participants, but due to time constraints and the merits of focus groups, one focus group was carried out, although interviews were done with those participants who couldn't attend. [20] Denscombe (2021) describes focus groups as "a small group of people who are brought together by the researcher to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a specific topic" (p.232). The merit of using a focus group lies in allowing "researchers to observe a large amount of interaction on a specific topic in a short time" (Smithson, 2008, p.358). More importantly, the data that is produced would be less purposeful without the interaction that comes from being in a group where participants can play an effective part. Using a focus group therefore aids understanding of not only what the participants think about the practices of the Urban Saints groups they run but also why they might think that. However, it needs to be recognised that the conversation is not taking place in a natural situation, a fact that was made more obvious as the focus group was conducted on-line.

Historically, virtual focus groups might not have been perceived as "the future of focus group research" (Bloor *et al*, 2002, p.75). However more recently, and crucially even prior to a global pandemic, online focus groups are seen as being beneficial in supporting qualitative research (Moore *et al*, 2015). Given the geographical distance, participants increasingly familiar with on-line meetings, and common challenges experienced as those face to face (such as navigating groups dynamics and directing focus group discussions), a virtual focus group was implemented. This took place on the 22nd February 2022 and lasted one hour.

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[19] Acknowledging that the response rate was low, it is difficult to ascertain if this is because of declining response to surveys in general as discussed by Miller (2017).
[20] 1 participant was unavailable.

Phase 3: Mini Ethnography

The final phase of the research involved an ethnographic study of an Urban Saints group. A few criteria that determined which group was approached. Practically, the group had to be within a manageable geographical distance. Demographically, the group needed to have a good number of tweenagers and was independent rather than church linked. Guildford Urban Saints was chosen because it met all the criteria and seemed to be one of the few groups that were operating as close to how things were pre-Covid. However, there was one major concern of using Guildford, that being that they still adopt the original Crusaders model of running a male only group. Aware that this would bring a different angle and potentially take the research in a different direction, it would have been preferable to visit another group for comparison. However due to time constraints, this was not possible, therefore the case study of St Aidan's (Scanlan, 2017) as secondary data was used for comparison where necessary.

When deciding on which method to use, whilst the case study method would have given an in-depth study of the group, an ethnography would enable the close observation of the practices and the culture of Urban Saints. Furthermore, through observing the beliefs and interactions in the group, an understanding of how Urban Saints create identity and belonging would be gained. Creswell and Poth (2018) define ethnography as a "qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs and language of a culture-sharing group" (p.90). Originating in anthropology, it has developed into a sophisticated methodological design, accepted within different academic fields including practical theology.

To acquire a greater knowledge of any culture, the primary data source for ethnographic research is participation observation, usually over many months, in conjunction with open interviews allowing for an emic perspective. Due to time limitations this research would be better termed as a mini ethnography. Once authorisation was given from the gatekeepers, the fieldwork began and consisted of data collected from direct observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis of training notes produced by the leaders of the group.

Observations

Four visits in January and February 2022 were made to the group initially as an observer-participant.[21] The position for the first visit was at the periphery, with a combination of note taking and observation of the group dynamics. This position felt unnatural, and it was soon realised that a non-participant approach was more noticeable because of the participatory culture of Urban Saints. Gradually a role within the group was established and a transition to the mode of a participant-observer felt more natural. However, this led to a challenge of recording the observations. After each visit hours would be spent writing up the notes whilst the visit was still fresh.

Semi-structured interviews

To complement the observations, interviews were held with two of the main leaders of Urban Saints Guildford. This gave detailed data directly from the participants and also helped inform ongoing observations. The interview was designed with open ended questions, to elicit free flowing and conversational dialogue. The role became not only researcher but also "ethnographic listening" (Moschella, 2008, p.9) allowing the interviewee's the space to reflect and expound on their practices.

Secondary data in the form of Urban Saints teaching materials alongside Scanlan's observations, was also collated to form part of the analysis. This secondary data combined with the survey data, focus group and mini ethnography assisted in providing a rich picture of the formal and informal practices of Urban Saints and how these might aid the retention of tweenagers.

3.4   Framework for data analysis

The primary data (transcriptions of the focus group and interviews, fieldnotes from the ethnography and open-ended survey questions)[22] were coded and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data for researchers, facilitating the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given the diversity of data a method was needed that that was flexible enough to work across the range of material and sit well between

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[21] There are four observation types; complete participant, participant as observer; observer as participant and complete observer (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.167).
[22] The survey was conducted using a software that produced graphs and tables for the closed ended questions.

different theoretical frameworks. Braun and Clarke outline a clear six stage process for the coding and interpreting of the data; however, it is not a linear process therefore there was a degree of coalescence due to the range of material.

Once familiarised with all the data, the material required manual coding, identifying key categories that were emerging through the research. These were both theoretical and inductive, and open coding was used where codes were developed throughout the process. During this process a coding document was produced and amended on an ongoing basis.[23] As themes began to emerge from the key categories a further round of coding was completed, and themes were then defined. Initially this was done using 'thematic map', thus allowing consideration for the relationship between codes, themes, and sub themes.[24] Themes were redefined and reviewed, eventually being organised into a coherent and consistent account with accompanying narrative (Braun and Clarke, 2006).[25] Consequently themes were being examined that would provide insight into the practices of Urban Saints that could aid the retention of tweenagers.

Reflecting on the thematic analysis process it is important to acknowledge one's own theoretical position in relation to the research. It soon became clear in the way that themes were identified the research was being approached from the framework of a contextualist method, sitting between a realist and constructivist epistemology. Thus acknowledging "the way individuals make meaning of their experience, and in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'" (p.81).

3.5   Limitations and potential problems

The relatively low response rate from the survey, not only resulted in a low sample size but also impacted the focus group numbers. This led to checking for non-response bias, that is to assess whether those who didn't respond are different from those who did and the impact this might have on the results. Limitations also arose from the COVID pandemic. Many groups were not fully operational, and it was clear from the interviews and observations that this was having an impact on the way Urban Saints were able to minister to the young people. Other potential problems were surrounding

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[23] See Appendix iii.
[24] See Appendix iv.
[25] See Appendix v.

objectivity which can be a particular challenge for ethnographical research. Using participant-observer in the ethnography enabled the building of a rapport with those being interviewed thus allowing an "ethnographic interview" (Scanlan, 2017, p.96). This was not the case when interviewing those who could not make the focus group and therefore there was an awareness of the "interviewee effect." [26] However, to mitigate this the interviews were done on-line. [27]

Whilst trying to remain as objective as possible, reflexivity is essential in qualitative research and is based on the premise that "the researcher can never achieve a truly objective stance" (Denscombe, 2010, p.91). The focus on the research questions underpinning this project, stems from personal experience as a children's pastor, and consequently affects what is observed and the questions asked, as well as how the data is analysed and interpreted. To ensure that what had been interpretated was an accurate representation, validation strategies were put in place such as multiple data sources which allowed for triangulation. The interviews and focus group were recorded and fully transcribed, using a software system therefore not relying on memory. For the ethnography it must be recognised that there is a tension that arises from the analytic understanding of what has been observed. Therefore, employing Hammersley's (2006) 'radical critique of interviews', coding and themes were made only from what participants did and said during the interview. Furthermore, participant feedback was sought which Creswell and Poth (2018) note is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p.261). The preliminary analysis of themes was sent to Urban Saints and constant contact was maintained with the gatekeepers to guard against misinformation that might have arisen from the participants and to avoid generalisations being made from the findings.

3.6   Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand the rationale behind the methodology and research strategy employed in this study. The limitations and approaches used to reduce potential problems have also been examined. The next chapter will present the

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[26] Denscombe (2021) notes how interviews respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions (p.235).
[27] *Ibid.,* p.242.

findings and results, uncovering the practices of Urban Saints and their effectiveness in ministering to tweenagers.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1   Leaders survey

Section 1: About the participants

A total of 15 surveys were completed by Urban Saints leaders giving a response rate of 20% and representing different regions in England. A higher proportion were male (67%) and most volunteered weekly (73%). The average length of volunteering was 14 years.

Section 2: About the participants Urban Saints groups

The survey explored how many children and young people attended the group and specifically those classed as tweenagers. Nearly half of the participants groups had over 50 attendees, with no groups having over 100. In terms of tweenagers that attended, 60% had between 11-30 attendance with one group having between 31-40 (see Figure 4.1).
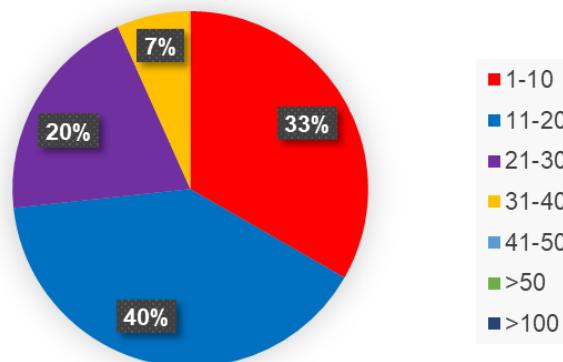

Figure 4.1 Attendance of tweenagers

Group Structure and activities

The survey revealed that there wasn't a typical Urban Saints model in terms of ages. 66% of the participants ran separate age specific groups and 33% met as one large group. Those who ran separate age groups, 74% said that here was an overlap with primary and secondary ages (i.e., year 6 and 7 were in one group). When the

participants were asked about the elements in a typical evening, bible teaching (94%), prayer (80%) and food (80%) were the most common activities (see Figure 4.2).
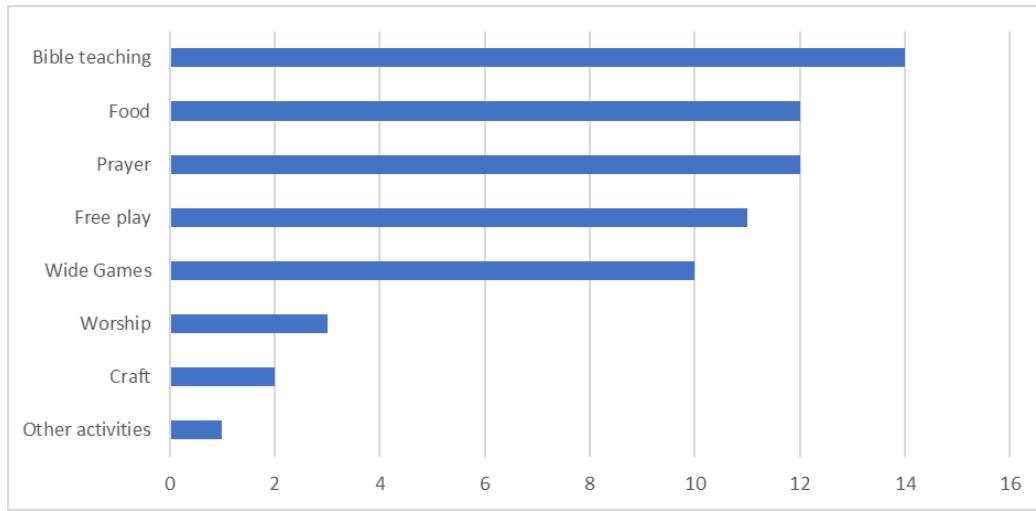
Figure 4.2 Elements in a typical Urban Saints session

Camps were also identified as another important activity for 80% of the participants, with the attendance rate varying from 70% to 90%.

Perceived differences between Urban Saints and church led groups

When asked if they thought that their Urban Saints group ran differently to church run children and youth groups, 13 (87%) of the participants said "yes." There were a variety of reasons as to how they were perceived as different, however many of the answers revolved around the type of activities that Urban Saints run and the relational aspect. The reasons were summarised as follows:

Table 4.1 Perceived differences between Urban Saints and church led groups

More physical activities and games.	4 (26%)	Relational and investing in friendships.	4 (26%)
More evangelistic and simple bible study.	3 (21%)	The group is deliberately led by younger leaders.	2 (13%)
Meet in a school and not affiliated to a church.	1 (7%)	Intermingling of ages.	1 (7%)

Section 3: Operating during the pandemic

During the pandemic only 1 of the groups did not meet. The other groups ran virtually or outside when regulations permitted, and attendance varied from 100% to 50% with more turn out when the meetings were face to face rather than virtual. For those groups that continued during the pandemic bible teaching and games remained part of the session.

Section 4: About the young people who attend

When asked what elements of the session were important to those that attend fun, friendship and belonging were listed as the main reasons by 94% of leaders (see Figure 4.3). Games were also important to the young people (80%). Despite the majority of groups being for those who are unchurched, encouragingly 73% of participants listed faith development as a key element to attendance. It does need to be acknowledged however that these views did not come directly from the young people.
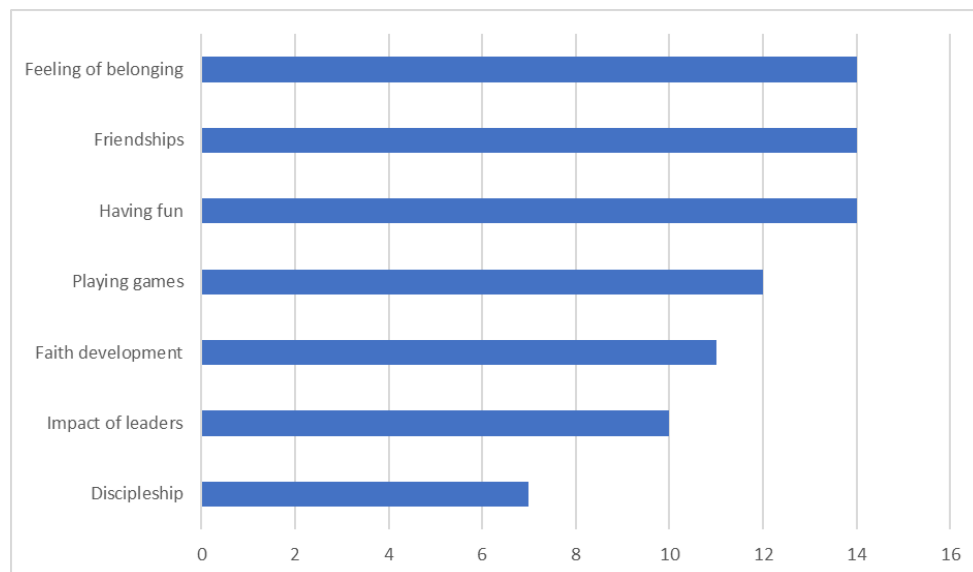
Figure 4. 3 The elements important to those who attend.

Another positive response was the attendance figures, particularly the retention rate of the younger age group. When asked if any of the young people stop attending, whilst 80% of the participants said yes, participants didn't seem to lose many of the younger age group (see Figure 4.4). For those that did stop attending it was largely those aged 15 and over.
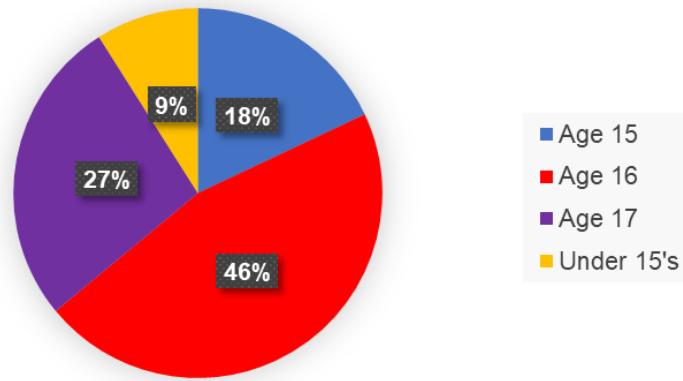
Figure 4.4 Ages of those who stop attending Urban Saints

The reason for leaving was mainly due to other commitments such as being in a relationship or getting a job (see Figure 4.5). 39% of participants said that lost faith or belief was a reason that they might stop attending.
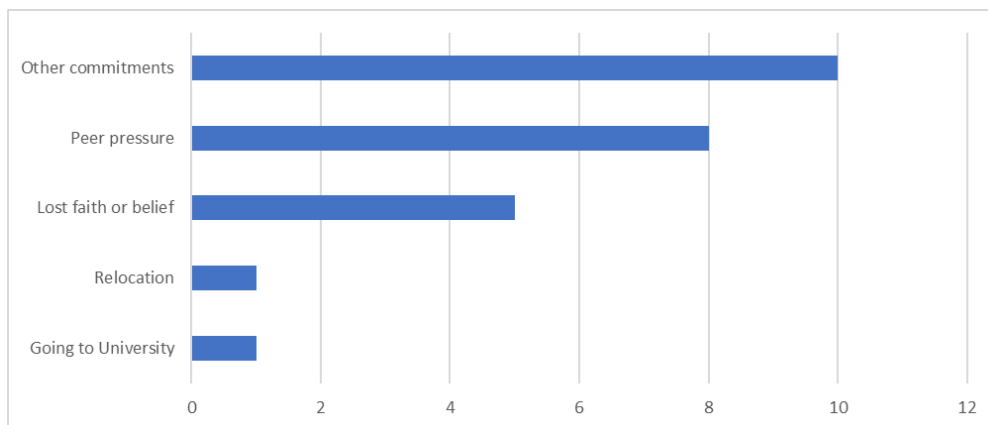
Figure 4.5 Reasons for decline in attendance at Urban Saints

Summary

Despite a low response rate there was sufficient data to uncover key findings which can be summarised as follows. There is no one size fits all Urban Saints group however there seem to be certain elements which are typical to all, namely a bible study, prayer, games, camps and a high number of young leaders who regularly serve. Many of the groups have a mix of ages or have a time when all the ages can be together. Those who run Urban Saints groups have done so for many years and

dedication to the mission is one of the reasons that they stay. This commitment was outplayed in the ways the groups operated during the pandemic, with groups looking for creative ways of continuing to meet. There is evidence of a good retention rate of the lower age group although the small sample size needs to be considered. Fundamentally the biggest attraction to attending Urban Saints is a pervading sense of belonging, friendship, and fun, with the relational aspect and investment in friendships being the key differences between these groups and church led children and youth groups.

4.2 Focus group

A focus group was held with four Urban Saints leaders representing different geographical regions in England. Three groups were well established, running for over 25 years, and one group recently started during the pandemic. Since one participant couldn't make the focus group, one interview was also carried out. Both the focus group and interview explored common themes and Urban Saints practices that had been noticed from the responses in the survey. Namely, how the leaders saw themselves as affiliated to Urban Saints; the development of leadership; key transition elements and the differences between Urban Saints and church groups. In terms of the findings six areas which resonated across the focus group and interview will be presented.

A bridge into the community

When asked how their groups had originated, all had been formed with a missional focus in mind. Two of the groups had similar beginnings to Kestin's original model where the leader saw a group of young people on the streets and a group was formed by inviting them along to an event. There was a clear sense that the groups saw themselves as working alongside the local church. One participant commented: "It's helping equip and support the church to reach those that wouldn't necessarily walk through the doors of a church." Another participant used the term "UK Missionary" to explain how they saw their mission, planting life into communities where "the church wasn't really present."

The missional focus extended to the importance of providing a 'neutral space', both physically and metaphorically. Whilst one of the groups has their own building, the

majority meet in village halls or parks. The participants expressed that there was an intentionality that an Urban Saints group was and should be different to a youth group:

> "I think what we could end up doing is being like a church youth group. That is not what we want to build. We want to be able to build between the street and the church. That middle bit."

A 'neutral space' was also incorporated in the program with the central focus being conducive for inviting friends. Furthermore, there is an understanding of the wider context faced by this generation today and therefore "answers the questions that young people are asking acknowledging there's other perspectives out there too" and where "nothing is off the table" within their discussions.

The DNA of an Urban Saints group

When specifically discussing the differences between Urban Saints and church led groups, participants talked about how the young people "feed into what's going on" and see their groups as "for young people by young people." There was a strong belief that Urban Saints are not there to entertain; rather "it's much more about working with rather than we're going to put on this for you." This was also illustrated in the traditional activities where one participant remarked, "I do tonnes of old school youth work in the session because you don't need flashing lights and smoke machines." Despite the simplicity, there was a drive for adventure alongside creating "unforgettable experiences" for those that attend.

Relational youth work

It became apparent that ultimately the heart of an Urban Saints group is to create space which can facilitate authentic relationships with the young people that attend. One participant stated, "there's something about the relationship that leaders have that kind of goes beyond the activity" and another conceptualised it as "doing weekly relational youth work." This was seen in how committed all the participants were, thus the absence of requiring a weekly serving rota. Comments such as "if you commit, you commit so we don't do rota's" were expressed by the participants. There was the belief that relationships were built because the team was consistent so "they see you week in week out." Relational youth work was not only demonstrated in the physical time given to running the Urban Saints groups but also the depth of provision that they gave leading one participant to conclude "it's such a bigger picture than just the running of

a group." Another talked about meeting the physical needs of a young person who needed some clothes or giving lifts to those who couldn't otherwise make the group. There was a definite sense that whilst the groups may look different, the commitment and heart of an Urban Saints leader was the same, and one where leaders were willing share their own personal circumstances with the young people.

Emerging leadership

Four leaders spoke about emerging leadership as something which organically occurred within the groups, where leadership was passed onto those who attended the group. Two groups seemed to have perfected this where "leaders naturally arose, they came from the group" and where "95% of our young people transition straight to leadership." This resulted in many leaders being in their late teens but supported by older team and there being a vulnerability where "lads know each other inside out warts and all." The groups were therefore naturally intergenerational.

Transition elements

Discussing specific practices which might aid transition, the interaction between the older and younger youth was seen as a key element. For some groups this happened organically as there was one group operating and they "just all muck in with the games" and "you don't notice the transition between years six or year seven." For others there was a time of cross over which provided the space where "the older lads have learned to include them". Others commented that having young leaders created an aspiration amongst the younger children of wanting to be a Junior leader one day because "they see it being worked through where the young people are leading the younger ones."

Identity with Urban Saints

The final area which resonated across the groups was how they identified with Urban Saints where most had little affinity with Urban Saints or had at the beginning "but that had fallen away." This was reflected in the fact that the groups were not called Urban Saints groups but had different names such as 'girls hang out' and 'Impax' Those that attend the groups are therefore "quite oblivious to Urban Saints on some measure."

Summary

Whilst all the groups were set up with a missional focus the groups which maintained Kestin's original model seemed to remain strong in terms of the number of leaders volunteering and the growth of young people attending. The affiliation to Urban Saints wasn't what keeps the young people attending. It is relational youth work, participation and the intermingling of ages. The one group which still had a strong affiliation to Urban Saints, not just in name but also in how the group was structured was Urban Saints Guildford. The other participants had heard of the group with the CMO seeing it as "a fantastic example of what we would love to see elsewhere." It was this group that was used for the following ethnography.

4.3   Urban Saints Guildford

History and overview of the group

Running since 1910, Urban Saints Guildford (USG) is committed to the traditional characteristics of Crusaders. It is one of the few groups which hasn't amalgamated boys and girls but remains a missional group for over 80 "lads" aged between 10 and 18. Jagat, a 24-year-old trainee accountant, is the current leader and has been part of USG since he was 10. Having attended as a young person himself, over time was given more and more leadership responsibility. He describes his reason for continuing with the group:

> "We're called as Christians to show others the gospel and Urban Saints is an exciting place to do that and somewhere that there is investment and friendship."

Alongside Jagat there are numerous enthusiastic adults who serve weekly, with the majority having a long history with USG. When asked why they serve there was a sense that it was a definite call from God. They wanted to be there.

The structure of the evening begins with Juniors (school years 5-7) who arrive at 6:30. At 7:30 the Intermediates (school years 8-10) and Seniors (11-13) arrive. There is a period of 45 minutes where all the groups are together. At 8:15 the Juniors leave and the Intermediates and Seniors disperse for 'keenites' where they are split into their

own year groups and taken in minibuses to hosts' houses for teaching and food. The observation revolved around the Juniors' group.

Group night

The purpose-built hall needs some loving, but the heritage of the past is evidential by the Junior and Senior name plaques on the door, alongside newspaper clippings and camp photos placed around the hall. Leaders begin to arrive at 6:15 and the set-up time seems to be virtually non-existent. Other than finding the red sign-up book and setting up the props needed for the talk, there is a distinctly relaxed and laid-back approach. At 6:20 onwards there is a gradual trickle of boys arriving with 25 in total. A couple of the leaders are in the main hall playing football but there is gravitation towards the "bundle room". The boys have total freedom and no more so than when the bundle room opens. A giant soft play which was donated by a local charity, it's a place where the lads can let off steam by bundling each other! Despite the chaos there is a warming display of care and lads looking out for lads.

At 6:50 the lads are herded into the Senior room, and this freedom is extended as they jump on sofas. A couple of the lads are being piggy backed into the room by leaders. There is a high level of excitement by all. However, amongst the chaos the leaders are still able to command the room so the teaching session can begin. This seems to vary in length and style in terms of small group discussions or up-front object lessons however there is always an undiluted message. Jagat explains that there is a teaching program and whilst there is an element of freedom there are key points which must be followed, namely making Christianity exciting and relatable. Whilst some of the lads struggle to concentrate, leaders gently encourage them to listen. After the talk and discussion one of the lads is invited to pray for the group – someone always volunteers. The session closes with handing out of rewards which creates a buzz of conversation. A leader explains that if you have attended for 10 weeks you get a badge and sweets, 15 weeks a wrist band, 20 weeks a bible, 30 weeks a mug and 50 weeks a hoodie. Whilst a couple of lads eagerly receive their wrist bands it's hard not to notice the hustle and bustle of the Intermediates and Seniors arriving. The Juniors are released, and the hall becomes an explosion of 80 lads of all ages playing football, board games, bundling and chatting. When the full group arrives it is difficult to

distinguish who are leaders and who aren't. Despite the mixture of age groups there is an acceptance of the older ones with the younger ones.

At 8:00 everyone moves into the main hall and grabs a chair. The space instantly resembles that of a school assembly with Jagat taking on the role of headmaster. He gets the attention of the lads and invites each section leader to speak about what is going on in their groups – this is interspersed with cheers and banging of the chairs. There is a quick game before everyone leaves. The foyer is abuzz with Seniors and Intermediates heading out into minibuses and parents arriving to collect the Juniors. In amongst this the leaders are hugging and bundling those Juniors who are still hanging around.

The ethnographic findings:

<u>Belonging</u>

There are deep friendships and a sense of belonging which resonates on every level of the group. The free play seems to be a significant time creating attractive and risky elements that not only keep the young people coming but also allows for friendship to be built. The bundle room exemplifies this, as Jagat explains:

"it's thrilling to come home and tell stories of being thrown around in a bundle room by lads three times the height of me. It's just exhilarating."

It provides space for lads to be able to have fun and excitement that they couldn't anywhere else, yet also cultivates inclusion and belonging. This was displayed by the lads encouraging other lads to join them in the bundle room, shouting "come on come on, get on in." Belonging is also fostered in the relationship that leaders have with the lads, one leader when looking for his group shouts "where are my lads?" Leaders know not only the names of the lads but their backgrounds too. Each is welcomed by name on arrival and valued – one of the leaders paused the discussion to greet a late arrival, asking how they were before recapping for them and resuming the session. There is intentionality by the leaders to allow a space for lads to be themselves and find family and belonging within the group that progresses as the lads grow up together.

Urban Saints identity

The longevity of USG, alongside the way that many of the leaders have grown up in Urban Saints creates a strong sense of identity and allegiance with Urban Saints. This is reinforced with the displaying of memorabilia as well as the merchandise worn by the lads and the reward system for the Juniors. This identity also extends beyond the Friday night. For the leaders it is part of who they are, and they intentionally pass this to the lads. One leader states: "It's a calling and therefore just a way of life." After showing an emotive video of one of the last camps he tells the Juniors, "this is showing you the life of an Urban Saints lad" reinforcing that this is more than a youth club – it becomes a part of you.

Effective leadership

Underpinning USG is effective leadership which is done organically, where lads grow up through the group are gradually involved in the running of activities. Jagat said: "we are really intentional about teaching lads about leadership and USG is a safe environment for lads to practice leadership." Whilst this is done informally there is an emerging leaders course which is delivered in keenites as well as a yearly training event. There is the sense that training leaders extends beyond the Christian faith but is also about preparing them for adult life. It is a unique feature of USG, where leadership has always naturally arisen from within the group. However, as leadership is passed on the old leaders don't step away completely providing support where necessary. The CMO of Urban Saints explains "they seem to have a really good balance of being able to pass leadership on but then offer support continually and be around." This makes for an intergenerational model of leadership allowing young people to be mentored by those older and creates a range of leaders from 15 to over 70 who serve weekly.

Ecclesial traditions

Although the group is very missionally focused there are strong ecclesial traditions, namely bible teaching, prayer and pastoral care. Each week there is a short talk and bible verse which young people are either told or asked to read out followed by the opportunity for the lads to discuss their thoughts and understanding. At the end of the teaching there is a prayer time where lads are invited to pray out loud. The pastoral

care is seen in the way the leaders engage individually with the lads, taking an interest in their lives as well as collecting or driving the lad's home when needed.

4.4   Summary of findings

The results of the empirical research carried out indicate that there are practices within Urban Saints which could aid the retention of tweenagers, particularly when the original Crusaders model is maintained. These are: creating belonging and identity; emerging leaders; the "intermingling of ages" and a relational youth work model. Additionally, the practice of creating belonging and identity alongside the intermingling of ages correlate to Scanlan's (2017) observations.[28] Furthermore, Urban Saints strong ecclesial traditions give gravitas to the discussion and arguably place it in conversation with church led children and youth groups. This research will now analyse and discuss these practices alongside wider literature and a church context.

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[28] See pp.117-156.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

Having detailed the results from the empirical data an analysis will now be discussed and in particular this chapter seeks to answer the research question of how Urban Saints practices are effective at ministering to tweenagers. Swinton and Mowat (2016) contend "the efficacy of the practice (the good to which it is aimed) is not defined pragmatically by its ability to fulfil particular human needs, but by whether or not it participates faithfully in the divine redemptive mission" (p.21). It became apparent from the research that Urban Saints have not intentionally set out with a strategy for a ministering to tweenagers *per se*. However, Urban Saints groups, when following Kestin's original model, where the commitment of both leaders and young people creates a space that enables a transformational encounter, does create such a blueprint. This chapter will argue that there is 'the miracle of the turn up', for both leaders and young people, thus practices which are uniquely embedded in Urban Saints gives rise to fervent and committed members.   There were three practices which emerged from the data which will be discussed - namely forging community, emerging leadership and relational youthwork.

5.2   Forging community

The first practice was the strong sense of community which was outplayed in the marked participation, language, customs, and commitment from those that attend. There is an intentionality of belonging and identity placed on every individual. Each participant is known by name and personal circumstances understood. In USG the leaders and young people hold this identity as an "Urban Saints lad" as observed with how the lads interact with each other and the leaders. The overwhelming sense of belonging also resonated with the freedom and open participation by those who attend. These findings confirm, as discussed in chapter two, that there needs to be an understanding of the human developmental changes of tweenagers for those working with young people. Dobbs' (2011) "beautiful brains" illustrates the science behind the often impulsive and irrational nature of tweenagers and citing several scientific studies explains that excitement and risk-taking are part of their human development. USG provide a space which allows for excitement and risk-taking, giving permission for the

young people to be themselves - as observed in the bundle room. Creating a neutral space possibly enhanced this freedom.[29] Collins-Mayo *et al* (2010) assert that places become storied spaces that can become triggers for Christian memories. Although there wasn't direct discussion with the young people who attended Urban Saints, the ecclesial elements of prayer, bibles and opportunities for reflection could be triggers for a raised Christian consciousness, and nevertheless were accepted despite the need for a neutral space.

The practice of community within Urban Saints also echoed in the customs that the young people embraced. There was a strong sense of tradition at USG seen not only in the building but carried through in the naming of the groups and the rewards[30], which could aid faith development. Collins-Mayo *et al* (2010) argue that faith is more effective when passed through embodied tradition, however it should be acknowledged that this would require frequent attendance which was certainly the case at USG. Urban Saints exemplifies Hervieu-Léger's (2000) notion of a religious community that accepts tradition but allows an incorporating into its traditions the modifications of the present (p.87). Traditions have been part of church groups such as Archibald's model, however as discussed in previous chapters, the Sunday School has not been able to move with the times, unlike Urban Saints, remaining entrenched in the past.

The importance of belonging was initially recognised in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and identified as an important element of a healthy church community for all ages. For example, Mercer (2005) concludes "for children to gain an identity as members in the community of practice, they must have access not only to its edges but also to its core" (p.201). Through youth group participation of shared experiences theological meaning is derived which as Shepherd (2011) writes: "stimulates, supports and sustains young people in forming and expressing faith" (p.43). Yet despite these strong advocates church groups have sometimes struggled to provide this place of belonging for young people. More recently Powell and Griffin (2021) reveal that Generation Z "feel as if people around them are not really *with* them and that no one really knows them well" (p.144), and argue that a contributing factor to young people drifting away from church is not knowing where they fit in. Barna's (2018) research supports this noting that

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[29] See section 4.2.
[30] As presented in 4.3 rewards were given to reinforce an USG identity rather than to incentivise good behaviour.

Generation Z want community and a sense of belonging yet church "was the last place they felt safe as they wrestled with their identity, future and life" (p.33). Whilst both sets of data are from the USA, Youth for Christ (2016) also reveal that British Generation Zs ask the same questions about identity and purpose (p.42). This therefore raises the question as to why young people don't perceive church as their community.

Critics have argued that the primary reason is the rigid separation of age groups - something which Urban Saints have moved away from. Since the Sunday School Movement began there have been strong advocates for an intergenerational church model such as Hamilton's family church concept,[31] which until recently, have had little impact. Intergenerational church is defined by Allen and Ross (2012) where "multiple representatives of two or more generations are present and engaged in *mutual* activities" (p.21). The specific benefits of an intergenerational church for tweenagers is supported by Goodwin (2012), who reveals that children who attend all or part of the adult service on a regular basis are twice as like to make the transition to adult church (p.110). The positive effects of cross generational relationships were particularly noticeable in the free play at Urban Saints, where an intermingling of ages had become embedded and accepted within the culture. It does need to be recognised that this takes time if it is to be something which is interwoven into the fabric of a community - but when it does it can have radical results.

Accordingly, the practice of community is aided by an intergenerational nature, tradition, identity, and the importance of involvement that all seem to be organically created within Urban Saints. Above all there was an acceptance that no one was just an observer or consumer, but everyone was participating. Whilst recognising that Urban Saints have created a community which is retaining tweenagers, it leads to further discussion of whether this is impacting their faith. Recognising that the young people themselves were not interviewed, parts of the survey and observations suggests that it possibly could. [32]Additionally, these findings could then support Hervieu-Léger's position that the best place to pass religion on is through participation in an actively believing community (Collins-Mayo *et al*, 2010, p.86). Furthermore, when exploring emerging leadership, where those attending are not just participating but

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[31] See Cliff (1986, pp.238-251).
[32] See section 4.1 and 4.3.

also becoming leaders themselves, it becomes apparent that this has played an important part in their faith journey.

5.3   Emerging leadership

The practice of good leadership should not be undervalued, as it can permeate into all facets of life and none more so than the body of the church.[33] Both the observations and discussions affirmed that leadership plays a significant role in shaping the culture of Urban Saints and its success. The analysis revealed two elements which will be examined and compared to that of children and youth groups. Those being firstly the leadership and commitment levels of the volunteers and secondly how leadership is generated as part of the culture of Urban Saints.

Many of the Urban Saints groups had enough leaders to not need rotas and those leaders were committed and served for several years.[34] This seems to contrast with what is seen in children and youth ministry across the wider church. Urban Saints is volunteer led unlike children and youth work which since the 80s and 90s has been professionalised, yet there are mixed opinions as to its success. Brierley (2011) has argued that employed children and youth pastors "were making a real impact in their churches enabling more young people to stay in church life than might have been the case" (p.2). More recently, Francis *et al* (2019) indicate that having a youth or children's pastor added on average seven young people between the ages of 5-18 to the total weekly Sunday attendance (p.2). Conversely, one could question the limitations of this research and that it was only Anglican churches that were examined. Whilst this research may indicate positive benefits it doesn't change the fact that despite paid workers, church attendance by young people is still plummeting, as discussed in Chapter 2. There is also the question of the pressure put on these practitioners, particularly in the responsibility felt to deliver results, leading Gough (2020) to draw attention to the struggles and reality now faced by employed children and youth workers. Children's groups have been severely impacted by Covid-19 with churches struggling for volunteers and still operating with a degree of uncertainty about the future (Holmes, 2021). Yet in contrast to this Youthscape (2021) contend

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[33] Church growth and leadership is recognised by the Church of England in the Church Growth Research Program (2014, p.10).
[34] See section 4.2.

that volunteer led youth work lost fewer young people during lockdown, which this research could possibly support, and have not seen the same struggles in coming back post pandemic. The decline in those training for Christian children and youth ministry[35] alongside the struggle for volunteers in a church context suggests that there is a benefit of exploring the Urban Saints model of recruitment and developing teams.

It was discussed in the focus group that Urban Saints have a unique leadership development model where leaders naturally arise from within the group. This is not something new, as Ward (1996) demonstrates how Urban Saints had a "significant influence in developing leaders within evangelicalism" (p.36). Since this leadership model was something which was instilled from the Juniors upwards investigating how developing leadership practices might retain tweenagers is important. Rather than examining academic theory on leadership styles, the principles that resonate practices from leadership experts will be drawn. For example, the change from a hierarchical, leader-heavy model being replaced with more team led structures is particularly relevant. Maxwell (2007) writes "the more you invest in people and the longer you do it, the greater the growth and the higher the return" (p.255). Arguably USG have done just that by not only investing in those who attend but also by being intentional in the development of leadership skills. Leadership at USG was not just given to a select few but was something which was observed across all those who attended. As a result, leadership is engrained in the culture and vision of USG, and also encouraging those to gain an understanding of their own leadership identity within the culture that they are part of. Bartz (2009) contends that leaders must understand their communities and there is no 'one-size-fits-all', implying that leadership is somewhat organic and relational. Equally Lichtenstein *et al* (2006) argue that "leadership emerges though dynamic interactions" (p.2). This relational approach within leadership was certainly observed in USG, [36] where participants were not only given the freedom to lead, but also allowed to make suggestions which were taken seriously.

Such a strong leadership development culture is something that is not always seen within children and youth ministry, despite Archibald's (1909) model which used the older classes to teach the younger groups. Yet where this has been implemented the

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[35] CYWC (2016) reveals that the number of people training youth and children' ministry has almost halved over the past 10 years.
[36] See section 4.3.

research has shown the positive benefits. Griffiths (2009) observed that when giving young people responsibility it helped them stay in church (p.88). Powell *et al* (2011) also documented that the more teenagers serve and build relationship with younger children then the more likely it is that their faith will stick (p.75). A deeper review of this will illuminate how such investment might aid the retention of tweenagers. This is more than just asking tweenagers to help with craft or lead action songs; it is the way leadership is developed, as evidenced within USG, through mentoring and relationships.

Hassell (2022) describes mentoring as "a relationship in which one person helps another to grow in their faith and leadership ability by sharing the God-given resources of skills, wisdom, knowledge and experience" (p.12). Toombs (2014) notes that mentoring can be formal or informal. The mentoring which was observed at USG was the latter, where the mentoring role was less organised and more of an "unspoken occurrence" (p.12), where the lads were subconsciously learning from the leaders. The importance of mentorship is something which is becoming essential for Generation Zs, who place value on face-to-face communication (Seemiller and Grace, 2019, p.61). Emery White (2017) comments "they have endless amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors" (p.65). Generation Zs are seeking advice and guidance, therefore effective mentoring could explain why tweenagers stay. Boshers and Poling (2006) argue that the Christian life is more caught than taught therefore ascertains that mentoring, which encompasses "bite sized scripture truths" (p.22), provides for greater effectiveness in the transmission of faith. Urban Saints place real value on meeting face-to-face (as seen in the way that Urban Saints continued during the pandemic) where informal mentoring alongside scriptural truths could arguably be what helps retain tweenagers. Authentic relationships, whilst intentionally developing leadership skills through mentoring, are a by-product from the relational youthwork model which is the final practice to be explored.

5.4   Relational youthwork

Relational youthwork was specifically mentioned by both the CMO and an Urban Saints leader. It's approach to ministering to young people is rooted in relationships where workers must "adapt themselves - both contextually and relationally – to bring

the gospel to young people in their cultures" (Gough, 2019, p.135). This concept was spearheaded by Ward in the 1990s who saw youth ministry as needing to "look for ways in which the gospel might be contextualised within youth culture" (1995, p. 18), and involved going *to* young people or being *with* young people (Gough, 2019). However, for Ward (1997) the goal of youthwork would be the same: namely for "young people to become independent of the youth worker" (p.66). It was this viewpoint that caused Root to reimagine the model. Root's (2007) reinterpretation comes from the stance that "relational Youth Ministry is highly dependent on the use of influence for its effectiveness" (p.78) using attractional approaches to incentivise. This has resulted in program and budget driven paid youth work, and as already discussed, leads to ineffective and burnt-out youth workers which has also infiltrated into children's ministry. Arguably this has not been the case for Urban Saints, as demonstrated in team retention and high commitment levels, where leaders have experienced long-term investment and faith transformation.

Root's relational youth work model applies the concept of place-sharing where "we place ourselves fully in the reality of the other, refusing to turn away even from its darkest horror" (p.83). It is from this relationship where we are with and for each other that God's transcendent presence can be experienced. Youth ministry is not about numbers and exciting meetings but more about a focus on the group itself where "adults and adolescents can encounter one another and have meaningful interactions" (p. 209). The Urban Saints model is more akin to Root's interpretation as seen in transformation and commitment and the way leaders go all out for young people. Correspondingly, earning the total trust of the young people was witnessed at USG, and in the focus group, leaders spoke about how they made themselves vulnerable by sharing personal experiences and challenges.

There is one major critique of Root's model and that is the time and personal commitment required. Whilst Root does argue that boundaries need to be set by those ministering to young people, Gough (2019) notes that this approach needs "the youth minister to be radically self-sacrificial [….] and the practical difficulties his approach raises leaves both youth ministers and young people vulnerable" (p.151). Gough's concerns could be warranted, especially given the challenges faced by Generation Z, the greatest of those emerging as mental health. Following the pandemic, Elmore (2020) suggests that there are three negative outcomes which could be normalized

for Generation Z, those being isolation, panic and anxiety, or a 'scarcity mindset' (p.55). The observation of USG leaders didn't reveal any signs of burn out or strain on relationships, although they were certainly self-sacrificial such as the lift sharing. At the same time boundary placements weren't observed so this would require further exploration.

Root (2007) argues that "relationships are the concrete place where we meet the transcendent" (p.141) which aligns with Day's (2010) 'believing in belonging' research where "human relationships are the main site for sourcing and experiencing meaning, morality, and transcendence" (p.98). Relationships over biblical programs is the focus for Urban Saints therefore the approach is more emotive than didactic in nature. Instead, the teaching is done within the relationship, as seen in the short talks which allow more time to be spent with young people. As Shepherd (2016) asserts, this can give young people a positive effect when considering what being a Christian means and contributes to their own understanding of faith (p. 97). Burns and DeVries (2001) contend that "Young people [.....] remain active in the youth ministry not because of creative programming but because of healthy and genuine relationships" (p.20). This is a powerful indicator as to why Urban Saints can retain tweenagers, through facilitating encounters which happen in conversation and not necessarily in a 'God slot'.

There needs to be a rethinking of what it means to engage with young people who value authentic relationships, especially if they don't experience this in youth work.[37] Membree (2022) claims that only 2 out of 5 kids in children's ministry have a positive, meaningful relationship with a mentoring adult. Moreover, they discovered that when children have a meaningful relationship with an adult in the church, they are twice as likely to have an ongoing relationship with the church. Whilst the effect on church attendance or faith development was not examined, in the short-term Urban Saints provides meaningful relationships and ones which are highly valued by those who attend.

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[37] only 2% of Generation Z regard a youth club as a favourite place to spend time (YFC, 2016, p.12).

5.5   The miracle of the turn up

In many respects the discussed practices haven't changed but remained entrenched in Urban Saints as seen in the work of Ward and Scanlan. Urban Saints, in its beginnings, would have inevitably been influenced by the Sunday School Movement and Archibald's methods. The overlap with Archibald's model was observed in the group names and rewards, but there was too greater an emphasis on religious education that stopped Archibald from seeing the benefits of intergenerational and relational teaching methods. Urban Saints as a movement has not conformed to culture but instead been able to work within the culture and from that create a movement which arguably is one which helps retain tweenagers. Despite the changes in youth culture, the practices and principles of Urban Saints have adapted well. It is claimed that Kestin's model can transform activities, therefore goes beyond just a youth group gathering, but one which is transformational for all those involved. Central to Urban Saints are relationships of which Bonhoeffer contends are the place of God's transcendence present in the world (Root, 2007, p.270). Fundamentally, there is a 'miracle of the turn up' where every week both leaders and young people turn up, and in that commitment to one another, is the transformation.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter, through the analysis of the data from the Urban Saints groups represented, has provided the reasoning that Urban Saints can retain and minister effectively to tweenagers adopting three practices namely: forging intentional community, emerging leadership and relational youthwork. It is within these practices where the transcendence is encountered – this is the miracle for those who turn up to the group. The question is whether these practices are unique to missional groups who operate outside of church structure or whether they can be applied to those ministering in the local church. Arguably parts of the Urban Saints model have been integrated into church life before, as noted by Ward (1996) where Pathfinders used "the traditions of Crusaders and integrated them into the life of parish church" (p.49). However questionably only parts of the model were used such as bible classes and brand identity.

Twentieth century missiologist Winters (1974) argues that there are two separate structures which together constitute the church: local congregation (modality) and Missionary structures (sodality). This can be applied to two types of youth work: the local church youth group and outreach groups, which Ward and subsequently Shepherd identify. However, Scanlan (2021) contends that Urban Saints exists between the two, suggesting that it is in a unique position of not only operating outside of church constraints but also still being able to influence church practice. This supports an opinion that there are practices which could be transferred. However, it should be recognised that cultural changes and challenges make it difficult to create a 'how to retain tweenagers' model and instead any proposal would need to be contextualised for a church setting. With this in consideration the following chapter, as part of the conclusion, will offer recommendations that could help leaders minister more effectively to tweenagers, thus fulfilling the final aim of this research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study will conclude by summarising the key findings in relation to the research aims and questions. In discussing the value and contribution of this, research recommendations will be laid out for those working with children and young people in a church setting. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

Firstly, this study aimed to understand the Urban Saints ministry model and assess whether it is effective at retaining tweenagers. Secondly to ascertain if it could offer recommendations that would be useful for children and youth leaders. These research aims were broken down into three subsidiary questions which have driven this study:

- *What is the faith and religious beliefs of tweenagers and why do they leave the church?*
- *What is the Urban Saints model for ministering to tweenagers and is it effective?*
- *Could this model work in a church setting?*

The first question was answered in the form of a literary review and contends that, for the physiological and psychological changes which tweenagers face, there is a general lack of understanding, leading to church practices which are detrimental to their faith development and consequently their attitude to church. Through empirical research involving a survey, focus group and a mini ethnography, the second question was answered. Alongside the secondary data from Scanlan's research, allowing for further data triangulation, the results indicated the possible practices of Urban Saints which could be an intrinsic part of the retention of tweenagers.

The survey revealed that Urban Saints have a good retention rate of tweenagers. Both the focus group and ethnography identified that whilst Urban Saints has adapted over the years, it is Kestin's original model of understanding the culture of the young people, the commitment of the leaders and creating a community of belonging and identity, that seems to have the biggest impact on those who attend. Analysis of the empirical data alongside Scanlan's work identified three specific practices - intentional community, emerging leadership and relational youth work - which in turn allows for using the metaphor 'the miracle of the turn up' – encompassing a transformation that happens for both leaders and young people. Furthermore, Urban Saints is placed in a

unique position where its ecclesial practices allow it to operate between local congregation and missionary structures. It is from this position that the second part of the aim will be answered, which is to offer recommendations for ministering more effectively to tweenagers.

The identified practices of mentorship and emerging leaders, the intermingling of ages, and relational youth work, grew from Urban Saints being a missionary movement and this historically has influenced the churches work with young people, however arguably only part of their model was implemented, with the key practices which aid the retention of tweenagers being omitted. It is hoped that the recommendations will unite children and youth work models, which for the most part have largely remained separate. Youth work has predominately tried to provide a solution for those who were too old for children's ministry. Griffiths (2009) writes that it is problematic if there is "no strategic programme for those over the age of 12" (p.291). However, this research suggests that there is a distinct middle gap in which tweenagers operate and therefore signifies that there is a need to for both groups to work together. Thus, the first recommendation is *to recognise the importance and distinct nature of tweenagers* as a group who by their very nature fall in this middle gap. This understanding needs to come from a constant check on the composition of this group and looking for ways of relating to and ministering to tweenagers.

USG successfully demonstrates a combination of both children and youth ministry, mixing key stages together. Consequently, the second recommendation would be that, where possible, practitioners should allow for opportunities of the *intermingling of age groups.* This is not suggesting that children and youth groups should be replaced by intergenerational services, as that is a wider debate which is beyond the remit of this study, rather encouraging a space where both primary and secondary ages can mix. Recognising that faith development theories demonstrate the importance of being able to create a space where faith can be nurtured, it should be stated that a larger group context might not always be the best for facilitating this. It would be preferable to have a balance of exploration within their own age groups alongside having time to build community and relationships through intermingling age groups.

The commitment of Urban Saints leaders was something to be commended, and induces the third recommendation, namely the importance of *leadership development*

and opportunities. USG demonstrate how leadership can be engrained in the culture and vision of a group as something relational and dispersed to everyone. Cliff (1986) suggests that the main reason for the decline of the Sunday School was ineffective methods of training and support, therefore leadership development for those working with children and young people must be given high priority. Archibald recognised the challenge of keeping young people engaged and whilst in part his approach was to assign them teaching roles, this research has shown that it is more than just leadership responsibilities - it requires investment and mentorship, something that tweenagers value. In response to this, the fourth suggested recommendation is *relationships above program.* It is now widely cited by youth practitioners that youth ministry is not about big budget programs, yet there can still be a focus on 'instructional' style teaching. Tweenagers value authentic relationship above anything else, so allowing space for this within the session and recognising that the transcendent can be found in the chatting during a craft is key. It also needs to be acknowledged that relationships take time and for Urban Saints, as well as weekly sessions there are camps and other weekday activities, which cultivate a relational model and build community, the final recommendation.

The longevity of USG reminds us that *forging a culture of community,* takes time and investment but can be an intrinsic part in retaining tweenagers. In USG community is cultivated through tradition, an Urban Saints identity, participation, risk and belonging, which all aid supporting and generating the faith development of tweenagers. Whilst USG was unique in that it was all boys, these key elements can be transferred to a church setting, such as activities which allow space for risk-taking and excitement alongside shared experiences. Csinos (2020) observed how children embody the theology of community and this was witnessed in action at USG, recognising the unique culture of one's community and engendering it, so it becomes a key source for those who attend. This is really done by everyone taking ownership of the group. Griffiths (2009) notes that for outreach groups to keep running takes tenacity and perseverance. Children and youth groups are therefore most prosperous within a settled environment where community and belonging are able to be established with leaders and those who attend - yet the sad reality is that this isn't the case in a church environment, with some authors claiming that youth and children's workers are only in position for around 18 months (Bennett, 2021). The culture and identity created at

USG eclipses any individual leader. Whilst individually they may exemplify Kestin's entrepreneurial spirit, it is the whole group that forges the community they ultimately identify with.

While the intent was to conduct this study without any restrictions, certain limitations need to be acknowledged, specifically the limitations of COVID-19 restrictions, as well as the low response rate from the survey which subsequently impacted the focus group numbers. Furthermore, what is absent from this research is the way the young people themselves understand Urban Saints and how they see it impacting their faith. Having suggested five possible recommendations, there are other factors which go beyond this research such as the influence of parents, friends and camps. These limitations also leave possibilities for further research. Camps played a big part in the life of USG aiding community and relationships but also giving participants time to think about their faith and respond to what God is doing. Exploration of that might add further insight into the retention of tweenagers and possibly support research that "a week at a camp is more effective than a month's worth of messages" (Lanker, 2007, p.15) as well as the lasting impact of camps for the faith of tweenagers.

Participating in the life of USG has affected me deeply, realising that it is perhaps no longer a matter of trying to reverse church decline but rather giving attention to cultivating a bricolage of practices that foster the 'miracle of the turn up'. Talking to Urban Saints leaders gave me renewed hope that even without intention, there are ways that missional organisations have the potential to unite children and youth work, to not only impact the lives of tweenagers but also supports the Church. Phyllis Tickle (2008) writes "that about every 500 years, the empowered structures of institutionalised Christianity, whatever that may be at the time, become an intolerable hard shell that must be shattered in order that renewal and growth may occur" (p.16). Taking a wider perspective, as the mixed method research allows, can bring about the cracking of this shell. Rather than continuing to ossify, churches should minister alongside outreach groups and collaboratively reshape practices to continually reconfigure and together bridge the gap.

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APPENDICES

Appendix i   Ethical approval

18 October 2021

Dear Joanne Foster,

Thank you for taking the time to present your Ethical Research Application to the St Padarn's Committee. It was a pleasure to read your intended subject matter and research techniques.

We are delighted to approve your application.

We wish you luck in your future research projects.

Cofion gorau / Regards,

The Rev'd Dr. Manon C. James
Chair of Ethical Research Committee and Dean of Initial Ministerial Training.
St Padarn's Institute
manon.c.james@stpadarns.ac.uk / 07776 591799

Appendix ii Example participant information sheet and consent form

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET FOR URBAN SAINTS ADULT LEADERS (FOCUS GROUP)

An Investigation Into How Urban Saints Run Youth Work For 10-12 Year Olds

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS RESEARCH IS ABOUT:

My name is Joanne Foster and I am currently studying for a Masters in Theology, specialising in Children, Youth and Families at Durham University. I am also the Families pastor for Kerith Church in Windsor.

The focus groups are part of my research for my Masters, which is exploring the Urban Saints model of youth work and how this might challenge the churches defined way of children's and youth work. It is my hope that the results may benefit the church.

WHY YOU HAVE BEEN INVITED:

I am now at the stage of my research where I wish to interview some leaders from Urban Saints about how they run the transition groups for children aged 10-12 years old.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

You will be invited to take part in a focus group with myself and 5 other participants which will last for around an hour on Zoom. The focus group will be recorded and later transcribed (written up). By taking part you will be furthering our understanding of transition and how the church can learn from the Urban Saints model of Children and Youth work.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to participate then you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw from the research at any point, without having to provide an explanation. If you decide not to take part, any data already collected will be deleted as soon as possible and will not be used in the research.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

All personal information gained in this research will remain confidential. Any recordings and transcripts from the focus group will be stored safely and then destroyed. No one else will

have access to the recordings or be able to use them for any other research. The names of people, places and churches will be changed so that nothing is written down that can identify you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results will be collated and presented as a whole as part of my dissertation. I can offer you a copy of the research when it is completed.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you have any questions or require more information about this study please contact me using the following contact details: Joanne Foster, Tel: 07855 403029, email **Joanne.Foster19@stpadarns.ac.uk**

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted then please contact my Supervisor, Mark Griffiths@stpadarns.ac.uk

17th January 2021

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICPANTS IN JOANNE FOSTER'S RESEARCH PROJECT

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

Title of Study: **An Investigation Into How Urban Saints Run Youth Work For 10-12 Year Olds**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project explained on the Information sheet. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet please clarify them with me before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous in the final dissertation and any related publications.

I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify Joanne and be withdrawn from it immediately.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Participant's Statement:

I _____

Agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research involves.
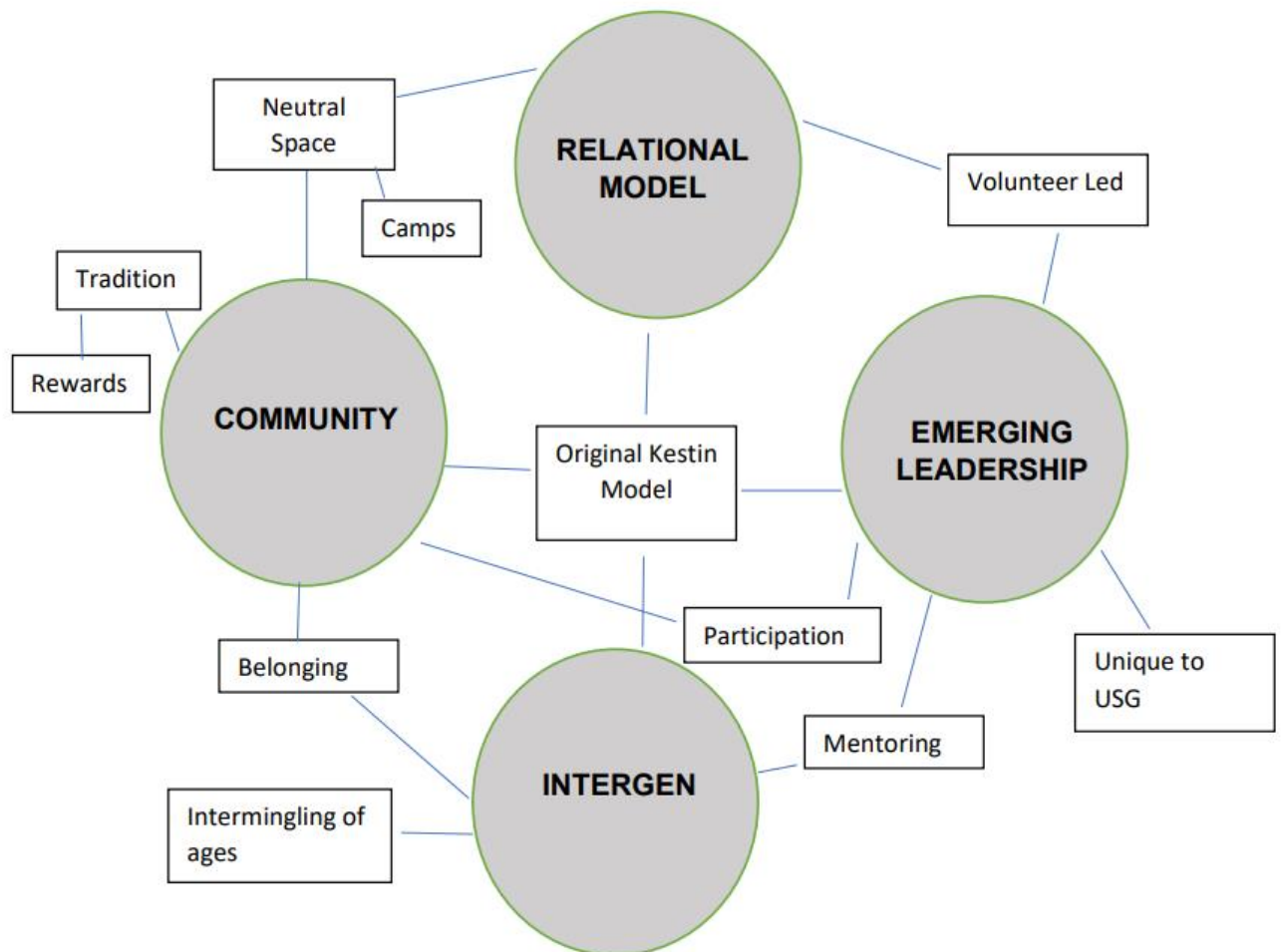
Signed: Date:

Appendix iii Coding document

1. Reputation	44. Don't do a rota
2. Identify with US	45. Commit you commit
3. Parents refer to it still	46. No continuity.
4. Branding – all over	47. Leaders naturally arose
5. Ones who identity are praying.	48. Know each other inside out
6. Flexible and agile	49. Modelled
7. All ages (in 70's who still help).	50. Come from within the group
8. Churches coming together	51. You're invested in it
9. Community	52. Committed to the mission
10. Bridge into the community	53. Leads to natural pattern of growth
11. Emerging leaders	54. Talent naturally arises
12. Adults are B layers	55. Committed
13. Without emerging leaders (Ruth)	56. Take a deep breath
14. Age of the leaders all know each others lives.	57. The culture goes on with them
15. Transition straight to leadership	58. Relationship building
16. expectation	59. Non-judgmental
17. Training them up	60. Being a role model
18. Didn't want it to detract	61. Volunteer
19. "Rotten Guildford group"	62. Enthusiasm for other people's lives
20. Mayhem	63. Interest in them
21. Play to what the lads want	64. Choice
22. Risky	65. Can bring your friends
23. Leave your best kit at home	66. Welcomed
24. Buzz	67. More fun less serious
25. Around younger people	68. Longer time of having fun
26. Not entertainment – working with them.	69. Same school
27. Basic	70. Socials
28. Transition in contact	71. Long talks - embarrassed
29. Want to know what's over the wall.	72. Rebellion against parents
30. Aspiration	73. Intergen.
31. Young ones leading work for the ones younger than them.	74. Allowing them to change things.
32. Rites of passage	75. Allowing mistakes
33. Don't notice the age groups	76. Camps
34. All muck in with the games	77. People go for years
35. When they move groups get a bible.	78. Invest in camps
36. Camps look the same	79. Separate
37. It's natural to them	80. Acknowledge Head office
38. Dynamic changed with girls	81. Brother
39. Old crusader badge (still in Guildford)	82. involved
40. Young people are running it	83. Friendship
41. Handing over responsibility	84. Investment
42. Doesn't exclude	85. Allowing them to change things.
43. Don't make a difference	

Appendix iv Thematic map

Thematic map showing the relationships between the main themes. The central circles represent: RELATIONAL MODEL, COMMUNITY, EMERGING LEADERSHIP, and INTERGEN.

Connected labels include:
- Neutral Space
- Camps
- Tradition
- Rewards
- Volunteer Led
- Original Kestin Model
- Participation
- Unique to USG
- Belonging
- Mentoring
- Intermingling of ages

Appendix v Themes

Code	Theme	Source	Narrative
Reputation Identify with US Parents refer to it still Branding – all over Ones who identity are praying. Flexible and agile All ages (in 70's who still help).	Strong identity of Crusaders (but not kids or US except Guildford)	FG 1	"it's got a very good reputation within the community" "we've got a long way to go with branding" "there was a lot of identity initially but that has fallen away"
Community Bridge into the community	Churches working together. Brings Unity.	FG 2	Different churches coming together It's very much a community group
Emerging leaders Adults are B layers Age of the leaders all know each others lives Transition straight to leadership expectation Training them up Didn't want it to detract	Young leaders	FG 2 FG 3 FG 5	Without emerging leaders
Risky Play to what the lads want Mayhem	Guildford as an example	FG 4	"Rotten Guildford group"
Leave your best kit at home Buzz Around younger people Not entertainment – working with them. Basic	DNA of US	FG 4 I	
Transition in contact Want to know what's over the wall. Aspiration Young ones leading work for the ones younger than them. Rites of passage Don't notice the age groups All muck in with the games When they move groups get a bible.	Transition What is over the wall.	FG 4	"the older lads have learned to include them" "I play football with the big lads and I'm not scared of them" "I'm going to be a JR leader one day"
Camps look the same It's natural to them Dynamic changed with girls Old crusader badge (still in Guildford) Young people are running it Handing over responsibility Doesn't exclude	Culture of USG	FG 4	
	Mixed groups	FG 3 FG 4	

Code	Theme	Source	Narrative
Don't make a difference	Rewards	Richard	
Don't do a rota Commit you commit No continuity. Leaders naturally arose Know each other inside out Modelled Come from within the group You're invested in it Committed to the mission Leads to natural pattern of growth Talent naturally arises	Leaders	FG 5 FG 2	"if you cut them in half you would have US/Crusaders going through them" My best night for the week
Committed Take a deep breath The culture goes on with them	Culture		"if you're committed to the young people you'd want to be there every week". "you take a deep breath and you dive in" "you don't get a break you just get a change"
Relationship building Non-judgmental Being a role model Volunteer Enthusiasm for other people's lives Interest in them	Miracle of the turn up		
Choice Can bring your friends Welcomed More fun less serious Longer time of having fun Same school Socials Long talks - embarrassed	Neutral Space	FG 1-5 I 2	
Intermingling Friendship	Intergenerational	FG 3	"we can't miss the fact that they want to be around an age range of people"
Allowing them to change things. Allowing mistakes	Youth participation (don't get in church)	FG 1	Example of reflecting on events.
Camps People go for years Invest in camps	Camps	I 2 FG 5	
Separate Acknowledge Head office	Relationship with Head office	FG 1	we keep quite separate. been to one Urban Saints national kind of random drinks event.