

# **How does a Missional Approach to Leadership Impact Methodist Churches in Ireland:**

A Critical Investigation

**2023**

By Heather Bailie

The logo for Cliff College features the word "CLIFF" in a bold, green, sans-serif font, positioned above the word "COLLEGE" in a blue, sans-serif font. The letters in "COLLEGE" are spaced out, with the "O" and "L" being significantly larger than the other letters.

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# **Abstract**

(196 words)

Missional leadership is an increasingly used term within theological literature; consequently, it is vital to investigate its nature and effectiveness. This dissertation critically evaluates perceptions of missional leadership on a circuit within the Irish Methodist Church. The dissertation combined empirical methods and literature-based analysis to gauge perceptions of missional leadership within this context and compare them to theological understandings of missional leadership. The purpose of this dissertation is first to highlight the biblical and theological nature of missional leadership: (a) it recognises mission as an activity of the Trinity in which the church partakes, thus is entirely Spirit-led, (b) it follows the New Testament example of collaborative leadership, (c) it acknowledges Spiritual gifts for all followers, hence seeks to empower all disciples to engage missionally, and (d) it aspires for God's transformative power personally and collectively. Secondly, the dissertation presents the impact that missional leadership can have on church congregations. It concludes that missional leadership is beginning to have an impact on the particular context researched; however, further discipleship is needed to help develop a better understanding of the spiritual aspect of mission, and to encourage increased participation in mission outside the confines of church buildings.

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# **Abbreviations and Definitions**

BFMC – Ballynafeigh Methodist Circuit.

Circuit – A collection of Methodist churches in a particular geographical location.

Connexion – The term used to describe the body of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

IMYCD – Irish Methodist Youth and Children’s Department.

MC – Methodist Church

MCI – Methodist Church in Ireland.

MWI – Methodist Women’s Institution.

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# How does a Missional Approach to Leadership Impact Methodist Churches in Ireland:

## A Critical Analysis

### Introduction

Church leadership has taken many forms since the birth of the Christian Church. From a lay-led shared ministry in the Early Church (1Cor.3), to a hierarchical ordained leadership during the Christendom era,<sup>1</sup> to relational,<sup>2</sup> visionary,<sup>3</sup> charismatic leadership styles,<sup>4</sup> and more, emerging in this post-Christendom context; church leadership comprises multiple styles and structures. However, the redefinition of mission as God's mission<sup>5</sup> sparked a conversation around how churches move from having a mission, to being missional.<sup>6</sup> As part of this conversation, increasing amounts of literature are exploring and endorsing another leadership style: missional leadership. This literature explains the biblical and contextual basis for missional leadership, and presents examples of missional leadership empowering congregations to become missionally minded and effectively engage with communities. A discussion of this literature is presented in Chapter One, with particular emphasis on the research of Alan Roxburgh,<sup>7</sup> Scott Boren<sup>8</sup> and Alan Hirsch;<sup>9</sup> who are

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zcheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Rohadi Nagassar, 'Leadership in a Post-Christian World' (2019) Available: [Leadership in a Post-Christian World - V3 Movement \(thev3movement.org\)](https://www.thev3movement.org) (accessed 28 March 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Rohadi Nagassar, 'Re-imagining Church Leadership in 2020s' (2018) Available: [Re-imagining Church Leadership in 2020s - Rohadi.com](https://www.rohadi.com) (accessed 28 March 2023).

<sup>4</sup> David M. Setley and Douglas Gautsch, 'Leadership and the Church: The Impact of Shifting Leadership Constructs', *International Journal of Business and Social Research* 5:12 (2015), 15-25 [16-17].

<sup>5</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 389-390.

<sup>6</sup> Truls Akerlund, 'Missional Leadership: A Critical Review of the Research Literature', *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 18 (2016), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Roxburgh 'About' Available: [About - Alan Roxburgh](https://www.alanroxburgh.com) (accessed 27 March 2023).

<sup>8</sup> IVP 'M. Scott Boren' Available: [M. Scott Boren - InterVarsity Press \(ivpress.com\)](https://www.ivpress.com) (accessed 27 March 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Alan Hirsch 'About' Available: [About — Alan Hirsch](https://www.alanhirsch.com) (accessed 27 March 2023).

renowned for their contribution to missional theology. The chapter will focus on four major themes which arise from their research: Spirit-led, collaboration, empowerment, and transformation.

Considering how every context is different, this dissertation explores how the concept and practice of missional leadership has impacted one circuit within the Irish Methodist Church.<sup>10</sup> This circuit was chosen for its current exploration of mission and its collaborative leadership structure. Chapter Two: Methodology explains the decision to use empirical methods to gather circuit perceptions of missional leadership and evaluate the impact of missional leadership. As a lay employee of this circuit, I have witnessed the development of missional thinking over the past decade, therefore, I hope this evaluative work will encourage further missional exploration to transform both Church and Community.

Chapter Three begins to analyse the empirical data. The questions are ultimately to identify three main themes: (a) what does the circuit perceive as missional leadership? (b) where have they seen effective missional leadership in action? (c) how do they believe missional leadership will impact the MCI for the future? Chapter Four continues this analysis; comparing the results to the themes which surface in Chapter One and addressing any additional themes.

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<sup>10</sup> From herein = MCI.



# **1. What Makes Leadership Missional?**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This dissertation will critically evaluate the impact that a missional approach to leadership has on a particular circuit within the MCI. First, it is necessary to investigate characteristics that current missiological theologians associate with missional leadership. Some of the most influential writers of this generation regarding missional leadership are Alan Roxburgh, Scott Boren, and Alan Hirsch. As church leaders and missional consultants their research is crucial in describing the character of missional leadership. This chapter will present their understanding of missional leadership alongside other writers on the subject.

A primary examination of Roxburgh, Boren and Hirsch<sup>11</sup> shows multiple similarities of characteristics identified with missional leadership. This chapter focuses on four of their major themes: Spirit-led, collaboration, empowerment, and transformation. Primarily, missional leadership is led by the Holy Spirit to encourage others to participate in God's mission of transforming the world through the spread of His Kingdom. To do this, the Holy Spirit bestows gifts to all believers thus missional leadership must be collaborative to utilise all spiritual gifts. As these gifts are not limited to leadership, leaders must collaborate with those in their context to empower them to live missional lives. By empowering communities of believers, transformation is imminent as God's Kingdom

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<sup>11</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Christian Mission and Modern Culture: The Missionary Congregation, Leadership & Liminality* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood* (Michigan: Baker Books, 2011).

Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009).

Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 2020),

Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2006).

expands on earth. Each of these characteristics will now be presented in more detail.

## 1.2 Spirit-Led

Spirit-led is considered a primary characteristic of missional leadership.<sup>12</sup> Previously, mission was perceived to be determined by the Church,<sup>13</sup> however, Barth's *Church Dogmatics*<sup>14</sup> were pivotal in transforming the Church's understanding of mission as he highlighted mission to be dependent on the Holy Spirit, not the Church. Consequently, many believe mission is not simply a directive of the Church, but a desire of God's heart to grow His Kingdom.<sup>15</sup> By the Spirit's empowerment and energy Christians are invited to join in this mission.<sup>16</sup> This corroborates Acts 1 when Jesus commissions His followers as witnesses for Him locally and worldwide by the Spirit's power. Roxburgh accuses the Church of often forgetting this truth, alleging that Christendom created a Church which perceives mission as institutional growth by its own abilities, rather than the growth of God's Kingdom by the Spirit's power.<sup>17</sup> He admits that in his earlier writings he prioritised the Church's ability over the Holy Spirit;<sup>18</sup> a mindset difficult to shift.<sup>19</sup> Nowadays, Roxburgh insists the Church must embrace the boundary-breaking empowerment of the Spirit for building a Kingdom not limited by the Church's imagination.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Hirsch identifies the Spirit as the generator of mission who keeps the Church connected to God and

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<sup>12</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church & Local Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-390.

<sup>15</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 335.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 28-29.

Christopher J. H. Wright, *Biblical Theology for Life: The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 24.

<sup>16</sup> C. J. P. 'Nelus' Niemandt, 'Complex Leadership as a Way Forward for Transformational Missional Leadership in a Denominational Structure.' *HTS Theologiese Studies* 71:3 (2015), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>19</sup> Darrell Likens Guder 'Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom.' *Princeton Theological Seminary Journals* 28:3 (2007), 251-291 [277].

<sup>20</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 114.

aligned with His mission for growing His Kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Grundy states how leaders are needed to inspire a missional church.<sup>22</sup> Considering the Spirit's role in mission, these leaders should also be reliant on the Spirit. This was a prerequisite to leadership in the New Testament as each new leadership appointment was subject to them being filled with the Spirit and open to the Spirit's direction (Acts.6:1-6,<sup>23</sup> 11:22-24, 16:6-7). Ford avows that only leaders dependent on Jesus and, consequently the Holy Spirit, are acceptable Church leaders.<sup>24</sup>

Kim asserts that Spirit-led leadership ensures mission is not an activity imposed on congregations, but is a lifestyle embraced by all believers.<sup>25</sup> To achieve this missional lifestyle, the Holy Spirit equips the Church with all the gifts necessary for its 'life, health, growth and work',<sup>26</sup> including gifts of leadership, a sample of which are presented in Ephesians 4. Describing leadership itself as a spiritual gift,<sup>27</sup> Pinnock claims missional leaders must recognise they are under the authority, direction, and fluidity of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

This means missional leaders should not bring their own preconceived plans to a new context but should discern the pre-existing movement of the Spirit in that context.<sup>29</sup> This will prevent leadership from being motivated by personal and non-missional agendas.<sup>30</sup> This may be difficult as Roxburgh and Boren discovered when they interviewed church

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<sup>21</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Malcolm Grundy, *What's New in Church Leadership? Creative Responses to the Changing Pattern of Church Life* (London: Canterbury Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Perry W. H. Shaw, The Missional-Ecclesial Leadership Vision of the Early Church, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37:2 (2013), 131-139, [131-133].

<sup>24</sup> Lance Ford, *Unleader: Reimagining Leadership ... and Why we Must* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2012), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Baptism & Fulness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 131.

<sup>28</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church: in the Age of the Spirit* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 6.

leaders. They found that many leaders believe the Spirit is at work in the Church but doubt many people are open to the Spirit's initiative.<sup>31</sup> This made them more likely to instil personal visions on their congregations as opposed to allowing the Spirit to ignite imaginations.<sup>32</sup> However, as portrayed above, missional leaders should be discipling congregations in embracing Spirit-led missional lifestyles, therefore this suppression of the Spirit's creativity amongst congregations is contrary to the actions of a missional leader.

### 1.3 Collaborative

Another proposed characteristic of missional leadership is collaboration. Grundy refers to the origins of 'leadership', highlighting the connotations of travelling with companions and combining resources for developing new pathways.<sup>33</sup> Guder accentuates the collegial character of missional leadership,<sup>34</sup> agreeing with Boren this is a biblical concept, referring to Jesus' leadership style of surrounding Himself with a team and sending His disciples out in pairs, Paul's missional journey companions, and Peter's group preaching at Pentecost.<sup>35</sup> Gledhill and Niemandt retain a Trinitarian approach, declaring that the collaboration of the Trinity is symbolic for leadership on earth,<sup>36</sup> and that missional leadership is rooted in the communion of the Trinity.<sup>37</sup>

The first area of collaboration is within the leadership itself. Collaborative leadership is explained in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians,<sup>38</sup> and alluded to in Philippians 1 and Thessalonians 5.<sup>39</sup> In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses divisions

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<sup>31</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Grundy, *Church Leadership*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Guder 'Walking Worthily', 282-283.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-283.

M. Scott Boren, *Missioretate: Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups* (Texas: TOUCH Publications, 2011), 92-93.

<sup>36</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Niemandt, 'Complex Leadership', 3.

<sup>38</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 166, 175-176.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Thielman, *Baker Exegetical Commentary: Ephesians* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 248-249.

arising in the Church because of loyalty to different leaders. Paul explains how leaders are not in opposition to one another, rather, they are a team with different gifts and responsibilities, but a unified aim to aid others in participating with God's mission (1Cor.1:10-17, 3:1-11); a theme repeated in Ephesians 4 when Paul lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/shepherds and teachers as leadership gifts.<sup>40</sup> Warrington, Petts and Carlson claim these gifts are distinguishable from other gifts mentioned in the New Testament,<sup>41</sup> referring to them as people who are gifted to the Church<sup>42</sup> with 'specialised callings'<sup>43</sup> of leadership. Hirsch describes each role respectively as ensuring: a missional outlook; a God-focus; proclamation of the gospel; healthy sustainability; and faithfulness to scripture and history.<sup>44</sup> He argues effective mission requires all of these gifts to be present within a leadership team.<sup>45</sup> Gledhill concurs, stating that a truly missional church has 'apostolic gifts to pioneer [both worldwide and locally<sup>46</sup>], prophetic gifts to envision, evangelistic gifts to be good news to its community, pastoral gifts to care and teaching gifts to make disciples'.<sup>47</sup> Referring to a Church of England report revealing most evangelists are lay people and not clergy,<sup>48</sup> he adds that this leadership collaboration is not confined to the ordained,<sup>49</sup> and pastors and teachers may also be lay people.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Debate surrounds the equal authority of these roles and the modern-day presence of apostles and prophets. The purpose of this research is not to add to this debate, however, having considered the evidence, it will be assumed that modern day apostles and prophets still exist in the Church, albeit, with slightly different authority and practices than their historical origins.

<sup>41</sup> Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 138.

<sup>42</sup> David Petts, *Body Builders: Gifts to Make God's People Grow* (England: Mattersey Hall Publications, 2002), 17.

<sup>43</sup> G. R. Carlson, 'Christ's Gifts to His Church', *Paraclete* 25:3 (1991), 2 referred to in Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 175-176.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>46</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 25-26.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> A Report of the Working Party of the House of Bishops, *Good News People: Recognising Diocesan Evangelists* (London: Church House Publishing, 1999), 21.

<sup>49</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

Similarly, Roxburgh is convinced that poets, prophets, and apostles are required for an effective missional leadership. He proposes poets help congregations remember their identity and vision as a missional body.<sup>51</sup> Prophets are God's mouthpiece; ensuring that congregations remain guided by God's outward-focused mission.<sup>52</sup> Apostles are responsible for discipling and equipping congregations to be effectively missional in their culture and context.<sup>53</sup> These roles are united by the goal of guiding the congregation towards missional participation.

Hirsch suggests that one reason for the denial of modern-day apostles is that, on occasion, apostolic integrity has been questioned when alleged apostolic leaders have embraced a dictatorial approach to leadership.<sup>54</sup> Believing that missional leadership encourages congregations to pursue missional lifestyles and grow in Christian missional maturity, Hirsch argues that dictatorial leadership only disempowers congregations and causes them to remain reliant on the leadership.<sup>55</sup> Rather, Hirsch, Boren and Roxburgh agree that missional leadership should be collaborative with others in their context in order to empower those who follow their direction.

## **1.4 Empowering**

The second area of collaboration for missional leaders is with others in their context. Critiquing Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Roxburgh believes Paul to be describing leadership as a collaboration to cultivate missional communities, 'Some plant seeds, others water the young plants, and some, like Paul, wrestle with errant growth and discipline the

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<sup>51</sup> Roxburgh, *Christian Mission*, 58-59.

<sup>52</sup> Roxburgh, *Christian Mission*, 60-61.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-65.

<sup>54</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 159.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

plants in directions they were intended to grow.<sup>56</sup> Hirsch explains this collaboration as creating the right environment so that followers are empowered to be leaders in their own contexts.<sup>57</sup> This coincides with Gledhill's understanding that all Christians can be leaders, as all Christians can lead someone to Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Several scholars interpret empowering as the original form of leadership in the Early Church, referring to Jesus and His disciples,<sup>59</sup> and Paul and his apprenticeship style of training both Timothy and Titus.<sup>60</sup>

Roxburgh and Boren explain how empowerment is essential for developing missional congregations.<sup>61</sup> They believe top-down leadership does not achieve cultural change, rather change comes from congregations who accept ownership for their actions.<sup>62</sup> In agreement, Drane asserts top-down leadership may create divisions as people who disagree with leadership risk marginalisation.<sup>63</sup> He and others suggest that missional leadership collaborates with the whole community to cultivate an environment where they are empowered to follow the Spirit beyond the confines of the Institution.<sup>64</sup>

To achieve this, Hirsch emphasises the importance of discipleship. If leaders focus on attending conferences and seminaries to access new ideas, they will continue dealing with unchanged congregations.<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, discipleship cultivates missional mindsets and empowers congregations to live missionally. Roxburgh suggests missional leaders should

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<sup>56</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 186.

<sup>57</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 160-166.

<sup>58</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Rob Elkington, Darryl Meekins, Jennifer M. Breen and Suzanne S. Martin, 'Leadership as an Enabling Function: Towards a New Paradigm for Local Church Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.' *In Die Skriflig* 49:3 (2015), 11-14 [3].

<sup>60</sup> B. Williams and M. McKibben, *Oriented Leadership* (Michigan: Orthodox Christian Publications Center, 1994), 186.

<sup>61</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 137-138.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-139.

<sup>63</sup> John Drane, *After McDonaldization: Mission, Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2008), 106.

<sup>64</sup> Drane, *After McDonaldization*, 107.

Elkington, 'Leadership as an Enabling Function', 3.

<sup>65</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 123.

adopt a discipleship structure of awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment,<sup>66</sup> helping congregations become aware of church context, understand relational engagement, evaluate current practices, take risks and experiment with new missional approaches.<sup>67</sup> Through this, congregations will be empowered to commit to missional lives.<sup>68</sup>

Stott interprets Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4:10 as suggesting all believers receive Spiritual gifts.<sup>69</sup> In agreement, Gledhill states missional leaders recognise the privilege of empowering their congregations to discover and use their gifts for building God's Kingdom.<sup>70</sup> As Roxburgh's discipleship structure suggests, this requires experimentation, therefore, missional leaders must provide flexibility for experimentation.<sup>71</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk insist that when congregations are encouraged to experiment in mission, this encourages others to participate in ways previously unconsidered,<sup>72</sup> thus becoming more open to the boundary-breaking movement of the Spirit.<sup>73</sup> Hirsch concurs that the flexibility to experiment and the 'freedom to make mistakes', builds a church community of trust and support where communication is nurtured.<sup>74</sup>

Roxburgh and Boren provide examples of church communities who, through missional leadership, are experiencing the true nature of participating in God's mission.<sup>75</sup> The common denominator is not that they have found attractive programmes to entice people

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<sup>66</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 141-142.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-144.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>69</sup> Stott, *Baptism*, 104-105.

<sup>70</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 180.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 164, 180.

<sup>73</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 114.

<sup>74</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 177.

<sup>75</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 49-52, 65-67.



into their buildings, but that they have learnt to engage with people in their local communities outside of institutional norms.<sup>76</sup> They have been disciplined to recognise where God is at work beyond church buildings, and empowered to join in with His mission by building relationships and following the Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

## 1.5 Transformative

The final characteristic of missional leadership this chapter will address is transformation. Grundy states that missional leadership should bring about change and growth.<sup>78</sup> Hunter describes the purpose of missional leadership as opening people to the transformation that comes from being in relationship with Jesus.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Bolsinger expresses how missional leadership 'is about the transformation of a congregation so that they, collectively, can fulfil the mission they, corporately, have been given.'<sup>80</sup> Niemandt believes that missional transformation is reliant on missional leadership.<sup>81</sup> Thus, portraying how missional leadership and transformation are intertwined.

Bolsinger declares transformation begins with the personal transformation of the leader: being open to the transforming work of God to efficiently manage leading others through uncharted transformation.<sup>82</sup> Niemandt agrees this personal transformation ignites transformation in the church and surrounding contexts.<sup>83</sup> He and Kok consider Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1-42) as evidence of the transformational purpose and power of missional leadership, stating that Jesus as a transformational leader

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>78</sup> Grundy, *Church Leadership*, 36.

<sup>79</sup> Todd Hunter, '4 Essential Elements of Missional Leadership' (2020). Available: <http://anglicancompass.com/4-essential-elements-of-missional-leadership/> (accessed 19 November 2022).

<sup>80</sup> Ted Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 40.

<sup>81</sup> Niemandt, 'Complex Leadership', 2-3.

<sup>82</sup> Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 45-46.

<sup>83</sup> Niemandt, 'Complex Leadership', 2-3.

transformed the lives of others and created a ripple effect of transformation.<sup>84</sup>

Transformation requires change. In a Post-Christendom context this may be a change of perspectives and practices,<sup>85</sup> which can be painful for many and create conflict. However, Wright believes part of the missional responsibility of the Church is recognising its failings in participating with God's mission.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Roxburgh and Romanuk explain conflict is not only normal, but essential, in bringing about missional transformation.<sup>87</sup> They refer to the Early Church, highlighting that through conflict the believers discovered the unity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>88</sup> They outline how relationships are strengthened when conflict is managed well and resolved; and leaders who engage in managing conflict grow in maturity and self-awareness.<sup>89</sup> Bolsinger concurs, viewing leadership as leading people where they need to go in spite of resistance, and equipping them to face challenges to achieve transformation.<sup>90</sup> Roxburgh argues that the leadership roles of poet, prophet and apostle are vital for missional transformation. The poet gives voice to vision, the prophet encourages outward thinking, and the apostle leads the congregation through the challenges and potential conflict of transformation.<sup>91</sup>

Roxburgh and Boren note there is no formula for successful mission: what works in one context may not work in another.<sup>92</sup> However, they suggest that the transformational journey missional leaders lead their congregations on requires an awareness of the present reality for the congregation; helping the congregation to share and understand their

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<sup>84</sup> Jacobus Kok and Cornelius J. P. Niemandt, '(Re)discovering a Missional-Incarnational Ethos.' *HTS Theologiese Studies* 65:1 (2009), 502-508 [506].

<sup>85</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional*, 54.

Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 18-20.

<sup>86</sup> Wright, *Biblical Theology*, 282.

<sup>87</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 134.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-136.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-136.

<sup>90</sup> Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*. 124.

<sup>91</sup> Roxburgh, *Christian Mission*, 58-65.

<sup>92</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 85.

experiences; evaluating these experiences in line with the reality of the church life; and experimenting with community engagement.<sup>93</sup> This process will help transform congregations into people committed to engaging with God's mission in the community.<sup>94</sup> Roxburgh writes that this transformation to missional living is the embodiment of Romans 12 when Christians fully offer themselves as participants in God's mission.<sup>95</sup>

## 1.6 Conclusion

From the discussion above it is clear that being Spirit-led, collaborative, empowering and transformative are essential characteristics of missional leadership. As mission is dependent on the Spirit, so missional leadership should be steeped in the Spirit. This ensures mission remains a God-focused lifestyle and not an imposition. To aid missional lifestyles, the Spirit has equipped the Church with gifts of leadership which are reliant on the authority, direction, and fluidity of the Spirit. These gifts are shared across ordained and lay so a collaborative leadership is required. Each gift has a unique role and responsibility, yet they are all unified in the collective purpose of growing God's Kingdom. This collaboration extends beyond the leadership team. Missional leaders must empower their congregations to be missional in their individual contexts. This is more likely to be achieved through collaboration and discipleship than a top-down leadership approach. Part of this discipleship process involves giving congregations the flexibility to explore their own spiritual gifts and equipping them to be missional in their everyday lives.

Fundamentally, the purpose and consequence of missional leadership is personal and corporate transformation. Conflict will arise; however, if managed respectfully and sensitively, conflict will dissipate into an environment of trust, unity, and spiritual maturity.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 136-144.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>95</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 161.

As all contexts are unique, there is no set formula for successful mission. Nevertheless, by following the Spirit, embracing spiritual gifts, and giving room for missional experimentation, congregations will be transformed into missional communities who embrace God's work in the world. Ultimately, while being Spirit-Led, collaborating with a leadership team, empowering congregations to be missional daily, and cultivating transformation in communities, missional leaders will dedicate everything to God; ensuring that Jesus remains the focus.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ford, *Unleader*, 21.  
Grundy, *Church Leadership*, 30-32.

## **2. Methodology**

As previously stated, every context is different, thus, having examined the literature around missional leadership, this chapter will explain the decision of focusing on the impact of missional leadership in one specific context.

### **2.1 The Purpose**

This dissertation will analyse perceptions of missional leadership within a particular circuit in the MCI. This circuit has been exploring mission for several years, therefore, it is hoped the research will encourage them on their missional journey by firstly, conveying the positive characteristics of missional leadership that are found in the MCI, secondly, by exploring the impact missional leadership has had on the circuit thus far, and thirdly, indicating potential areas which need addressed.

### **2.2. The Context**

Due to the geographical vastness of the MCI, I am using the Ballynafeigh Methodist Circuit<sup>97</sup> as a case study. This circuit comprises four churches on the outskirts of South-East Belfast. Like many churches, they have been battling decline for the past decade. Employed nine years ago, my role as Church and Family Worker in one of these churches was to develop the existing children's and youth ministry and build relationships with the local community. As the four churches began to function more collectively, my role developed into Church Development Officer: recognising the collaborative efforts of the Circuit and the missional aspect of developing community relationships. In addition to two full time ministers, the circuit also employs two retired ministers for pastoral and preaching responsibilities, and two pioneer missionaries to initiate and run innovative missional projects across the

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<sup>97</sup> From herein = BFMCI.

circuit. Sermons, Bible studies and discussion groups deliberating mission have attempted to cultivate a missional circuit. Over the past few years there has been increased missional activity, hence my choosing BFMC to evaluate perceptions and impact of missional leadership.

## **2.3 The Method**

To gauge perceptions and impact of missional leadership on BFMC I will first use the quantitative method of questionnaires followed by the qualitative method of interviews. Philips emphasises the complementary, not competitive nature of quantitative and qualitative research.<sup>98</sup> As with my research, he asserts that quantitative research can explore previously unknown phenomenon on a wide scale, then be followed up in more detail via qualitative research on a smaller scale.<sup>99</sup> My preliminary quantitative research will identify previously unknown perceptions of missional leadership across the BFMC. The qualitative research will identify and compare perceptions from a missional leadership perspective. Questionnaires will be distributed first, and the participants will become gatekeepers for my interview candidates by naming three people from the MC Connexion who embody missional leadership. This will ensure the interview candidates are missional leaders according to BFMC perspectives and not my own.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaire responses will illustrate perceptions that represent the general understanding of missional leadership on BFMC. Request for participation will be announced at Sunday services, advertised on the BFMC Facebook group, and shared through the BFMC email group. Approximately 120 people regularly attend Sunday

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<sup>98</sup> David P. Philips, 'The Complementary Virtues of Qualitative and Quantitative Research: Reply to Altheide' *Social Forces* 60:2 (1981), 597-599 [598].

<sup>99</sup> Philips, 'The Complementary Virtues.' [598].

services across the BFMC. My initial desire was to receive 80 responses giving me a sample of 2/3s of the circuit population. However, Blair, Czaja and Blair stress that the sample size is not the priority, rather a more accurate sample is concerned about *who* is being asked.<sup>100</sup> In this case, as the questionnaire focuses on people belonging to the BFMC, any responses are beneficial for the research. Given the premise of the research and its aim to evaluate perceptions, limited responses may also be useful in portraying a lack of understanding for the research, specifically mission and missional leadership.

The questionnaire was designed using an online resource tool<sup>101</sup> then circulated via the circuit email list, in addition to paper copies<sup>102</sup> being distributed in the four churches. The advantage of online data collection is the reach of a wide population at reduced cost, less intrusiveness by an interviewer, and opportunities to use multi-media stimuli.<sup>103</sup> Contrarily, with online data collection it is difficult to verify the quality of the samples, participant eligibility, and the contexts of the responders.<sup>104</sup> As BFMC is an aging circuit, many may not have access to online channels. Additionally, two of the responses are duplicates of earlier responses, indicating the results will be slightly flawed due to human technological error. Consequently, Trobia affirms it is more effective to use both electronic and hard copies,<sup>105</sup> as I have chosen to do.

The questionnaire contains six questions. The first two identify the demographic of respondents, namely their gender and age bracket. Questions three, four and five are

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<sup>100</sup> Johnny Blair, Ronald F. Czaja, Edward A. Blair, *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2014), 83-90.

<sup>101</sup> Smart Survey, Available: [Online Survey Software and Questionnaire Tool - SmartSurvey](#) (accessed 3 January 2023).

Survey Monkey, Available: [SurveyMonkey: The World's Most Popular Free Online Survey Tool](#) (accessed 29 December 2022).

<sup>102</sup> These were ordered online: PrintPond, Available: [Document Printing and Binding Online | PrintPond.co.uk](#) (accessed 2 January 2023).

<sup>103</sup> Alberto Trobia, 'Administering the Questionnaire' in *Encyclopaedia of Survey Research Methods Volume 2*, Paul J. Lavrakas, Editor (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008), 655.

<sup>104</sup> Trobia, 'Administering.' 655.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 655.

responsive questions to elicit information which will help formulate the analysis around the circuit's perceptions of missional leadership. Each question builds upon the previous. First, they are asked to describe missional leadership, then where they have seen effective missional leadership to determine if their practical examples match their theoretical descriptions, and finally they are asked to depict what kind of church they believe missional leadership will produce. This will reveal where they think the priorities of church leadership should lie. The purpose of the final question in asking for names of suggested missional leaders is to provide a basis for interview candidates and evaluate how these names support their previous answers.

## **Interviews**

According to Starcher, Dzubinski and Sanchez, qualitative methods should be widely used in missiological research as they offer a deeper understanding of people and their contexts.<sup>106</sup> This derives from the recognition that the perspective and experience of qualitative participants shape the outcome, in contrast to quantitative research which is often striving to prove a hypothesis.<sup>107</sup> This also allows for previously unconsidered variables to be introduced into the research,<sup>108</sup> hence my decision to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative research will assess the perceptions and impact of missional leadership. The qualitative research will cross-examine how these perceptions reflect the efforts of missional leaders, or how they differ and why.

There are eight interview questions. The first two identify age and gender demographics. The third is interview specific to gauge how long the leader has served the MCI. Questions four, seven and eight mirror the questionnaire so comparisons can be made between the

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<sup>106</sup> Richard L. Starcher, Leanne M. Dzubinski and Jamie N. Sanchez, 'Rigorous Missiological Research using Qualitative Inquiry.' *Missiology: An International Review* 46:1 (2018) 50-66 [51].

<sup>107</sup> Starcher, 'Rigorous Missiological Research.' 51-52.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



circuit answers, and those in perceived missional leadership roles. Questions five and six are interview specific, although question five will allow for comparisons between their perceptions of effective missional leadership and how they parallel the reasons questionnaire participants gave for naming them as missional leaders. Question six will assess possible differences between the understanding of mission by missional leaders and those in their contexts, as well as establishing how these potential differences have been addressed.

The interview candidates will be selected from answers in the questionnaires for people who embody missional leadership. The interviews will take place at Knockbreda Methodist Church where there is recording equipment, or on Zoom where they can also be recorded. They will be semi-structured and last no more than 45 minutes each. Candidates will have advance access to the questions so they can semi-prepare their answers, then the conversation will be formed around, but not limited, to the questions. The candidates will be anonymous in the written report; however, their context and the small size of the MCI may likely make their identity recognisable. Candidates will be informed of this prior to the interviews.

## **2.4 Analysis**

The questionnaires will be analysed first so I can identify my interview candidates and have an overview of the circuit's perceptions on missional leadership in advance of the interviews. I will identify repeated themes, words, or phrases in both the questionnaires and interviews, then cross-reference these with literature focused on missional leadership. I will be ascertaining if the circuit has grasped the concept of missional leadership, what challenges missional leaders have faced in discipling missional congregations, the benefits of missional leadership, possible areas which need further addressing by leadership, and

the overall impact missional leadership has had on the BFMC.

## 2.5 Obstacles

Before analysing the data, I am aware of several intellectual obstacles. The first is that people may not understand the difference between effective mission and effective missional leadership. The second is that not everyone will be aware of the Methodist term 'Connexion', thus their insight may be limited to circuit leadership; an obstacle confirmed when distributing the questionnaires. A similar obstacle may be profiling; people will suggest names they recognise, particularly those in leadership on the circuit, rather than discerning those who are involved in missional leadership. Whilst these may be obstacles, they do not prevent the information from being useful.

When handing out the hard copies of the questionnaires, approximately ten people declined because they felt unfamiliar with the concepts of mission and missional leadership. Three people who did respond chose to omit the final question of naming three missional leaders within the Connexion. As mentioned above, even a limited response provides insight into the perceptions around missional leadership.

Human technological error will be a minor obstacle. This will be easily resolved providing I carefully analyse the results.

## 2.6 Personal Reflection and Reflexivity

From a practical theology perspective, for any research project, Bennett, Graham, Pattison and Walton testify that reflexivity is necessary for being aware of oneself as both 'subject and object of their own investigation'.<sup>109</sup> I enter this research as an employee of the BFMC,

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<sup>109</sup> Zoe Bennett, Elaine Graham, Stephen Pattison and Heather Walton, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 35.

and a leader who tries to have a missional approach. This has been a difficult journey with many frustrations, not only because of the decreasing attendance numbers and resources, but because of the tiring passion from many on the circuit to find alternative methods of connecting with the community. I must, therefore, be careful that my research is not unduly impacted by my frustrations,<sup>110</sup> but is an accurate representation of the circuit's reality.

On the contrary, there has been an increase in missional activity by many across the circuit. This is exciting and daunting, hence, my decision to pursue an empirical approach to research so it can be used as a helpful guide for the next steps of the circuit's missional journey.

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<sup>110</sup> Bennet, *Practical Theology*, 38.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Having collected the data, this chapter begins the analysis of my empirical research. The questionnaires have gathered perceptions of missional leadership across BFMC. As a second stage, the interviews provide insight into missional leadership from people perceived to be missional leaders by BFMC. There were 40 questionnaire responses: 28 through the online platforms Smart Survey and Survey Monkey, and 12 in paper form.

Here I present the results of the questionnaire with comments on the quality and character of the data.

### **3.2 Questionnaires**

**Question One asked the participant to identify their age bracket.**

18-25: 0%

26-34: 5%

35-44: 2.5%

45-54: 2.5%

55-64: 17.5%

65+: 72.5%

This is a fair representation of the BFMC age demographic with approximately 90% of the circuit being over 55.

**Question Two asked the participant to identify their gender.**

Male: 32.5%

Female: 67.5%

This is a fair representation of the BFMC gender demographic as more women than men attend the four churches.

**Question Three asked the participant to name five words which they believe described missional leadership.**

The following diagram presents the 104 suggested words and phrases, with the most common words emphasised in larger font.<sup>111</sup>



The words most identified with missional leadership are love, transformation, visionary, inclusive, listening, compassionate, enthusiastic and community.

Thematic analysis of these words produces the following categories: Collaborative,

<sup>111</sup> WordClouds.com Available: [Free online word cloud generator and tag cloud creator - WordClouds.com](https://www.wordclouds.com/) (accessed 4 February 2023).

Community-Focused, Conviction, Empowering, Evangelistic, Faith-Discipling, Passionate, Pastoral, Personal Attributes, Spirit-led, Transformative, and Visionary.

**Question Four asked the participant to identify where they have seen effective missional leadership.**

Most responses centred on BFMC. Long-existing activities like toddler groups, Alpha courses, house groups, sermons, family or mission services, prayer weeks, and ongoing work with schools, youth groups, and children in the area were acknowledged. Others commended joint denominational initiatives for families, and community outreach initiatives such as uniform swaps, Warm Spaces in response to the growing economic crisis,<sup>112</sup> monthly cross-cultural praise and social nights in a local bar, Irish classes, and projects providing resources for immigrants.

The most common answers from fourteen, eleven and three people respectively, were the community meal, garden, and choir for integrating Church and Community, offering hospitality, and creating environments for blossoming friendships. One person highlighted how these new relationships have established a new worshipping community experiencing fellowship and discipleship together. Another described the garden as beneficial for mental health and well-being, and a place where 'the needs of people are being met where they are, instead of where the Church wants them to be'. Interestingly, these answers focus on effective missional projects rather than the effective leadership within them.

Several people referred to the re-development plans for Ballynafeigh Methodist Church to include a multi-purpose arts and food venue, a community centre with an onsite presence, and social housing for vulnerable women.

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<sup>112</sup> Warm Spaces, 'About' Available: [Warm Spaces](#) (accessed 24 March 2023).

Examples of effective missional leadership beyond the Circuit included the work of IMYCD through Soulmates, a weekend discipling, encouraging and empowering pre-teens; and the outreach of East Belfast Mission<sup>113</sup> and Belfast Central Mission<sup>114</sup> where support is provided for youths, low-income families, and the homeless, alongside counselling and befriending. Further examples were the Surf Project for pioneering new discipleship methods,<sup>115</sup> and the Agape Centre for its encouragement of questioning ingrained ideas.

One personal reflection discussed how strong Bible teaching and action groups had enabled and increased the use of individual gifts, and engagement with local community and church groups: leading to community initiatives and prayer outreach, and an increasing missional confidence. Another personal example explained how small groups interested in spiritual welfare had made them feel valued, loved, included, and shown how the Kingdom should really work.

Mother Teresa was commended for quietly but powerfully leading many in the act of self-sacrificial love and for seeing Christ in everyone. She inspired others simply by loving God and loving others, and although great things came from her work, her goal was to do small things with great love.

**Question Five asked the participant what kind of church they think missional leadership will create.**

With elements of the themes which arose in question three, the answers considered the spiritual, personal, and practical characteristics of the church missional leadership would create.

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<sup>113</sup> East Belfast Mission 'Home.' Available: [East Belfast Mission \(ebm.org.uk\)](http://EastBelfastMission(ebm.org.uk)) (accessed 25 January 2023).

<sup>114</sup> Belfast Central Mission 'Home.' Available: [One of Northern Ireland's oldest charities... | Belfast Central Mission](#) (accessed 25 January 2023).

<sup>115</sup> The Surf Project 'Home.' Available: [The Surf Project | Facebook](#) (accessed 25 January 2023)

## *Spiritual*

Eight people suggested a spiritual, God-centred, Christ-like church, underpinned by a belief in Jesus and growing in faith. This would not be limited by politics or resources, but hungry for discipleship and deeper relationships with Jesus; a place of healing which shows God's love practically to all people.

Seven people identified the evangelistic nature of the church as God's people who are willing to learn and follow the gospel and demonstrate it in practical ways so that those without church connections become comfortable in church activities, thus developing more disciples.

The church was recognised to be people who are filled with, focused on, and led by God's Spirit to confidently step out in faith, discovering and using their gifts for expanding God's kingdom locally and worldwide, perhaps in new ways. They would be committed to mission, causing less tension and disagreements over trivial matters.

## *Personal*

The church was described as passionate, exciting, vibrant, energetic, lively, and alive; always displaying God's universal love. Members would be open, authentic, love Jesus and neighbour, be faith-and hope-filled, humble, listeners and learners, living generous and joyful lives. It would have a pastoral heart: warm, caring, empathetic, encouraging, and nurturing peoples' spiritual well-being. Transformed from today's church, it would be growing, adventurous and renewed.

Several people suggested a church inclusive of all ages and all people, accepting them for who they are; a caring, non-judgemental, and safe place for people to pray, worship and praise God together without fear of church politics.



### *Practical*

The most common answer from fourteen people was a community-focused church. This came from the realisation that with declining numbers at Sunday services, Church must be a body of people not confined by buildings, but reaching out and serving everyone regardless of creed, ethnicity, and social class; a church which is financially, socially, practically, and spiritually active in the local community, co-ordinating activities and offering support. Through these loving interactions, many will experience the caring nature of Church.

It was speculated it would be hard to distinguish leadership because of a foundation of teamwork rooted in Christ: one without prejudices or hierarchy.

**Question Six asked the participant to identify three people (lay or ordained) from the MCI connexion that they believe embody missional leadership and why.**

Three people omitted this question. 35 names were given: 16 ordained and 19 lay, 16 females and 19 males across the roles, 23 employed by the MCI.

The answers reflected the themes in question three.

### *Collaborative and Empowering*

Five people highlighted leaders with collaborative qualities, who listen for God's direction and vision and have gifts of inspiring and enabling others to use their gifts for serving God. They encourage a united leadership vision, try to involve all ages in mission, and support the ideas and initiatives of others.

### *Community-Focused*

All the suggested missional leaders are active within their church context and wider community. Their faith promotes practical support to those in need, usually through community activities, such as the community garden, meal, choir, craft projects, social action programmes, and connecting with other community initiatives.

### *Conviction*

Several leaders are convicted to cultivating a missional church. They have an awareness of community needs and strive to serve those needs by undertaking difficult tasks with great vision, spiritual guidance, and empathy for all.

### *Evangelistic*

Evangelism and discipleship were recurring characteristics. These people are dedicated to preaching and living the Gospel and discipling others in the Gospel. Some welcome children from the community to teach them about God and His love. Others work within IMYCD, toddler groups, local schools, and the community: striving to disciple children and young people. They ensure others have a greater understanding of Scripture through services and life groups, teaching that Christianity is a lifestyle, not a Sunday activity.

### *Passionate*

These leaders are enthusiastic about mission and have an inspirational energy.

### *Pastoral*

Six people were suggested for their pastoral qualities: putting others first, loving and caring for those around them, offering pastoral support, and being interested in other people.

### *Personal Qualities*

Various people were nominated based on their leadership qualities of being encouraging, gentle, approachable, a friend to all, and doing everything in a spirit of love.

### *Spirit-Led*

Interestingly, only one person highlighted the Spiritual gifts of their suggestions.

### *Transformation*

Four people selected leaders determined to transform the church, who prioritise doing things differently to expand God's kingdom, help others to see Christianity in a new way, and who have changed lives through their ministry.

### *Visionary*

Despite being a common word to describe missional leadership, only one person was mentioned for their aspirations of creating a missional church for the future.

## **3.3 Interview Profiles**

Before presenting the findings of the interviews, below is a profile for each of the interview candidates using reasons from the questionnaires as to why each participant is a missional leader. Each participant was chosen based on frequency of mention in the questionnaires.

### **Lay Participant One – LP1**

LP1 was nominated for their inclusive nature, their work with children in the community, and their work through the Peaced Together project<sup>116</sup> which seeks to empower women.

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<sup>116</sup> Peaced Together, 'About.' Available: [About - Peaced Together](#) (accessed 22 Jan 2023).

## **Lay Participant Two - LP2**

LP2 was submitted for volunteering with the Community Garden, Meal, and Choir, and for their serving nature.

## **Lay Participants Three and Four - LP3&4**

LP3&LP4, who are a married couple, were named for their missional hearts, their essential work in reaching out beyond the traditional bounds of 'church' to local community groups such as the community choir, meal, garden, and refugees in the area, and building relationships and promoting practical support to those in need whilst encouraging church members to participate. They have explained how church needs to change and are striving to lead others through the unknown. They recognise the importance of discipleship, evangelism through action, surrendering to God and using Spiritual gifts.

## **Ordained Participant One - OP1**

OP1 was designated for their compassion for the community and attempting to integrate church with community. They were described as inspiring, hard-working, non-judgemental, generous, and willing to respond and speak out for the vulnerable.

## **Ordained Participant Two - OP2**

OP2 was suggested for their missional and leadership experience. They work hard to build unity by encouraging and supporting missional initiatives, bringing new ideas, effectively preaching the Gospel, and offering pastoral support. Their life reflects the characteristics of a missional leader: caring, encouraging, loving, sharing, and listening.

## ***Ordained Participant Three - OP3***

OP3 was nominated for their determination to cultivate missional mindsets, their leadership qualities, and their supportive and inclusive ministry. They encourage people

to think outside the box in terms of mission. They are not afraid to broach difficult subjects but do so in a spirit of Christian love.

### **3.4 Interviews**

The interview participants were selected (a) because their names were suggested multiple times in the questionnaires, and (b) to provide fair representation of ordained and lay, male and female, Church volunteer and Church employee.

#### **Question One asked the participant to identify their age bracket.**

Three of the participants are 65+, one is 55-64, and three are 45-54.

#### **Question Two asked the participant to identify their gender.**

Three of the participants are female, and four are male.

#### **Question Three asked the participant how long they have been serving for the Methodist Church in Ireland, either voluntarily or employed.**

Two lay participants have been volunteering with MCI for around 30 years. Their involvement has included being society stewards and serving on various committees, with one having preaching, discipleship, and social responsibilities. Two lay participants have been employed by the MCI for nearly four years but had 18 years of church and mission work prior to that. All three ordained participants have served the MCI for over 30 years, beginning in a voluntary capacity then later in an ordained role.

**Question Four asked the participant to name five words which they believed described missional leadership.**

The following diagram identifies the words and phrases given, with the most common terms appearing in larger font.<sup>117</sup>



Although 25 words were given across the 6 interviews, many similarities and entwined themes arose.

### *Spirit-led*

All the participants highlighted missional leadership being interlaced with God's Spirit. LP2 expressed it as a life dedicated to God's guidance and direction which sets an example to others. LP1 argued that a life built on God's Spirit is essential for missional leadership, emphasising prayer and being strong against spiritual attacks. Using the word 'prophetic', OP2 described missional leadership as a 'spiritual activity' grounded on being 'part of God's

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<sup>117</sup> WordClouds.com Available: [Free online word cloud generator and tag cloud creator - WordClouds.com](https://www.wordclouds.com/) (accessed 16 February 2023).

mission in the world and bringing the Kingdom of God into hearts and lives'. LP3, OP1 and OP3 accentuated the woven relationship of Spirit-led and visionary. For LP3 missional leadership is 'being able to see what isn't there but what in the Spirit could be'. OP3's answer nearly coincided completely, adding how missional leadership 'operate[s] in the domain of miracles'. OP1 agreed, but included pioneering, explaining how churches must identify needs in their surrounding context then find new ways to connect with those needs and express the gospel love. For them, missional leadership is sensing where 'the Spirit of God [is] rustling and agitating and highlighting social injustice'. They recognised the vast vision of the Great Commission but argued that vision is equally noticing three families in need and walking alongside them as they discover their place in God's Kingdom.

### *Outward-looking*

For OP1, mission and missional leadership should be outward-looking; extending to the margins of society to embrace social responsibility, and tackling social injustices such as homelessness, addiction, family fallouts and increasing suicide rates, without expectation of something in return. LP3 and LP4 similarly talked about reaching people on the margins of church and society. Although the others did not use this phrase, their examples of mission in their communities portrayed their understanding that missional leadership is not limited to church buildings and breaches social barriers. Not only is this a missional responsibility, but OP2 and OP3 see this as an essential responsibility, stressing how the institutional model of church is dying and so churches must respond to God's call to be missional in order to survive.

### *Challenging/Inspiring*

LP2 preferred the term 'inspirational' to 'challenging', interpreting 'challenging' as a negative approach and explaining that since people respond differently, a more beneficial

catalyst for change would be an 'inspirational' and encouraging leadership. Contrarily, OP2 sees challenging as an unavoidable aspect of missional leadership because the transformation of becoming missional 'test[s] our preconceived notions of church and community'. OP3 concurs, accrediting this to many aging congregations having to embrace new structures and styles of church and mission. Additionally, it is challenging to empower people to use their gifts for mission. Consequently, missional leadership is challenging both for the leadership and their context.

### *Courageous/Risk-Takers*

In response to challenges, OP2 highlights how missional leaders must be courageous when encountering previously uncharted territory and managing those within the context who struggle with the changes. LP3 explains this requires humility, and determination to make difficult decisions. This corresponds with OP1's statements about missional leaders being risk-takers. They discussed instances where they had taken risks to connect with people then circumstances moved these people to different contexts. This reiterated how risks are necessary and worthwhile but parallel the reality that missional leaders won't necessarily finish the journey with people they connect with.

### *Pastoral*

As many will not understand the missional changes, and considering potential consequences of connecting with communities, LP1 and LP2 emphasise the pastoral requirements of being caring and compassionate, even when problems cannot be solved.

### *Collaborative/Empowering*

LP4 gave the Parable of the Lost Sheep as an illustration of missional leaders' roles, expressing a desire for 'the 99' to also recognise their role and responsibility in looking for 'the one'. OP1 agreed, asserting how missional leadership should 'gather' people in the



shared vision of God. Likewise, OP3 maintained missional leadership will achieve nothing if it fails to help other people grab God's vision and walk together on that missional journey. They added that 'empower[ing] other people to use the gifts that they've been given' is essential for finding new ways to share the gospel.

### *Exciting*

OP2 declared how missional leadership is exciting as people are successfully engaged with and the church grows, albeit probably not in the traditional form that people previously aspired for. OP3 also spoke of excitement from seeing missional leadership cultivate opportunities, (birthed through prayer), to connect with local communities.

## **Question Five asked the participant what they thought it was about their ministry that people saw as missional.**

The answers fit into three categories: job title, ministry, and personal characteristics.

### *Job Title*

LP3, LP4 and OP2 all referred to their employed leadership status, and their responsibility in leading their contexts through change.

### *Ministry*

LP1 believes that leaders should 'practice what you preach'. Therefore, they try to be inclusive by not judging those who do not 'fit in the box' and encouraging those on the sidelines to partake in tasks alongside them.

LP2 sees themselves as a supporter not a leader. However, they wondered if their commitment to church and mission meant others associated them with missional leadership. They identify with Martha (Lk.10:38-42), arguing the importance of practical

work in aiding mission.

LP3 and LP4 mentioned their vision for their context, and discussed their background and experience in missional activities and how they encourage others to live missionally by 'gardening in the Spirit, making coffee in the Spirit, doing whatever in the Spirit'. They expressed how sharing stories of those on the margins to those not necessarily on the margins, and letting people see and hear the Spirit's movement in the surrounding community, might lead to them being considered missional leaders.

OP1 emphasised the collaboration of the Trinity in relationship and function, and how this encourages them to have a collaborative ministry by working closely with their church council. Their background has given them a heart for the marginalised, so they believe in an immersive mission: integrating with the community by walking the streets. They suggested these attributes might be why their name was given.

OP2 believes in living by example and covering everything in prayer. Having experience in fresh expressions of church they are committed to undertaking fresh expressions of mission in their everyday life by trying to be good neighbours and building good relationships so opportunities to share the gospel will arise.

OP3 pondered if their forthrightness, their integrating of pastoral and missional, and their 'point[ing] people to the possibility of a future' are why people have identified them as a missional leader.

### *Personal Attributes*

LP3 and LP4 hope the qualities they associate with missional leadership are evident in their own lives: faith-filled, humble, determined, visionary and outreaching. OP2 and OP3 talked about their missional drive and determination.

**Question Six asked the participant what challenges they have faced in 'cultivating missional mindsets' in their context.**

LP3 and LP4 highlighted how the challenge of missional leadership begins within the leader, with LP3 stating, 'If we're working hard on our inward life ... taking time to learn to be loved, to learn that we are loved ... to sit in the presence of our Father ... [that] transforms us into people who want to share that. And it becomes a very natural outpouring of that'. They believe leaders must be filled with the Spirit or this will hinder the outpouring of missional leadership. Considering missional leadership a spiritual activity, OP2 raised the challenge of living consistently to avoid hypocrisy when encouraging and equipping others to live missionally.

OP2 revealed a challenge for them is helping people recognise the reality of their context, adding that, although people of deep faith are committed to Sunday morning services, that model of growth and church is unlikely to be the future of the Church. Church must be more than 'how do we grow a Sunday morning congregation so that we can keep going here?', it must be about growth on the margins of church and society.

LP4 specified the challenge of broadening peoples' understanding of mission in changing culture. They expressed how interpreting mission as bringing people into the church, or a Billy Graham crusade, or an Alpha course, or an overseas mission trip, or good works is not wrong, but mission exceeds institutional boundaries. LP3 explained how part of this challenge is that 'often we try to make it an "us and them" scenario ... mission is ... us going to them or us ... inviting them in'. They believe a mission more aligned with Jesus' example is needed: focusing on transforming lives and recognising how even people with no faith have something to teach us of God.

OP1 shared the challenge of getting churches to own responsibility in mission, commenting

how people are reluctant to participate in activities which do not immediately produce new Christians. In their context, OP1 assigns this to right-wing Christianity which is suspicious 'of anything to do with the Spirit'. Although more open to the Spirit in their context, LP4 also discussed peoples' need to feel they have succeeded in 'making Christians' and how this can result in Christians trying to rush mission. However, LP3 emphasised depending on the Spirit of God and not personal initiatives, 'You're gonna guide me and we're going to just trust you in this journey'.

One common challenge is the resistance to change. LP1 and LP2 associate this with fear, with LP2 deliberating how the church is so accustomed to once-a-week hourly services that it will be difficult for leaders to encourage congregations to become 'more involved in church life outside the walls of the church'. However, they see change as necessary for church survival and are pleased to see missional leadership through youth, pastoral, and community work where hospitality is shared 'with an open and caring spirit' to 'strangers of different faiths, or maybe no faith at all'. OP3 concurred that fear often leads to resistance, though it may not be the specific changes people are opposed to; they might simply want assurances that changes will not affect them or prevent them from burial at the place they have dedicated their lives to.

OP3 emphasises resistance must be carefully managed because many of the resisters have supported and financed the church in its mission thus far. Their proposal for managing resistance is helping people 'deepen their faith over fear'. LP1 suggested two ways of managing resistance to change are practicing collaboration and not dictatorship, and illustrating how change is often necessary for growth. They acknowledged pastoral care would be vital. LP2 proposed tackling resistance to change by encouraging people to see blessings resulting from change.

OP1 and OP2 remarked on the mindset that mission is the responsibility of people specifically employed to be missional and how this can create an apathy in churches. OP2's response - 'the work of the Kingdom is the work of all God's people' - parallels the *Priesthood of all Believers* that 'The Mission of Jesus Christ in the world is accomplished by His calling of every Christian to serve',<sup>118</sup> comparably promoted by the latest MCI tagline for Christians to, 'Liv[e] wholeheartedly as followers of Jesus for the transformation of the world'.<sup>119</sup> As highlighted by OP2 and OP1, this brings the challenge of equipping congregations so they might be incorporated into missional activity. OP2 stresses how discipleship through Scripture and prayer are necessary for missional leaders to have 'an eye to the mission of God' whilst helping people discover their part in that mission.

OP1 listed capacity as a challenge. Church attendance figures in Northern Ireland are declining, meaning less people resources for running missional projects. Similarly, OP3 refers to aging congregations in many circuits, and alludes to the historical lack of strategic and succession planning which has ultimately led to financial challenges, and the inability to cater for all needs in increasingly complex societies. Therefore, OP3 states that churches must prioritise immediate needs in their context and mission effectively into those needs.

One final challenge mentioned by OP3 is gossip as 'what people don't know they make up'.

**Question Seven asked the participant what kind of church they think missional leadership will create.**

Paralleling the quantitative research, the answers speculated about the spiritual, personal, and practical characteristics of the church missional leaders may create.

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<sup>118</sup> Dean Nadasdy, 'Vocation and Mission: The Role of the Laity in the Ministry of Christ.' *Lutheran Mission Matters* 24:1 (2016), 50-58 [50-58].

<sup>119</sup> The Methodist Church in Ireland, 'Wholehearted Resource' Available: [Wholehearted — The Methodist Church in Ireland \(irishmethodist.org\)](https://www.wholehearted.org) (accessed 21 Feb 2023).

## *Spiritual*

LP1 believes the church will be a strong praying church. LP2 hopes for a church built on discipleship. Although church will likely look different, LP4 outlines how the spiritual practices of reading Scripture, praying, and worship will remain. LP3 affirms church should contain the Jesus values of authenticity, inclusiveness, openness, and embrace. LP3 and LP4 envisage the church as Spirit-driven, trusting God and being 'willing to adjust things as you go'. OP2 hopes the church will burst with people willing 'to give their lives for Jesus', believing that more will happen for the Kingdom with smaller passionate numbers than bigger numbers who attend church out of obligation. OP3 addresses the call of Jesus to 'follow me', explaining that commitment to 'think, believe, speak, [and] act like Jesus did'. Consequently, they anticipate missional leadership will create a church of disciples that is Christ-centred like the church in early Acts 'where people said, "See these Christians: look how they love one another."' <sup>120</sup> OP3 also visualises a church summed up by the MCI strapline for this year, 'Whole-hearted disciples for the transformation of the world'.

## *Personal*

LP1 feels the church will be caring, genuine, welcoming, and inclusive, so people are not judged for their clothing, but are recognised as children of God who have something to teach us about who God is. LP4 agreed church will be more diverse and embracing, authentic, honest, and less culturally uniform. These characteristics were reiterated by OP3. OP1 hopes the church will have a heart for 'the other' and continue to be outward-looking. OP2 responded that *they* are not trying to create anything, (alluding to previous answers about church being Spirit-led), rather they are aspiring to cultivate a church which is hopeful about a future, outward-looking, open, welcoming and hospitable, deeply spiritual and

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<sup>120</sup> Reference to: Tertullian, '*Apology: Chapter 39*', translated by S. Thelwall. Available: [Logos Virtual Library: Tertullian: Apology. 39 \(logoslibrary.org\)](https://logoslibrary.org/Tertullian:Apology.39) (accessed 21 February 23).

covered in prayer.

### *Practical*

LP1 asserts the practical sharing of the gospel: 'you don't have to preach; you just have to show Christ in you'. LP4 describes the worshipping community in their context and how, although it still maintains traditional spiritual disciplines, they aspire to be practically different from Sunday worship structure to include those for whom traditional church is an alien concept. LP3 stresses that church will look different in each context so they should not simply imitate other churches but should ask, 'What is it in this cultural setting that I'm in that brings Jesus to the centre?'. OP1 ponders the informality of the church, envisaging it to revolve around food and music, and possibly taking the form of multiple small groups who regularly meet together. Considering the tenuous affiliation of people to church OP2 also believes the Western church will mirror its Methodist heritage: less dependent on church buildings with many small communities which are increasingly lay led.

There was agreement that the future church will be different from the traditional model of church. LP1 and OP1 speculated how Sunday worship will change and church will become a more flexible 24/7 community. They believe this a necessity to cater for the changing cultural climate where Sunday worship is no longer practical or a priority for many people. LP2 agrees, adding that church must evolve to integrate with the community. LP4 wonders if the current generation's 'reaction against being controlled' has led to a decline in institutional attendance, therefore church might have to become 'less controlled or less disciplined'. After discussion with LP3, LP3 and LP4 clarified this to mean less disciplined by institutional authority, but more disciplined by the Spirit.

**At the end of each interview, the participant was asked if they had anything to add.**

LP1 referred to a church context in North America they had read about online.<sup>121</sup> It involved a church worker who ignored some church members on his way into his office. His boss challenged him on this, stating, 'Your work was out there in that foyer'. Those words changed the worker's life and ministry. For LP1, this story captures what missional leadership should be: a presence.

LP4 finished by highlighting some questions missional leaders bring to their contexts and the ultimate assurance through it all, 'How do we adapt to accommodate ... where society is at right now? How can we wash their feet? How can we ... take off our shirt, put a towel around our waist and kneel down and wash the feet of society? How can we put ourselves out for the sake of the world? How can we make the sacrifices ... [to] leave the 99 ... to go see the one? And I feel that as we do that ... the good shepherd ... will lead us to green pastures and still waters. And he will restore our soul and guide our paths.'

This concludes the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative research, which will form the basis for discussion in the following chapter.

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<sup>121</sup> Bret Selby, 'Sermon: Missional Leadership – John 20' (2014) Available: [Sermon: Missional Leadership - John 20 \(lifeway.com\)](https://www.lifeway.com/sermons/sermon-missional-leadership-john-20) (accessed 21 February 23).



## **4. What makes Leadership Missional According to the Ballynafeigh Methodist Circuit?**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Helping people see the ‘possibility of a future’, empowering them to use their gifts, sensing where ‘the Spirit of God [is] rustling and agitating and highlighting social injustice’ ... these are just a few of the insights into missional leadership shared by those involved with the research on BFMC. Building upon the thematic analysis of the previous chapter, this chapter will evaluate a sample of the quantitative and qualitative responses, analysing perceptions around missional leadership on BFMC in comparison to literature dedicated to the subject of missional leadership to display an MCI-specific perspective.

### **4.2 Characteristics of Missional Leadership**

The most common words associated with missional leadership in the quantitative research were love, transformation, visionary, inclusive, listening, compassionate, enthusiastic and community. In the qualitative research they were Spirit-led, visionary, challenging and exciting, thus conveying how visionary is perceived by BFMC to be the most popular characteristic of missional leadership. As the following chapter will indicate, there is an overlap with Chapter One which presented Spirit-led, collaborative, empowering, and transformative as four of the characteristics associated with missional leadership by missional theologians, which will now be discussed.

#### **Spirit-Led/Visionary**

Avery outlines how visionary leadership is often expected to present a vision which

inspires people to collectively follow in achieving that vision.<sup>122</sup> He remarks how visionary leaders can lose their effectiveness when their vision no longer fits the contextual needs, and there is the danger that those not in agreement with the vision are excluded.<sup>123</sup> Roxburgh and Boren note how leaders with a predetermined vision are less inclined to listen to those around them.<sup>124</sup> This may explain why there is less emphasis on visionary leadership by other missional theologians. Rather, they concentrate on being tuned into God's vision,<sup>125</sup> expressing how missional leadership guides the Church in adjusting its vision from a Christendom model of church where leadership is elevated to a vision revealed and directed by the Spirit.<sup>126</sup> This conveys the relationship between Spirit-led and visionary, highlighting how the vision of missional leadership is God's vision revealed by the Spirit. The interview participants portrayed an awareness of this fact as two participants described visionary as 'being able to see what isn't there but what in the Spirit could be', three emphasised a life and ministry permeated with the Spirit, and one inferred the role of missional leaders as sensing where God's Spirit is 'rustling'. This reliance on the Spirit will empower people and institutions to recognise God's vision and participate in His ongoing mission.<sup>127</sup>

The quantitative research described a desire for a church which is fully immersed with the Spirit so God's vision is clear, yet only one suggested missional leader was nominated for their reliance on the Spirit. This may be due to assumptions their nominations are Spirit-led or it may be, as outlined in the interviews, there is a suspicion in MCI around 'anything

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<sup>122</sup> Gayle C. Avery, *Understanding Leadership: Paradigms and Cases* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2004), 24.

<sup>123</sup> Avery, *Understanding Leadership*, 24-26.

<sup>124</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 123-4.

<sup>125</sup> Karen M. Ward, Back to the Future: Visionary, Entrepreneurial, Missional Anglican Leadership for Today's Church, *Anglican Theological Review* 92:1 (2010), 167-173 [170].

<sup>126</sup> Elkington, 'Leadership as an Enabling Function', 6.

<sup>127</sup> Nelus Niemandt, 'Transformative Spirituality and Missional Leadership' *Mission Studies* 33:1 (2016), 85-103 [86].

to do with the Spirit', so being Spirit-led is not the first characteristic people assign to missional leadership. The research seems to support the latter as all the interview participants highlighted Spirit-led as essential for missional leadership in contrast to only three out of forty questionnaire participants. Eight more responses did, however, allude to missional leadership being spiritually aware by describing missional leadership as focusing on God's Kingdom and being attentive to the Spirit's work. With less than half of the quantitative participants associating missional leadership with the Holy Spirit, this portrays a misunderstanding of mission. Reiterating Chapter One, to perceive mission as *Missio Dei* entails both mission and missional leadership being immersed in and led by the Spirit: without the Spirit's guidance leadership is not missional,<sup>128</sup> and without the vision of God revealed by the Spirit there is no mission.<sup>129</sup> It seems there is an intuitive appreciation of the Spirit's role in missional leadership, but MCI as a whole lacks an explicit usable vocabulary for this.

### **Collaborative/Empowering/Inclusive**

In correlation with the literature, the quantitative and qualitative research agreed that missional leadership is collaborative by empowering and including all disciples in mission.<sup>130</sup> Noticeably, there was no distinguishment between collaboration within leadership roles and collaboration with the whole congregation. Steele maintains collaborative leadership was evident in the Early Church as they valued the spiritual gifts of all believers and commonly shared leadership.<sup>131</sup> This view was expressed by OP1 and OP3 who depict missional leadership as gathering and empowering disciples to collectively

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<sup>128</sup> Ford, *Unleader*, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 84.

<sup>130</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 163-178.

<sup>131</sup> David A. Steele, *Images of Leadership and Authority for the Church: Biblical Principles and Secular Models* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 9.

use their gifts in the shared vision of God. In agreement, LP4 compared the role of missional leaders to the Shepherd searching for the lost sheep; however, they expressed a desire for the rest of the flock to assist the search.

In the Early Church, people were considered leaders for their character rather than their role<sup>132</sup> as leadership was founded on an identity in Christ.<sup>133</sup> One questionnaire participant alluded to this style of church, writing that they believe missional leadership will create a church where it is hard to distinguish leadership because of a foundation of teamwork rooted in Christ. This may be a wider observation as, when asked to indicate evidence of effective missional leadership, the most common answers were the benefits of missional projects. It is possible that people do not accredit these projects to specific leadership but see them as a positive result of a collective effort. However, the question did ask specifically about effective missional leadership and not effective mission, suggesting that missional leadership is an unfamiliar concept. This seems likely considering at least ten people declined to respond to the quantitative research because they did not understand the terminology.

It was acknowledged that collaborative leadership brings challenges, predominantly the challenge of broadening peoples' understanding of leadership and mission. Many people identify mission as the role of employed or designated leaders. In the quantitative research, 23 out of 35 of the suggested missional leaders are employed by MCI. Indeed, this research has enlightened my own understanding of missional leadership as it became clear I also held that preconceived notion. Rather, endorsing Shaw's suggestion that leadership should be based on character and not position,<sup>134</sup> and considering Gledhill's and LP2's reminder

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<sup>132</sup> Shaw, *Missional-Ecclesial Leadership*, 138.

<sup>133</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 118.

<sup>134</sup> Shaw, *Missional-Ecclesial Leadership*, 139.

that everyone has the potential to be a leader when they are empowered to make disciples,<sup>135</sup> it is clear that missional leadership is not limited to those employed or designated by the church as leaders. Indeed, significant leadership capacity and expertise lies beyond this grouping.

Attentive to Avery's concern that visionary leadership excludes those who disagree with the vision, there was acknowledgement that some people will struggle to change their perception of church and mission, whilst others will refuse to do so. Rather than exclude these people, believing this resistance to change is largely due to fear, OP3 stresses how missional leaders must continue to 'pastor [their whole congregation] and deepen their faith so that their faith is greater than their fear'. This will require patience, most effectively practiced through prayer.<sup>136</sup> Romans 12:4-8 testifies that each person is a vital part of Christ's body, and that each part has been given spiritual gifts.<sup>137</sup> This highlights the responsibility of missional leaders to ensure that even those who resist change still sense their value as part of Christ's body and are given opportunities to engage in mission.<sup>138</sup> By discipling people to recognise their value in mission, they will be empowered to use their spiritual gifts in new contexts. Scars will be accumulated in facing these challenges, nevertheless, perseverance will bring rewards<sup>139</sup> and transformation.

## **Transformation/Exciting**

With six mentions in the quantitative research, 'transformative' was the second most common characteristic associated with missional leadership. Additionally, several people referred to missional leadership inspiring people to be open to God changing lives. This is

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<sup>135</sup> Gledhill, *Leading a Local Church*, 6.

<sup>136</sup> David Fitch, 'The Seven Indispensable Virtues of a Missional Leader' (2009) Available: [The Seven Indispensable Virtues of a Missional Leader – Missio Alliance](#) (accessed 13 March 2023).

<sup>137</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 131.

<sup>138</sup> Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 34.

<sup>139</sup> Grundy, *What's New in Church Leadership*, 1.

consistent with Niemandt's research which states missional leadership should aspire for transformation.<sup>140</sup> When giving examples of effective missional leadership in the questionnaires, the transformation of buildings for multipurpose use was mentioned, along with small group discipleship transforming peoples' confidence and ability to be increasingly missional. The word 'transformative' was not given in the interviews as a characteristic of missional leadership, however, transformation was discussed as a challenge missional leaders face. Agreeing with Niemandt, LP3 insisted that transformation begins within the missional leader, relaying how learning to sit in God's presence will naturally transform leaders into people who share God's love.<sup>141</sup> This will ensure, as highlighted by LP2, LP3 and OP2, that mission remains a spiritual activity for the leader and an example is set to those around them. This indicates a correlation between discipleship and transformation: as leaders practice personal discipleship and strive to disciple others, transformation will be imminent.

Beaumont claims discernment must be a part of discipleship, testifying how her experience as a congregational consultant revealed that although Christians may trust God to speak, 'they simply don't trust themselves to hear.'<sup>142</sup> This links back to being Spirit-led. In the same way people associate mission with employed leaders, they may associate Spirit-led as limited to the ordained,<sup>143</sup> assuming that if leaders are Spirit-led and listening to God's voice, their role is simply to follow the leader. Barton and Beaumont argue that discerning God's voice is vital for all Christians as it helps them to identify God's mission in their context<sup>144</sup> whilst strengthening their reliance on the Spirit and transforming their faith.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Niemandt, 'Transformative Spirituality', 97.

<sup>141</sup> Niemandt, 'Complex Leadership', 2.

<sup>142</sup> Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 67-68.

<sup>143</sup> Beaumont, *How to Lead*, 68.

<sup>144</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>145</sup> Beaumont, *How to Lead*, 91.

There is an awareness of this need for discernment in BFMC, as many people expressed a desire for a Church which is more spiritually aware and hungry for discipleship.

As with collaboration, transformation brings challenges. Pre-conceived notions of mission are being challenged, and the transition from a Christendom model of church to a more fluid church in a liminal setting is painful for many. This is especially true for BFMC which has four aging congregations with members who have dedicated their lives and finances to the work of a church model they are accustomed to. Niemandt refers to the *Anatomy of a Pioneer*,<sup>146</sup> outlining the importance of missional leaders taking risks and being aware of human obstacles.<sup>147</sup> Scott articulates the intentional disruption in the parable of the Lost Coin, paralleling this to the role of missional leaders in risking disruption to 'reset the priorities.'<sup>148</sup> In light of this, whilst pastoral care is an important aspect of missional leadership in liminal contexts, two further characteristics of missional leadership suggested by the interview participants are courage and risk-taking. Missional leaders cannot let resistance to change prevent them from following the Holy Spirit's direction into the unpredictable future.<sup>149</sup> For this reason, OP2 emphasises the courage required to step into this liminal space where not everyone understands or agrees with the changes.

OP1 refers to the uncertainty of mission, noting examples where their church has begun to walk alongside people then circumstances have moved those people elsewhere. This serves as a reminder that mission belongs to God and not the Church, thus Christians must acknowledge they are only part of the missional journey and may not witness the transformation they desire. Nevertheless, OP1 comments on the privilege it is to walk

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<sup>146</sup> Alan Hirsch & Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practise for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 162-165.

<sup>147</sup> Niemandt, 'Transformative Spirituality', 98.

<sup>148</sup> Alan Scott, *Scattered Servants: Unleashing the Church to Bring Life to the City* (Colorado; David C. Cook, 2018), 73.

<sup>149</sup> Niemandt, 'Transformative Spirituality', 97.

alongside people even for part of their journey.

Contrary to society which often measures success by metrics, missional success should be measured by increasing depths of faith, discipleship, and missional involvement.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, despite the uncertainty, the unknown, and the resistance, transformation of faith and Spiritual awareness is exciting as missional leaders witness lives and communities being transformed: an excitement expressed by OP2 and OP3, because ultimately, transformation is the fruit of a church collectively working with the Spirit to grow God's Kingdom.

### **Community/Outward-Focused**

In addition to the above characteristics, both the quantitative and qualitative results highlighted missional leadership as focused on the community beyond the church building. Drane asserts, 'For generations, we have understood mission in terms of revivalism ... inviting those who are not yet Christian to return to their spiritual home ... [however]; you cannot call people back to something they have never had.'<sup>151</sup> Corroborating with Bolsinger, this infers the increasing secularisation of society and the reality that many people have no connection with church,<sup>152</sup> thus mission must be outward-focused to connect church and community. Whilst Bolsinger indicates leader-induced congregational transformation is the necessary response to a secular society,<sup>153</sup> Drane suggests incarnational<sup>154</sup> mission is the answer.<sup>155</sup> He refers to Jesus as a missional leader who lived

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<sup>150</sup> Philip Nation, 'Defining Missional Leadership' Available: [Defining Missional Leadership - Lifeway Leadership](#) (accessed 18 March 2023).

<sup>151</sup> Drane, *After McDonaldization*, 91.

<sup>152</sup> Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 38.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-44.

<sup>154</sup> There is debate around the terminology and theology of 'incarnational mission' with some scholars preferring 'incarnational' to exclusively describe God incarnate through Jesus. However, Drane's definition of 'incarnational' as 'alongside' will be adopted for the purposes of this research.

<sup>155</sup> Drane, *After McDonaldization*, 114.



alongside those to whom he was ministering.<sup>156</sup> Although not using the term ‘incarnational mission’, OP1 advocates for this style of missional leadership, reminiscing how walking alongside members of their community led to them identifying the urgent needs of that community. Subsequently the church responded to those needs instead of making assumptions about what the community needed. This led to transformation in the community, which became their missional aim as opposed to increasing Sunday morning attendance. However, this mindset originates from someone actively engaged in outward-focused missional leadership, and although they uphold this as the nature of mission, they express frustration that this view is often limited in congregations. When this is the case, Bolsinger’s approach of leader-induced congregational transformation may be the first step in cultivating an outward-focused missional church. One questionnaire stated how small group discipleship had empowered many to exercise their gifts and engage with people in the local community. Discipleship led to personal transformation, which led to a transformation of the understanding of mission and consequently the practice of mission. In light of this, when cultivating an outward-focused mission, missional leadership has two intertwined responsibilities. They must personally engage in an incarnational mission in order to connect and transform those in their communities, and they must disciple their congregations so that missional mindsets are transformed, and they are empowered to engage with and transform their communities.

### **4.3 What kind of Church Missional Leadership will Create.**

The primary answer for the kind of church missional leadership will create was community-focused. Roxburgh and Romanuk believe this happens when congregations are

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 117.

empowered to be 'cross-cultural missionaries'<sup>157</sup> by a missional leadership centred on 'God ... at work in the world'.<sup>158</sup> This is one reason why LP3 thinks sharing stories of mission on the margins is important for transforming the mindset of people who are wary of mission. In this sense, the results are encouraging in presenting BFM's desire for a community-focused church. There is an awareness of the need to be practically, socially, and spiritually active in the community. However, some of the questionnaires indicated this activity is a response to declining attendance at regular Sunday services. This raises the question of missional motivation; a challenge which OP2 refers to as they discuss the necessity of mission not simply for church survival, but because God calls the Church into it. Scott expresses how missional motivation should be the transformation of cities,<sup>159</sup> arguing 'The next great move of God is not a movement *in* the church but a movement *of* the church'.<sup>160</sup> This is interesting as the most common answers for effective missional leadership in the questionnaires were the community projects which, although very successful for building relationships with people from the local community, are still all based on the grounds of BFM. This does not undermine the value of these community projects, but it does imply the perception that 'community-focused' applies to any activity on church property which accommodates community people. As declining church attendance was given as a reason for being community-focused, it also suggests that the missional motivation is to increase the numbers of those entering the church. It is possible that if Sunday service attendance was not in decline, BFM would not have the same opinion that churches should be community-focused.

On the contrary, whilst churches should continue missional activities on their premises,

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<sup>157</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 13.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>159</sup> Alan Scott, *Scattered Servants: Unleashing the Church to Bring Life to the City* (Colorado; David C. Cook, 2018), 14.

<sup>160</sup> Scott, *Scattered Servants*, 15.

acknowledging earlier statements regarding God at work in the world,<sup>161</sup> and the movement of the church,<sup>162</sup> it is important to note that mission exceeds church buildings. In this sense, churches should not simply be community-focused, but outward-focused. OP1 hopes this is the kind of church missional leadership will create, where Christians will have a heart for 'the other'. Similarly, OP3 anticipates a church which truly grasps the call to 'follow me' by thinking, believing, speaking, and acting like Jesus. Arguably, this is a Christological motivation for mission as Christians learn to see and love people in the way that Jesus did; taking compassion on the crowds (Mt.9:36).<sup>163</sup> This highlights the correlation between mission and service, with OP1 referring to Matthew 25:31-46 as a definition for mission. In addition to this Christological understanding of mission, Roxburgh and Boren identify the Pneumatological nature of mission, underpinning how the Spirit directs Christians to be missionally outward-focused in their everyday lives.<sup>164</sup> They give the example of a doctor who began mowing his neighbours' lawns as a way of serving his community. This progressed into coffee dates, barbecues, community events and eventually a community Bible study.<sup>165</sup> This is a reminder of the nature of *Missio Dei*: God's mission is not limited to the confines of church buildings but involves the entirety of creation.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, outward-focused mission is not about growing the attendance of Sunday church, it is about living alongside people so their lives are transformed as they become aware of God's Kingdom.

The interview participants generally agreed that missional leadership would create a church which differs to the traditional structure of church. With alternative activities now available to society, Sunday church is no longer a priority for many, and traditional church

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<sup>161</sup> Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 13.

<sup>162</sup> Scott, *Scattered Servants*, 15.

<sup>163</sup> Guder, 'Walking Worthily', 280.

<sup>164</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 18-20.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>166</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 398-401.

has become an alien concept. For this reason, LP1, LP2, LP4, OP1, OP2 all believe missional leadership will create a more flexible church which is not limited to Sunday worship, is less institutionalised and traditional, less dependent on church buildings, more informal and possibly more lay-led. OP1 and OP2 surmise that missional leadership will create smaller communities of believers in contrast to largely attended traditional services. These smaller communities will be bursting with passion for serving Jesus. Discipleship was a common answer in the questionnaires when asked what kind of church missional leadership will create, with eight people expressing the church will be God-centred and hungry for a deeper relationship with Jesus. As previously mentioned, small group discipleship was indicated as an example of effective missional leadership, with one person recounting the spiritual empowerment these small groups produced. Intriguingly, the concept of lay-led, small worshipping communities was a characteristic of early Methodism which was steeped in discipline, discipleship, and spiritual wellness.<sup>167</sup> Perhaps the church missional leadership will create will not be something completely new but will echo the characteristics of the early Methodist church.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, BFMC is beginning to grasp the nature of mission and missional leadership, yet there is room for development. Whilst visionary was the most common word associated with missional leadership in the empirical research, the literature clarified that this vision must be God's and not leaders' personal visions. BFMC recognise the Spirit has a role in mission and missional leadership, although lack awareness at the dependency on the Spirit required. This contrasts with the missional leaders who all highlighted the Spirit's role in mission, thus suggesting BFMC's perception of visionary is a desire for traditional 'top-

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<sup>167</sup> James A. Davies, 'Small Groups: Are they Really so New?' *Christian Education Journal* 5:2 (1984), 43-52 [43-44].

down' leadership direction. This may be due to missiological language barriers or limited understanding of the Spirit.

Despite the literature strongly promoting missional leadership as a shared leadership, there is little acknowledgement of a collaborative leadership team in terms of people appointed as missional leaders. Rather, the emphasis was on the collaboration of the whole congregation participating in mission. Whilst this coincides with biblical and theological teaching, it fails to recognise the Spiritual gifts of leadership. Furthermore, the perception of BFMC around collaborative mission was based on inclusivity as opposed to recognition of all believers encompassing Spiritual gifts. This reinforces a limited understanding of the Spirit working through the entire body; a challenge identified by the missional leaders.

Transformative was the second most common word associated with missional leadership in the questionnaires, but appeared in the qualitative results as a challenge of missional leadership personally and collectively. A link between discipleship and discernment was established, as discipleship helps people discern the Spirit's voice; leading to transformation of faith, missional participation, and missional impact. The desire for a church of disciples was expressed, suggesting the yearning of BFMC to be more Spirit-filled.

The final characteristic of missional leadership according to BFMC analysed in this chapter was community/outward-focused. The literature outlined this as essential considering the increasingly secularised society with no prior affiliation to church. Outward-focused ensures churches remains aware of the community's needs and respond appropriately. As outward-focused mission is less common within churches, missional leaders must practice an outward-focused mission whilst discipling their congregations to adopt this missional lifestyle.

Finally, this chapter considered the kind of church BFMC believed missional leadership

would create. The two characteristics discussed were community/outward-focused and less-traditional. It was portrayed that BFMC perceive any activity which involves the community as missional. This is a true but incomplete vision of mission. God is at work in the world; therefore, the church must engage with the community beyond church premises. There was discussion around missional motivation as the results suggested many in BFMC are missional with the aspiration of growing their traditional church. However, biblical and theological teaching affirms that the aspiration of mission is transforming lives through the Spirit's power, so people recognise their place in God's Kingdom. This is a challenge for many, especially considering the likelihood that the MCI of the future will not be traditional in the sense it is today. Rather, with an emphasis on small groups and discipleship, the MCI will mirror the characteristics of its historical heritage.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1 What this Dissertation has Shown**

The purpose of this dissertation was to convey positive characteristics of missional leadership found in the MCI, explore the impact of missional leadership on BFMC, and indicate potential areas which need addressed.

This dissertation has shown a positive correlation between the experience of missional leadership on the ground in BFMC and what the literature suggests missional leadership should look like. This indicates a positive impact of missional leadership on the circuit so far. However, there is a gap around having a language to express missional terminology, and a lack of appreciation for the Spirit – both as director of the mission, and the giver of gifts to empower the mission. In addition, BFMC has a limited understanding of the purpose of mission. Further discipleship is needed within BFMC to inform members of theological, biblical, and spiritual literacy around missional leadership, and to expand missiological knowledge.

### **5.2 Limitations**

Whilst this dissertation has portrayed the need for further discipleship, it has not addressed how this discipleship will look in practice. Therefore, it will be necessary to return to the literature to learn how to address this gap.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

It is my belief that Roxburgh's discipleship structure of awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment<sup>168</sup> will be helpful to BFMC in increasing

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<sup>168</sup> Roxburgh, *Missional Church*, 141-145.

understanding of the Spirit's role in mission and encouraging missional participation outside church premises. With discipleship around these areas, BFMC will continue to be transformed and have a transformative effect on its local communities by the Spirit's power.



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