

**What Shape Can Christian Mission Take In A Society Where There Is Growing
Loneliness Amongst Gen Z?**

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Abstract

During this dissertation we explore the theme of loneliness. We look at the statistical growth of loneliness in society, in particular amongst Gen Z. We look at the theological and missiological background of loneliness. We then look at three case studies as examples of projects which are addressing loneliness amongst Gen Z. The most common theme between these projects is the theme of intergenerational church. A key takeaway point from this dissertation is what it means to be a community, and a church. To be church is to share in worship and communion together but also to build relationships with one another and share connection. By being together and intentional about sharing this creates connection, combating loneliness. Another key takeaway is intergenerational church. A church which allows people to connect with people their own age, but also of other ages is a church which people can learn and grow together, through each other. By encouraging a church which listens to both its younger and older people is a church which will combat loneliness. Lastly, the most important point from this dissertation is that loneliness is an issue amongst our society, and it is most prevalent amongst young people. Loneliness is a problem which needs to be directly addressed by the church.

Declaration

I declare that the dissertation is my own original work unless referenced clearly to the contrary, and that no portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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What Shape Can Christian Mission Take In A Society Where There Is Growing Loneliness Amongst Gen Z?

Introduction

In a Christian community, a place in which I have been living, I felt both the most connected, and the loneliest. I am a Gen Z adult, and when speaking to both my Christian and non-Christian friends, the topic of loneliness is something which has been significant for us all. This is why I feel it is important to look at mission, and how the church can address the loneliness which is prevalent in today's culture with particular reference to Gen Z.

I will first define a few key words which will be used throughout this dissertation. These words are: Gen Z, loneliness, and Christian mission.

The first word to define is Gen Z, this word refers to Generation Z, which is those people born between 1997 and 2012¹. Gen Z are the generation which grew up with the development of social media use. Another defining characteristic of Gen Z is that most Gen Z will have 'little or no memory'² of the 9/11 terrorist attacks which were so significant across the world. I have chosen Gen Z for a few specific reasons, the first is that Gen Z are now teenagers and young adults, an age range which is already a focus of church mission³. The second reason is that I think that the loneliness which effects this age range is a specific type of loneliness, this age group grew up with social media and their formative years have been affected by technology in ways no other generation has been affected⁴. I think it has also been affected by the pandemic, and the affect the pandemic had on the social development of people who were teenagers and young adults was significant and different as it occurred during a specific few years in which social development is key⁵. The pandemic I am referring

¹Michael Dimock, 'Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins', Pew Research Center (2019), Available: <<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>> (accessed 28/08/2024).

² Dimock, 'Defining Generations'.

³ The Church of England have released a report aiming to double 'the number of children and young active disciples by 2030' with £338.5m of funding available for 2023 to 2025. The Church of England, 'Seeking the Vision: stories of the church's mission and ministry' (2023), Available: <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/smmib-annual-report-v6-print3.pdf>> (accessed 28/08/2024), Page 4. The Methodist Church also has a number of opportunities for children and young people and spend £1.56m, 3% of its total expenditure, on children and young people. Available: <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/MCiGB_Consolidated_Reports_and_Financial_Statements_2022-23_FINAL_-_02.02.2024_TKWkIPW.pdf> (accessed 28/08/2024), Page 29.

⁴ Melanie Morris, 'Climate Change, Social Media, and Generation Z.' (Published Dissertation, Pepperdine University, 2020), P.2.

⁵ As teenagers age, they spend more time with their peers and socialise in new ways based of sharing thoughts and feelings, not just common interests to develop relationships. 'Social Development Through Adolescence' Available: <

to is the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns which occurred between 2020 and 2021⁶. I will look more in depth at these reasonings further on in this dissertation.

The next word to define is loneliness, this is the feeling when our need for social connection is not met⁷. This is a simple definition and we will look more into different types of loneliness in the next section.

The last definition is what I mean by Christian mission. This is a phrase we will look at thoroughly further on in the dissertation, but for now we will use Jürgen Moltmann's definition 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, *creating a church as it goes on its way*.'⁸.

In this dissertation I will be arguing that not only does loneliness go against what God designed for creation, but that Christian mission should be concerned with how to address loneliness. I will be arguing that there are strengths and weaknesses of each approach to mission I am evaluating but overall, there is a common theme of engaging young people within the community of church, with support of the intergenerational model of connection of the church.

To argue this, I am going to first look at the growing loneliness amongst Gen Z. Loneliness is something which many people experience, I am going to be looking at the different types of loneliness which exist in society. I will look to express what is specific to Gen Z and why it is an issue which is important to address. I will then look at loneliness as a theological concept and explore what God does and says about loneliness throughout the Bible. With this I will be arguing why loneliness is something which God addresses, and why it is something we should therefore also be addressing. I will explore different missiological approaches to loneliness. I will be exploring why loneliness needs an approach missionally, and what approaches already exist which we can draw upon for the future. I will then explore three approaches to mission which I feel address loneliness in Gen Z. These three approaches are: the traditional church model, the relational evangelism model, and the online church model. In the traditional church model, I will be exploring the place for young people within the traditional church model. I will be evaluating how effective the traditional church model is at addressing loneliness amongst Gen Z, and looking at missional approaches that churches are taking to address loneliness among Gen Z. I will be looking at relational evangelism in a temporary setting. The Hope and Anchor is a part of the Methodist Church's evangelism strategy which demonstrates this relational evangelism model. It is set up as a dry bar and is a pop-

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Human_Development/Lifespan_Development_\(Lumen\)/07%3A_Adolescence/7.12%3A_Social_Development_during_Adolescence](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Human_Development/Lifespan_Development_(Lumen)/07%3A_Adolescence/7.12%3A_Social_Development_during_Adolescence)> (accessed 28/08/2024).

⁶ Available: < <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>> (accessed 28/08/2024).

⁷ 'Dealing With Loneliness' Available: <<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/lifes-challenges/loneliness/>> (accessed 28/08/2024).

⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: a contribution to Messianic ecclesiology*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 64.

up venue at festivals, looking to have conversations with people about taboo subjects. I will be evaluating the relationships built within the Hope and Anchor, and what kind of effect the temporary nature of the connection has on loneliness and if it is an effective approach to mission. Within the topic of online church, I will be exploring the idea of connecting with people in a non-physical way, which is not limited by geography, and considering whether this type of connection is an effective way to do mission, and if it addresses loneliness.

Chapter 1. Understanding Loneliness

Both loneliness and mission have broad understandings. In this section I will explore what I mean by loneliness, and look at trends in loneliness amongst all ages over the past few years to then justify why I am narrowing my scope of research to Gen Z. I will also look to make what I understand to be loneliness clear, to express what can be done to combat loneliness. I will also define what I mean by mission and explain what parts of loneliness the church can try to address through mission.

What is loneliness

Loneliness is hard to define; the NHS website acknowledges that ‘Everyone’s experiences of loneliness are different’⁹. The Government released *A Connected Society*¹⁰, a strategy for tackling loneliness in 2018, they defined loneliness as ‘a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.’¹¹. They go on to differentiate between isolation and loneliness, as isolation is a physical and observable situation, however loneliness is a feeling which is not necessarily linked to a physical or observable situation. The Mental Health Foundation define loneliness as **‘the state of distress or discomfort that results when we perceive a gap between our desires for social connection and actual experiences of it.’**¹². These definitions all state the feeling of loneliness as negative or unwelcome, subjective, and dependant on social connection. I disagree with the word negative in the definition, as when we look more into the research the effects of loneliness are normal, and can be either negative or positive. From these definitions we will use our own definition, loneliness is a subjective feeling which can be unwelcome, based on a perceived lack in social connection. Amongst these definitions of loneliness, there are different types of loneliness, which we will explore in more detail now. There are three key types of loneliness which are generally accepted¹³ these are: emotional loneliness¹⁴, social

⁹ ‘Dealing with Loneliness’ Available: <<https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/lifes-challenges/loneliness/>> (accessed 29/08/2024).

¹⁰ *A Connected Society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change* (2018) London: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Available: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936725/6.4882_DCMS_Loneliness_Strategy_web_Update_V2.pdf> (accessed 29/08/2024), p.20.

¹¹ *A Connected Society*, p.20.

¹² ‘Loneliness in Young People: Research Briefing’, Available: <<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/unlock-loneliness/loneliness-young-people-research-briefing>> (accessed 29/08/2024).

¹³ ‘Loneliness and Mental Health’ Available: <<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/loneliness>> (accessed 29/08/2024). ‘Facts and statistics about loneliness’ Available: <<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/facts-and-statistics/>> (accessed 29/08/2024). ‘Dealing with loneliness’, Gretchen Rubin, ‘7 Types of Loneliness and Why It Matters’ (2017), Available: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-happiness-project/201702/7-types-loneliness-and-why-it-matters>> (accessed 29/08/2024).

¹⁴ A lack of emotional attachment to someone

loneliness¹⁵, and existential loneliness¹⁶. The Campaign To End Loneliness offers three more types of loneliness, transient loneliness¹⁷, situational loneliness¹⁸, and chronic loneliness¹⁹. Due to the subjective nature of loneliness these are not an exhaustive list of ways to experience loneliness but are fairly comprehensive types of loneliness in which for most people the feeling of loneliness will come into one of these categories. I think these categories are well split and acknowledge the varying types of loneliness and are applicable to all age groups. Whilst they are broad categories in themselves, with little defining boundaries, due to the subjective nature of loneliness it allows the types to have wide goal posts to encompass the different feelings of loneliness which might fall into each category. Moving through this dissertation I will use these six categories as the basis of my knowledge when discussing loneliness.

We will now look at the causes, impacts, and solutions suggested for loneliness. There are no direct causes for loneliness due to its subjectivity, however there are some risk factors which may cause loneliness. The generally accepted most common risk factors revolve around major life changes. Some commonly accepted examples of this are moving house, moving to university, changing jobs, retiring, suffering from poor mental health, or physical health, becoming a parent or a carer, and suffering from a family or relationship breakdown or bereavement²⁰. We will look at some statistics later, but key groups of people are more at risk of experiencing loneliness, such as those who live alone, those who are younger, those who are older, those with poor mental or physical health, those who are on lower income or are out of work, women, and those who identify as LGB or other as their sexual orientation²¹. We have established that loneliness is something which can be experienced by people. Whereas whilst in my definition of loneliness I did not include loneliness as a negative thing in itself, when loneliness persists it can become negative. We are going to look at the impact's loneliness can have on people when it is something which persists. The impact of experiencing extreme or long-lasting

¹⁵ Lack of friends and people who share interests

¹⁶ A sense of being in a room of people you know and still feeling alone

¹⁷ A feeling that comes and goes

¹⁸ Occurring at specific times like Christmas

¹⁹ Feeling lonely all or most of the time

²⁰ 'Loneliness and Mental Health'. 'Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time' (2017), Available: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_dec17_jocox_commission_finalreport.pdf> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Dealing with loneliness'. 'Loneliness: About Loneliness' Available: <<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/about-loneliness/>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Loneliness: What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?' (2018), Available: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10> (accessed 29/08/2024).

²¹ 'Loneliness and Mental Health'. 'Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time'. 'Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England' (2022) Available: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factors-associated-with-loneliness-in-adults-in-england/investigating-factors-associated-with-loneliness-in-adults-in-england>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Loneliness: About Loneliness'. 'Loneliness: What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?'

loneliness is seen in increased risks to developing poor mental health, such as depression and anxiety²², your physical health²³, and it can 'increase the risk of early mortality by 26%'²⁴. It also affects work performance and is estimated that it 'costs UK employers £2.5 billion a year'²⁵. Lastly, we will look at the suggested solutions to loneliness. Some suggested solutions are connecting with friends, joining activity groups, and doing exercise²⁶, watching tv or listening to podcasts or other ways of connecting to media content such as watching the news²⁷, or volunteering at a local group²⁸. If things are extreme then it would be useful to get in touch with a GP²⁹. Whilst loneliness can be a negative experience, some people have recognised that a period of loneliness has been a positive experience, and can lead to growth in a person³⁰.

We are now going to look at some statistics of loneliness amongst the general population to examine some trends over the past few years. It has been noted that in the past it was assumed that loneliness primarily occurred among those who are older. This assumption may have been driven by an absence of studies examining loneliness in younger people. In the past few years there has been studies into loneliness amongst young people³¹ which has found loneliness amongst young people. We will look at a few studies across a few years to see the trends in loneliness. The surveys asked different age groups how often they experienced loneliness, with the answers being grouped by frequency

2016/17

²² 'Loneliness in Young People'. 'Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time'

²³ 'Loneliness and Mental Health'. 'Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time'.

²⁴ 'Facts and statistics about loneliness'.

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ 'Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs' (2020), Available:

<<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/xq2dnc0d/youngminds-coronavirus-report-march2020.pdf>>

(accessed 29/09/2024), p.10. Emma Kirwan, 'Loneliness in Young Adulthood: The Research So Far' (2023),

Available: <<https://www.evidentlycochrane.net/loneliness-in-young-adulthood-the-research-so-far/kirwan-e-loneliness-in-young-adulthood-the-research-so-far-take-home-points-october-2023/>> (accessed 29/08/2024).

'Who Feels Lonely?: The results of the world's largest loneliness study' (2018), Available:

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2yzhfv4DvqVp5nZyxBD8G23/who-feels-lonely-the-results-of-the-world-s-largest-loneliness-study>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Loneliness: tips to manage loneliness' Available:

<<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/tips-to-manage-loneliness/>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Dealing with loneliness'.

²⁷ 'Coronavirus', p.10. 'Loneliness and Mental Health'.

²⁸ Kirwan, Loneliness in Young Adulthood. 'Dealing with loneliness'.

²⁹ Kirwan, Loneliness in Young Adulthood. 'Loneliness: tips to manage loneliness'. 'Dealing with loneliness'.

³⁰ 'Who Feels Lonely?'. Emma Kirwan, 'Loneliness During Emerging Adulthood', *The Mind Yourself Podcast*, Episode 81 (16th November 2023). Available: <<https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/the-mind-yourself-podcast-81-emma-kirwan-loneliness/id1495915089?i=1000635019174>> (Accessed 28/09/2024), 10.35-11.00,16.04-17.50.

³¹ Kirwan, Loneliness During Emerging Adulthood, 3.06-20., Kirwan, Loneliness in Young Adulthood.

In 2016 to 2017 5% of 16- to 24-year-olds were 'often/always' lonely, young adults had the highest 'often' and 'some of the time' experiences, and the lowest 'hardly ever' and 'never' experiences of loneliness³². See appendix A for this graph.

2019

In 2019 a survey found that 88% had experienced it to some extent which is at the same level as in the previous study. However, 40% said they experienced it often, which is an increase on the previous study. The degree to which young people feel often is increasing. Other age groups in this survey reported experiencing loneliness less than this age group³³. The graph for this is also in appendix A.

2022/23

The data from 2022/2023 shows that people aged 16 to 29 feel lonely often or always 9.7%, with people between 30 to 49 at 8.2% and those over 70 were at 3.7%. Loneliness amongst all age groups has grown since 2016³⁴.

From this data we can see that people of all age groups experience loneliness, but loneliness is most prevalent amongst young people. Not only is loneliness prevalent, but it grew during the early 2020's. During this time period we experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw lockdowns and social restrictions placed on the entire nation for many months. We will look at the Covid-19 data in the next paragraph, but first I would like to comment on the quality of the data. Both critiques offered come from research by Emma Kirkwan³⁵. The data is fairly extensive, however the process of data collection for the frequency of experiencing loneliness relied on self-evaluation. This can be difficult as loneliness is subjective it can be hard to define, and the individuals answering the survey may all have a different understanding both of loneliness and of frequency of experience. It also assumes that the participants were being honest both with themselves and the survey around how often they felt lonely³⁶.

The second critique of the data is around those questioned were 'either all or mostly university students'³⁷. My critique of this is that it is not representative of those who chose not to attend university, and those who did attend university but have since left, and are still in the age bracket. Those at university have undergone a large transition and have left home, therefore the results may be biased towards experiencing loneliness as this is one of the triggers for driving loneliness. I do see

³² 'Loneliness: What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?'. 'Loneliness and Mental Health'.

³³ 'Loneliness in Young People', Connor Ibbetson, 'Who are the most lonely people in the UK?' (2019). Available: <<https://yougov.co.uk/society/articles/25089-young-britons-are-most-lonely>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Who Feels Lonely?'. 'Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England'.

³⁴ 'Younger Brits report higher level of loneliness' (2023) Available: <<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/press-release/younger-brits-report-higher-levels-of-loneliness/>> (accessed 29/08/2024). 'Facts and statistics about loneliness'.

³⁵ Kirwan, Loneliness in Young Adulthood.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

the value in both of these critiques in the data, and whilst they are critiquing the quality of the data, I do feel the data is strong enough to conclude that loneliness is prevalent in our society, particularly amongst Gen Z. Whilst loneliness to some extent is addressed within society, I feel that there is more that can be done to address it, particularly around education of triggers, and of resolving loneliness. This is something which I feel should be addressed by the Church, both due to the fact that there is loneliness amongst young people, but that young people are often overlooked assumptions around who experiences loneliness.

My dissertation title addresses Gen Z in particular. This is for two reasons, the first is that they are the current 15- to 25-year-old demographic, the second reason is that for Gen Z in particular they have experienced both a rise in social media use and have experienced the lockdowns of the pandemic at a key time for social development in their lives. Gen Z are the first generation to have grown up around social media. We have some more data to examine around these two key points, but in my opinion, these two factors have contributed to the rise in loneliness that we have seen in the data. The Mental Health Foundation found that 'current restrictions are having a heavy toll on children and young people', largely due to being unable to socialise with friends 'in and outside of educational settings'³⁸ Gen Z during the pandemic were largely within this age range. This report was taken at the beginning of the pandemic when restrictions were first introduced in March 2020. Young Minds Coronavirus report found that the top three most common concerns amongst young people were 'isolation and loneliness', 'not having enough food or supplies', and 'managing mental health'³⁹. During lockdown, young people were on the whole lonelier than other age groups⁴⁰. Another loneliness report found that loneliness spiked during lockdowns, but that loneliness dropped back to previous levels at the end of the lockdowns⁴¹. This graph can be seen in appendix A. So there is clear evidence that loneliness amongst Gen Z was affected by the lockdown restrictions, however there is not yet any evidence for the long-term effects of this on Gen Z. The second factor I will look at is social media use. Social media can be used to connect people. Social media as a tool has neither a positive or a negative impact on loneliness⁴², it is 'not just how much you use it but how you use it'⁴³ 'passive scrolling'⁴⁴ can make an individual feel lonelier, but connecting with others can improve loneliness⁴⁵. Whilst there is not a lot of evidence for or against social media,

³⁸ 'Loneliness in Young People'

³⁹ 'Coronavirus', p.10

⁴⁰ S. Parsons, A. Todorovic, M. C. Lim, A. Songco, and E. Fox. 'Data and Protocol for the Oxford Achieving Resilience During COVID-19 (ARC) Study'. *Journal of Open Psychology Data* 10: 1, <https://doi.org/10.5334/jopd.56>. (2022), p.4.

⁴¹ 'Loneliness and Mental Health'

⁴² 'Loneliness in Young People'. 'Coronavirus', p.10. D. Webster, L. Dunne, & R. Hunter, 'Association Between Social Networks and Subjective Well-Being in Adolescents: A Systematic Review.' *Youth & Society*, 53(2), (2021), p.175-210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X20919589>.

⁴³ Kirwan, Loneliness During Emerging Adulthood, 7.30-7.37.

⁴⁴ Kirwan, Loneliness During Emerging Adulthood, 7.37-7.43.

⁴⁵ 'Who Feels Lonely?'

I think it is significant to be aware of for Gen Z, and could be really significant in how we do mission to connect with Gen Z.

To conclude this section, we can see that loneliness is prevalent amongst young people. There have been a number of factors that affect loneliness which churches should consider. The different groups who are at risk of loneliness should be considered by churches, and the impact social media and the long lasting impacts from the pandemic had on Gen Z should be assessed over the next decade.

Chapter 2. Theology of Loneliness

In this section we will be exploring the theological problem of loneliness. We will be looking at what God says about loneliness, and why we should care about it from a theological viewpoint.

The direct translation for the English word loneliness does not appear in the Bible. The word $\tau\tau\alpha$ and $\mu\acute{o}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ are both used. Both these words mean 'alone'. The Hebrew word appears 12 times in the Old Testament⁴⁶ and the Greek word appears 111 times⁴⁷. There are examples of different characters in both testaments being alone, for example Elijah⁴⁸, Hannah⁴⁹ and Ruth and Naomi⁵⁰ were all alone at points in their journey. These experiences of being alone came from being physically alone, and from being far from God, and they experienced loneliness through this. The loneliness experienced in the Bible seems to fall into two types, loneliness through separation from people, and separation from God⁵¹. These are the two types we will look at in this section.

Loneliness as separation from God is seen throughout the Bible. When Adam and Eve first sinned in Genesis, they were separated from God⁵². Since then, we see continuously throughout the Bible separation from God. When Adam and Eve are in the garden of Eden they are with God, and when they sin and eat the fruit they turn away from God. They lose their connection with God and have to leave the garden⁵³. This loneliness and turning away from God is something which can be resolved through turning back to God.

The most interesting example of this is in both Matthew⁵⁴ and Mark's⁵⁵ account of the death of Jesus when he cries out, 'my God my God why have you forsaken me'. This is a quote from Psalm 22.1. This cry shows us that Jesus was alone, both socially, and from God⁵⁶. He has not turned away from God, and yet God has left him alone. When Jesus dies, he resolves this separation between humans and God. Through this we are able to have this connection with God. When Jesus dies, the curtain

⁴⁶Available:

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/search.cfm?Criteria=%D7%91%D6%BC%D6%B8%D7%93%D6%B8%D7%93&t=WLC#s=s_primary_0_1> (accessed: 31/08/2024) and <<https://biblehub.com/hebrew/910.htm>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

⁴⁷ Available:

<<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|version=SBLG|strong=G3441&options=VGNUH&display=INTERLEAVED&qFilter=G3441>> (accessed 31/08/2024) although, Strong's concordance cites only 47 times: <<https://biblehub.com/greek/3441.htm>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

⁴⁸1 Kings 19:10

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 1:1-20

⁵⁰ Ruth 1:3

⁵¹ André Barbera, *On Faith, Works, Eternity and the Creatures We Are*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020) p.95-102.

⁵² Genesis 3:24

⁵³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, (Texas: Word Books,1987), p.90-91.

⁵⁴ Matthew 27.46

⁵⁵ Mark 15:34

⁵⁶ Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*. (Bellingham WA: Lexham Academic, 2022) p.732-3.

which was a physical barrier between humans and God was torn, this physical separation is removed.

Loneliness as separation from people, as opposed to separation from God, is first seen in Genesis 2.18 it tells us 'Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'. The Lord saw that the connection that man had with God, and with animals was not enough. It is the first instance of creation being not good, and so woman was created. This was another human created, so that there was social connection between humans⁵⁷. Men and women could connect together, and this was good.

Another strong example is through the prophet Elijah. In 1 Kings 19.10 we see that Elijah is alone, as 'the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant ... and I, even I only, am left'. Although Elijah is physically alone, God speaks with him, and ensures that he knows he is not completely alone as God is with him⁵⁸. However, God also instructs Elijah to find Elisha, so that Elijah is not alone socially also.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 Paul discusses the parts of the church⁵⁹. That we need every part of the body, every hand and every foot is part of the body. There is no division, and the body works because of all the parts working together, and a singular part cannot be a body alone. In this way we see that the Church is comprised of many members. When we are alone we cannot be a part of the body, we need to be in community with others to resolve this loneliness⁶⁰. Loneliness is a problem, and the church exists as a way which can resolve both the loneliness we feel when separated from God, and from each other.

By looking at these examples we can see clearly that loneliness is both a separation from God, and a separation from humans. Both types of loneliness exist, and are important. To some extent they depend on one another. By being in a church community, we can worship with one another, and experience God together. Through Church and community, we can resolve both the spiritual and social loneliness.

⁵⁷ Wenham, Genesis 1-15, p.87.

⁵⁸ Simon J. De Vries, *1 Kings*. [2nd ed.]. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003) p.236-8.

⁵⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), p.1023.

⁶⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle To The Corinthians*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), p.616.

Chapter 3. Missiology of Loneliness

We are going to look at the concept of community, and in sharing communion with one another.

Throughout Christian history the concept of forming a community has been key, the development of the early church was through creating worshiping communities who met and shared a meal together⁶¹. Later as churches developed, they were still community minded. During the third century AD the desert fathers went into the desert to live away from all temptation⁶². They were very popular and many people went to join in this way of life and create a community in the desert. From this developed monasticism, which is when people give up all worldly things and live in a monastery, devoting their lives to prayer, and living in a Christian community⁶³. Different orders live in communities closed off, and others engage with society⁶⁴. As Christianity spread and the development of the parish system emerged in England in the early 11th century, churches were built for worshiping communities in a local area⁶⁵. The country was divided into parishes, a small local area where people would gather to be together. This system worked for many centuries, as many people lived in the countryside in villages and only engaged with the people in their community. As the industrial revolution moved people from the countryside into more urban areas, and urban areas developed, the parish system was altered but people still belonged to a community. John Wesley developed a system for allowing people to engage in community with one another, in his three-tiered system, of societies, classes, and bands he saw people gather together to share in community⁶⁶. Societies were a bigger gathering, classes were of 10 to 12 people, and bands were of 3 or 4 people⁶⁷. He encouraged these meetings and building of community, during the week to go alongside regular Sunday worship. Throughout the 1960's we saw the rise in popularity of the house church movement⁶⁸, calling people to meet in one another's homes, like the early church. This was to share an intimate space with one another, to develop community. A key part of Christian history has been this development of community, of people sharing their lives with one another. It is demonstrated to us through the early church, and something which should be encouraged today. Through building community together, we are not only sharing in

⁶¹ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, (New York: Continuum, 2008), p.78-79.

⁶² John Wortley, *An Introduction to the Desert Fathers*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.2-3

⁶³ Greg Peters, *The Monkhood of All Believers: The Monastic Foundation of Christian Spirituality*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2018), p.44-50.

⁶⁴ Peters, *The Monkhood of All Believers*, p.44-50.

⁶⁵ Norman John Greville Pounds, *A History of the English Parish: The Culture of Religion from Augustine to Victoria*. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.3-4.

⁶⁶ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (London: SCM Press, 2012), p.43.

⁶⁷ Moynagh, *Church for Every Context*, p.43-44.

⁶⁸ Hunt, S. (1999) "Andrew Walker. *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*." *Sociology -London-* 33 (2): 465–66.

the act of worshipping God, but we are sharing our lives, our struggles, and our happiness. The act of sharing in communion is considered a sacrament⁶⁹. When we share in communion we connect with God, and when we share communion in community it is significant. By being a community, we are providing this social connection. This is one way which has naturally provided an antidote to loneliness for so long. Whilst it is possible to be in a community and be lonely, if we are sharing in a Christian community, and caring for one another, and sharing our whole lives with one another, then it is a natural way to address loneliness. There are many barriers to building this community connection, the first is that it has to involve multiple people; if only one person wants to build a community, and others are shut off from this idea, then this will be difficult. The second is that these smaller groups may be harder for a new person to break into while another is that those with families or irregular working patterns, or chronic illness may find it difficult to attend a small group. Those who are most at risk from loneliness, new/single parents, those with long term illnesses, or are carers, might not have the availability to invest time into connecting in a community. Another issue is the decline in church numbers has seen many churches making the decision to close, or drop regular services to monthly, or even less often. This will have a negative effect on trying to build community, if there is no regular meeting. This idea of community is something which has been significant for much of church history, and can be a key way in combating loneliness, and yet is something which churches are struggling to offer.

⁶⁹ Available: <<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/what-we-believe/eucharist>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

Chapter 4. Methodology

My question is what shape can Christian Mission take in a society where there is growing loneliness amongst Gen Z. To answer this question, I found three approaches to mission which I think can address loneliness and, in my research, I have interviewed practitioners to gain their reflections on whether they think this is effective. The three approaches are the traditional church model, the relational evangelism model, and the online church model.

I chose a case study approach⁷⁰ because I wanted a more reflective professional perspective and the ability to reflect both on individual practice and the church as a whole. I wanted to look at a few different places that were engaging with young people, and dissect what it is they are doing well, what they have in common, and if it can be replicated in other areas of mission. I chose the traditional church style, to see if this model we have been using for millennia is able to be adapted today. I then chose the Hope and Anchor as an example of relational evangelism, to see if this pop-up short term intentional connectional model is something which can be effective. Thirdly, I chose online church, as having an online presence is something which is significant for the age group I am studying, and secondly, I wanted to see if trying to build a significant online presence was something which would be effective in creating real social connections rather than merely creating superficial connections with no real meaning. Since I only undertook a total of 4 interviews of practitioners across these three models, I acknowledge that the data pool that I am referring to is small. Nevertheless, I consider that the findings are amplified because the practitioners themselves each reflect contact with many young people, and I believe the professional reflections offered were critical and relevant⁷¹. I was able to identify some useful remarks and common themes which I will explore.

To collect the data, I had semi-structured interviews⁷² which lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. I sent my interviewees five or six prepared questions for them to consider. The interview was open⁷³, and I asked one or two non-prepared questions, following on from ideas which were mentioned, to explore things further, the initial five questions were all similar, with wording changed to make it relevant to the specific model⁷⁴. For the traditional church model and the relational evangelism model I added in a sixth question, unique to each model, which I felt was necessary.

⁷⁰ Tom Clark, Liam Foster, Luke Sloan, Alan Bryman, *Bryman's Social Research Methods*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p.59.

⁷¹ Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission*, (London: SCM Press, 2013), p.83.

⁷² Helen Kara, *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A practical guide*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), p.82.

⁷³ Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland, *What is Qualitative Interviewing?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.29.

⁷⁴ E.g. changing the word congregation to young people

When writing my questions, I chose to use the phrase young people, as I felt this best encapsulated those aged both under and over 18, which fall into the age bracket of Gen Z. During my first interview I quickly understood that the phrase young people within Methodism means specifically those who are under 18. This was an oversight on my behalf, and when sending the other questionnaires to practitioners I included a clarification of this phrase, which seemed to resolve this issue. My last reflection from my gathering of research was that whilst I was interested specifically in Gen Z, and those aged between 15 and 25, for those working within that age bracket, working with those under 18 is different to how they work with those over 18, and the majority of them worked only with those over 18.

I chose specifically to interview practitioners to gain an insight into how the practical approach they offer affects young people as a whole. I felt that as practitioners they would be able to evaluate their work, and the answers given would have more depth to them. I wanted this depth and critical analysis⁷⁵, rather than short answers gathered by a questionnaire from lots of young people, which was the other style of research I was considering⁷⁶. I chose not to interview young people individually as I felt that interviews with young people would not offer me as valuable reflections as interviews with practitioners. Another way to gather information from young people would have been to give them questionnaires, however I felt that a questionnaire would not be able to offer the most reflective space for a topic so hard to measure and would be outside the timeline available for this dissertation. I felt that reflections from professionals were more appropriate for the research I wanted. Upon reflection using a mixed method of research and both using a questionnaire and interviewing practitioners would have been beneficial if I were to do this again⁷⁷ as this would address some of the gaps in my research.

All the models I interviewed and studied were part of the Methodist Church. I felt this consistency was important, in particular with the Methodist Church's stance on online church, the God for All strategy, and the New Places for New People strategy. I felt that these recent strategies would allow for new approaches to take place, with enough commonality between them that I could compare and contrast, whilst also having a rich church history as a background. To choose these models to study I considered a number of factors in making the decision. The first was my own personal experience, as a Gen Z, what had I come across through informal conversations with others my age and what had I experienced which made me feel less lonely within my church experience. I then looked at what was being focused on within Methodism, what is being developed and where is funding being focused. I studied the policies and strategies approved over the past few years of conference,

⁷⁵ Clark, Foster, Sloan, Bryman, *Bryman's Social Research Methods*, p.428.

⁷⁶ Norman Blaikie, *Designing Social Research*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.205.

⁷⁷ Rosaline S. Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research: A Student's Guide*, 2nd Edition (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), p.206.

including this year. I was helped with knowledge from prior modules of study in the masters.

Considering these things and some brief research into loneliness and social media I decided to study a pre-existing model (traditional church), and to look at if online church could be used to connect people, given the impact it has had on Gen Z over the past few years. I also wanted to study the Hope and Anchor. Pop-up shops are a fairly big trend amongst Gen Z, finding something which is around for a short amount of time tends to be quite popular and brings engagement. Looking at how the Church is taking this idea and relating it to relational evangelism was a different way of creating social connections as an antidote to loneliness which I wanted to study. This interested me as my own experience volunteering at the Hope and Anchor, I knew the short-term deep connections which are built, and I wanted to consider the impact of this pop-up short-term Christian space on loneliness. Shoreline is an online church, looking at connecting with people in a solely online space with no physical meetings. The policy on online communion and the ongoing debate around online church which was present at this year's Methodist Conference was interesting and showed that this is a new way church is developing. For the traditional church model, I used the following process to identify two specific Methodist Churches to study. Firstly, I informally asked a number of Gen Z Methodists for their experiences of church, and if they had any positive experiences of engaging with a Methodist Church. The majority of them discussed how Churches in the centre of student cities were the best at engaging with young people. A number of them had also had positive experiences of the Hope and Anchor. Then I examined a number of Church websites for Methodist Churches in university cities, particularly noting if they had employed people to focus on student work. As a result, I selected Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and Jesmond Methodist Church and was able to secure practitioner interviews.

In choosing the specific projects to study I considered a range of factors, and did not research based off one specific criteria, but looked for projects which might be doing something new, as well as projects which were doing the traditional model well. I feel that the projects I studied were well chosen, and whilst they are not an exhaustive list of projects which engage with Gen Z, or that directly tackle loneliness, they have offered useful insights.

After interviewing the professionals who work at these four churches/projects, I have studied common themes, strengths, and weaknesses. I analysed the different projects, considering their different contexts and dissected what has worked, and what has not worked to come to my conclusions.

If I chose to move forward with this research, I would like to look into online communities more. I would like to look at different social media platforms and different ways of connecting with people online in ways which are not through traditionally structured services.

This table shows who I interviewed from what Church and which approach they fall into.

Approach	Example	Interviewed
Traditional Church	Plymouth Methodist Central Hall	Jonny
	Jesmond Methodist Church	Adam
Relational Evangelism	Hope and Anchor	Holly
Online Church	Shoreline	Wayne

Chapter 5. Approach 1: The Traditional Church Model

The church traditionally has been a place where people gather and share in community⁷⁸. In a previous section we explored this theme of community and sharing together. Throughout Church history people have gathered together to share. So, can this model which has been used for two thousand years be used effectively today amongst Gen Z?

In my research I interviewed two student and young adult workers to discuss how they engage with young adults in their work. Both the churches I looked at were in university cities, Plymouth, and Newcastle. When discussing the answers I will be using the abbreviations PMCH for Plymouth Methodist Central Hall, and JMC for Jesmond Methodist Church.

The questions for the interviews were

1 How does your church engage with young people, and do you think this is unique to your church, or do you think the church (Methodist) as a whole engages with young people?

Both PMCH and JMC recognised that having someone employed to focus on young Adults and students was key in engaging with this age range. They both recognised the significance of the student population in the nearby area as having an impact in this engagement. For PMCH they have a mentoring programme, aimed at coming alongside and supporting students. They also have a bible study and a meal mid-week at the student worker's house. There is an encouragement for the students to volunteer on teams, and to pair them up with families or older people. At PMCH they recognise the significance of intergenerational connection. The young people themselves have formed a connection within their age range and organise post church meals and swims at a nearby beach. There is also a connection between people who are studying, or have graduated from, the same subject. This is a mix of connection with one another, but also across ages. PMCH recognises that this might not be unique to them, but it is not something which exists in every church. JMC also has a specific Bible study for young adults, and also encourages volunteering within the church. JMC said that whilst what they are doing is not unique, it is rare within the Methodist Church, but that more evangelical churches or resource churches offer similar things. JMC also discussed that young adults often get lost within the Church, and that when they turn 18 in most cases they get forgotten about, and there is not much provision for them.

⁷⁸ Michael Plekon, "REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD: 'Community as Church, Church as Community.'" *Religious Studies and Theology* 41:2, (2022), p.246.

2 Do you think that there is loneliness amongst your congregation, in particular amongst young people?

PMCH responded to this question that there is loneliness in the congregation, but it is often hidden. The church sees between 1500 and 2000 people a week, with 150 to 200 people on a Sunday. Within this there will be people who are lonely, people who get lost in the business, with questions around who is the congregation, and who is in the community. They reflected that they do see a lot of loneliness amongst the students. JMC responded that there will be loneliness amongst the congregation, and that in the first few weeks of term there is a large amount of loneliness amongst the students. They reflected that whilst there is loneliness felt by students, they feel less lonely at church. We discussed intergenerational work, and they said it has worked in the past but it depends on if the young people want it, and if they want to engage with people of different ages.

3 Do you think what you are doing is addressing loneliness amongst young people?

Both JMC and PMCH reflected that building community is what addresses loneliness, and how they build community looks different, but it is connecting these young people with each other, and with the wider church which is significant. They both also recognised the importance of worshiping together, and encouraging faith development outside Sunday services. PMCH discussed further the need for encouraging people of all ages to connect with one another in intergenerational activities.

4 Is there anything you think you could be doing better to address loneliness amongst young people?

Both PMCH and JMC recognised that there was probably more that could be done. PMCH recognised that they have new people most weeks, and that whilst they had a robust follow up process, they could probably encourage people to talk more to new people on Sundays. Another key point was around the international population of the church, and allowing people to bring parts of their cultures and getting to know people's backgrounds to connect on a new level. JMC recognised that they could set up spaces mid-week for students to come and study and connect.

5 Is there anything the church as a whole could be doing to address loneliness amongst young people?

PMCH recognised that there is a lot more the church could do, particularly in other university cities. For those who are leaving home it would be good to link them to a local Methodist church, but that other Methodist churches were not like PMCH. They discussed the intentionality of sharing Jesus, and sharing the journey of Christianity.

They discussed the idea of the Church being more intentional in connecting with other people. JMC recognised that congregations need to be more equipped to engage with one another and with those outside the Church.

I think that both PMCH and JMC represent churches which have adapted well to the student population. They both focus on connecting with one another, and encouraging building faith with one another. They both recognise that intergenerational work is important in connecting with young people and growing young people, but that young people also need to connect with other young people. They are both good examples of the traditional church model being adapted to welcome young people, and to try and develop a community with young people. They both demonstrate that the church is relevant to young people. The main point which I thought was key from both of these churches is that there are some young adults in the church. This model which has worked for so long is still working, it is when the young adults feel involved and connected in the church that they feel less lonely. So, in some part we can take comfort that the church is still attracting young adults, but when we see them, we need to encourage them in their faith and development, keep them connected with members of the wider church and with others in the church their own age, and encourage them to volunteer. In essence we need to encourage their participation in church life. There are various aspects of missional approaches mentioned in these two interviews. They both recognised the importance of discipleship and fellowship, the significance of community. Creating a space where people connect to one another and share in their faith journey.

The traditional model of Church has existed for many centuries⁷⁹, and therefore it would be difficult to change the entire approach of the church. Being able to adapt this model to address the issue of loneliness is good, due to how ingrained Christianity and Christendom is in our culture and history. By having this history, and being able to recognise a church in many towns and villages means that the local church is well placed to address issues in community, and physically recognisable through the building⁸⁰. Adapting this model is useful as it does not require new infrastructure, only new initiatives. A weakness of this model is that creating a community is hard to define, meeting together in a church and forming a community might be good, but trying to join a pre-existing community might be difficult, and leave a young person feeling even lonelier. A church would need to offer a regular welcoming space for the young person to attend. This might be difficult especially if the church is struggling, they might not have services every Sunday, and for an outsider trying to join the church with unpredictable service times might act as a barrier and stop people engaging with church as a whole. Another critique is that it is

⁷⁹ T. Howland Sanks, "A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition." *Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (2015): p.299.

⁸⁰ R. Brenneman, and B. J. Miller. "When Bricks Matter: Four Arguments for the Sociological Study of Religious Buildings." *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 1 (2016): p.96

hard to predict what people want to engage with, and what works one year might not work the next. The other problem with this is that by trying to engage with students, there is a danger that people who chose not to go to university can get lost, they might be working a job or apprenticeship with different hours or contexts, and not feel a part either of the student community, or the wider church community. Similar to this is that for churches not situated in a university city, it is still important they engage with young people. Similarly, once students graduate, they also might feel that there is no longer provision for them within the church and find that there is no-one for them to relate to and also feel alone. So, whilst there might be provision for a specific group of people, there are many others which might not fit into this category and still feel lonely.

The traditional church model is the most recognisable for the unchurched person, and the widespread nature of local church means they could have a significant impact. However, church decline, or being situated in a rural or less busy location could mean that churches are unwilling to change as they might feel that it is pointless. The most important change the congregation can make however, is wanting to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds, and to recognise the mutual learning and growth that can be shared through this connection. By creating this welcome connection throughout the church will begin to build relationships and combat the loneliness which is felt amongst the congregation.

Chapter 6. Approach 2 – Relational Evangelism Model

The relational evangelism model is the model the Evangelism and Growth team use when working at events as an outworking of the *God for All* strategy⁸¹. This consists of a number of elements, generally as a pop-up⁸² venue at festivals, there is the Hope and Anchor podcast⁸³, the Hope and Anchor venue, and Conversations Against Mundanity which was produced by the Evangelism and Growth team. The Hope and Anchor venue exists as a dry bar, however a similar concept is done in different ways called different things at a few events, for example the pop-up venue is at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it is called Lost in Wonder, but still is part of this relational evangelism model. Conversations Against Mundanity was designed to shape conversations and build connection. All three embody the relational evangelism model, however we will be looking at the pop-up venue aspect specifically.

The aim of the venue is to do relational evangelism⁸⁴, this being creating a relationship with a person to then discuss the deeper aspects of life. Part of the aim of the venue is to create a safe space where people can discuss more taboo topics, things which the church traditionally does not like to discuss. Conversations Against Mundanity helps to promote conversations and connections within this context. The venue takes different shapes, it can be a dry pub, hence the name, or a café style at the Methodist youth assembly. The pop-up venue goes to different locations, both Christian and secular, like greenbelt and the Edinburgh fringe festival. It offers this temporary space for people to come and connect. I interviewed Holly Adams, the Evangelism and Contemporary Culture Officer in the Evangelism and Growth team in the Methodist Church.

In the interview I use the phrase Hope and Anchor to refer to every aspect of this model.

1 How does the Hope and Anchor engage with young people, and do you think this is unique to H&A, or do you think the church (Methodist) as a whole engages with young people?

In answer to the question, Holly discussed how they try to create a space which is comfortable, and targets those who are on the fringes. The Hope and Anchor as a venue does tend to attract younger people, and the Podcasts attracts some older people. Holly discussed how the Hope and Anchor does not do anything unique, that there are different people and ways that engage with young people, both across the

⁸¹ 'God For All' (2019) Available: <<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-24-pc-20-god-for-all-strategic-update-renewal-2025-2032.pdf>>.

⁸² Pop-up venues are popular amongst Gen Z, they are temporary venues which pop up in places only existing for a small amount of time before going. This creates a sense of exclusiveness, as there is only one chance to visit it. Pop-Ups are successful 80% of the time, 'Pop-up Retail Statistics' (2024) Available: <<https://capitaloneshopping.com/research/pop-up-retail-statistics/>> (accessed 30/08/2024).

⁸³ Available: <<https://www.hopeandanchor.io/podcast>> (accessed 20/08/2024).

⁸⁴ Lance C. Hahn, "The Power of Faithfulness in Relational Evangelism." *Great Commission Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 43–53.

whole church and within individual churches. She acknowledged the importance of the local church in mission initiatives, she discussed how she would love to see local churches able to create this kind of space for the local community. I think that in the way the venue is set up at these events it is exciting and attractive to enter, the space is designed well and the additional exciting elements⁸⁵ do a good job attracting people, particularly the young people who are at the events. I think they do a good job with creating a safe atmosphere to encourage this engagement. I also recognise that there are other intriguing ways the methodist church engages with young people.

2 How do you adapt the Hope and Anchor to engage with young people depending on where it is?

Holly offered a number of reflections on this point, the most significant was contextualisation. The approach taken in regard to young people depends to some extent on the location and the context of the wider event in which the Hope and Anchor is located. She acknowledged that it was a sub-aim to engage with young people, and that they could be more intentional. The wider aim is to engage people of all ages, and that it is an inclusive space for all. However, there are specific young adults on the design team, and on the panels to make sure it is a relevant space for young people. That it was being planned with young people, not older people trying to guess what might work. She also acknowledged that the card game, Conversations Against Mundanity, worked best in the young adult focused groups, and with those aged 15 to 18, than with older people.

I think the key part of this is the part the young adults play in the planning of the venue. I think that allowing young people to inform what topics are relevant for them, and informing what an attractive space for them looks like, has helped the Hope and Anchor to engage with young adults. Whilst the volunteers and those on the panel are a range of ages, listening to young voices allows this engagement to be effective.

3 Do you think that there is loneliness amongst those who engage with the Hope and Anchor, in particular amongst young people?

Holly's answer to this question was that there was a desire to connect, and a need to have a meaningful connection and to talk about meaningful things. That this need might have come from a place of loneliness. She said that she has seen times where people have disclosed things they had not told anyone else. That whilst this was seen across all ages, it was more distressing in younger people. The other point she made was that the existence of the Hope and Anchor within this wider event might exacerbate people's loneliness. This is a very significant point, if the festival setting is all about having fun, then the Hope and Anchor cannot also be all about having fun

⁸⁵ For example, a dry bar at Greenbelt, a sofa at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival

too, but rather needs to provide space dedicated to engaging people who are feeling left out and alone. The design of the space can ensure it is a fun venue, but it is specifically targeted at those who are alone, and encouraging them to have connections, and fun. There is no greater loneliness than feeling that you are the only one who is not enjoying the experience of being with a crowd and finding connection with others.

I think that the Hope and Anchor offers a space for people to engage, and that it can offer a space for people to connect and that this naturally will feed the need to connect. I think offering this space for connection will help those who do not have other connections. For young people, who might not know how to make connections easily, it is helpful to be offered a welcoming and engaging space whose focus is to be intentional about making a connection with them.

4 Do you think what you are doing is addressing loneliness amongst young people?

Holly answered that yes, what they are doing is addressing loneliness amongst young people but they could also be doing more. They are not explicit in their aims and language about addressing loneliness, it has just happened indirectly so far. They are beginning to program specific content addressing loneliness, but there is more they could be doing to follow up on people who have engaged with them. Essentially, yes it is, but there is so much more they could do. We discussed if there is any crossover between events, and between the podcast and the onsite Hope and Anchor, to which the answer was no, but there is work being done around signposting, and being able to point people towards their local churches.

I think this is very perceptive, the aim of relational evangelism will naturally provide this social contact.

Team members within the Hope and Anchor setting are encouraged to outwork their Christian love to people who engage. Creating this inclusive, accepting, and loving space will allow people to engage with people who care, and whose purpose is to have deep and meaningful conversations with others. This naturally will provide an intentional space to fulfil the social connections people are missing. This will address loneliness to some extent in people of all ages. To be specific about addressing the different types of loneliness, and to engage with it as a widespread issue however, will need a more intentional approach.

5 Is there anything you think you could be doing better to address loneliness amongst young people?

Holly said that there were definitely many ways they could be doing better. They could be more intentional in talking about loneliness, in planning content exploring loneliness, and in signposting people. She also discussed the importance of an intergenerational team, having the younger people and older people on the team is important. She recognised that older people tend to have deeper connections with

the younger people, but that there could be ways of encouraging younger people who volunteer to also share in this connection.

I think the intentionality of it is something which has come up a lot through this project, and that there are many aspects to loneliness, so many types and ways to experience it, express it, and ultimately resolve it. I think holding panels to encourage discussion and acknowledgement of loneliness would be the most useful way of being intentional by encouraging people to be aware of the issue, and how to resolve it, and to make others aware of it will help in the long term more widespread resolving of the issue. I think the intergenerational comment was important. In the interview this was something we explored, and Holly placed a high value on having people of all ages involved in the planning of the venue, the panels, and volunteers to engage. That sometimes an older person connected more with a younger person in a deeper way. This point indicates back to the idea of Church as a body. We are all part of the body and we need every part, young people and older people need each other, learn from each other, and can relate to one another. No matter what shape our mission is in, if it is inside the Church building, or at a festival in a pop-up venue, we still need to be using the whole of the body.

6 Is there anything the church as a whole could be doing to address loneliness amongst young people?

Holly again mentioned the significance of intergenerational work. She recognised the desire of older methodists to engage with younger people, but not knowing how to do it well, and that young adult representation will be useful in this. She recognised how well-placed Methodist churches are to do this locally, and how significant the local Church is in connecting with the local community. There is a big disconnect between older and younger people within the church. Often older methodists think that young adults are the magic solution to the problems, but really young adults need guidance, and their purpose is not to save the church, but to flourish alongside older Methodists. She ended by discussing street pastoring, and that often when people are drunk at night they are more vulnerable and so lonely, and yet we have such good news to give them.

The pop-up venue creates a space designed around relational evangelism, building a place of trust and conversation designed to make people feel comfortable talking about the real topics. This can help connect people, and go beyond surface connections and connect on the deep level which could help combat loneliness. This offers a space where, over a brief interaction or a few interactions over a few days, people can have a deep and meaningful connection. This connection offers a brief antidote to loneliness. The remaining issue with this approach is how to make this antidote one that lasts. This style of connection is based around building a community, no matter how temporary that community is. They aim to build an inclusive Christian community, which we can see is related to the missiological approach of community. This style of community, offered whilst being outside the traditional church model, is done intentionally to attract those who are on the fringes

and who might not feel welcome in a traditional church. This community is done well in this temporary space, and does address loneliness in the short term. This is one of its strengths, as it does this well. The issue comes when we consider what might happen post event, once the pop-up venue is packed away, and moves onto a new event. This temporary connection is difficult to sustain in the temporary venue. The only way to continue this connection is to introduce the individual to a local church. This however is difficult as the church may look different to the venue, and may not be as inclusive. Even with an inclusive church, it still requires the individual to have to re-engage, and to find the same connection. Whilst we might connect with one another, how do we effectively point people to connect with God. The other weakness is that whilst it does address loneliness in some sense, there are so many types of loneliness, that whilst it might momentarily offer this social connection, it is not addressing the root cause of the issue, and the person might end up feeling even lonelier after the connection is taken away. Even with a mechanism of connecting the individual with the local church to pass on this connection, the individual might not connect, or find the church to not offer the same connection that was found in the pop-up venue.

This model offers a solution to the theological problem of loneliness by offering the Christian community which welcomes those who are on the edges. It offers real connection; this combats the gap in social interaction which might be present in people's lives. However, there are issues with this solution, largely based around signposting and ensuring there is connection after the event. It also follows that while they might have an amazing connection socially with another person, they might not connect with God. Moving forward and applying this model to the wider church, the significant points to bring from this are: connecting with younger people, allowing them to inform decisions, creating an inclusive space, offering a caring space which looks to have meaningful connections in the local church. Amongst all of this is the significance of intergenerational work, the significance of people of all ages in the church supporting one another and growing together.

Chapter 7. Approach 3 - Online Church Model

During 2020 a global pandemic (Covid-19) meant that many churches had to close in-person worship in their normal meeting space⁸⁶. Many churches looked to connect with one another in audio-visual meeting space using either real-time or pre-recorded content, typically also equipped with the ability to exchange typed messages and comments. This has led to discussions about what church is and what it means to gather together⁸⁷. A particular question arose concerning sharing communion with one another in our own homes⁸⁸. Humans can connect through social media, and can build meaningful social connections whilst being geographically far away. This brings a form of connectedness which has not been seen before. There are dangers with social media use, however using social media to connect and share in community is something which can be good. This is a new way to explore being church and connecting with one another without needing a physical building. In the 2021 conference, The Methodist Church voted to allow online communion to happen⁸⁹, while the Methodist Church in the 2024 conference voted to do more research into allowing a solely online church⁹⁰. This is a communion of people who are not geographically co-located and have no physical meeting space or process for gathering in person, who are therefore congregating solely online in a virtual audio-visual meeting space. This is a new way of interpreting the concept of Christian community. The Methodist Church is exploring New Places for New People, new ways of doing church, in particular focused at those on the margins. Exploring online church would be a very new place and would be able to reach many people. Having an online presence means that an unlimited number of people could access Christian content and engage with a very fluid community. It is a very interesting concept.

This model of mission I think is the most interesting and offers the most range in adaptability to contexts. In my initial research I looked at a number of projects that digital enablers had created, and there is an unlimited way of connecting with people online. The key question around online church is that while humans can connect online, can God work through this? There is something special about worshipping together⁹¹. Does an online space hold this same sanctity? It pushing our understanding of the theology of community. It also offers unlimited reach for evangelism. This attraction of a new way to reach people on a large scale is

⁸⁶ Available: <<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/covid-19-reopening-church-buildings-and-the-financial-impact-of-closure/>> (accessed 30/08/2024).

⁸⁷ Chow, Alexander, and Jonas Kurlberg. "Two or Three Gathered Online: Asian and European Responses to COVID-19 and the Digital Church." *Studies in World Christianity* 26, no. 3 (November 2020): 298–318.

⁸⁸ Weit, John. "Denominational Considerations for Online Communion." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 50, no. 1 (2023): 10–12.

⁸⁹ Available: <https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/f-and-o-conducting-services-of-holy-communion-online-0921_HI0tGjf.pdf> (accessed 30/08/2024).

⁹⁰ Available: <<https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-24-pc-26-online-church-online-communion.pdf>> (accessed 30/08/2024), p.330.

⁹¹ 'Chow and Kurlberg, 'Two or Three Gathered Online', p.10-12.

reminiscent of the televangelism which gained popularity in the 1970s, largely in America⁹². This allowed people to connect through watching a church service on their television, and engage through phoning in to the evangelism team. This approach however lost credibility through scandals which emerged around the religious leaders⁹³. This approach itself was based off a form of evangelism popularised through radio in the 1920's. Whilst online church is a new concept, this geography-based connection is obviously not a new concept⁹⁴. Can online church develop a new and permanent way of gathering, or is it merely a trend influenced by involving the new technology which will either become irrelevant or become marked by scandal?

The second theology to consider is the theology of friendship and fellowship. Can humans build this deep and meaningful connection through a screen? Can we journey together through faith and understanding without meeting physically? These were all questions I have had in my research, which I tried to answer through my interview with Wayne, the minister of Shorelines. Looking beyond an online church, can we create pockets of Christian community which look to complement physical church. Can we gather online to share in fellowship with one another through only audio-visual interactivity or would a social media style interaction through comments also be a way in which we can engage? This exploration of church, community, friendship, and fellowship go far beyond the level of research for this dissertation.

Interview Questions

1 How does the way you use social media engage with young people, and do you think this is unique to your work, or do you think the church (Methodist) as a whole engages with young people?

Shorelines was an in-person church, and through the pandemic they began to provide online services. Over time there was a discussion about the necessity of a building, and the congregation concluded that they did not need a physical location and were happy to move entirely online permanently. During the pandemic, meeting online was not a unique experience, however to develop into a solely online community post-pandemic is somewhat unique. Shorelines offers daily prayers on Facebook which are accessible to everyone, and they have a weekly meeting on Zoom which is less accessible for reasons of security, as previously mentioned. They have built a community online, engaging in the Facebook page and over zoom amongst people of all ages and from many different geographical locations. During their services they encourage people of all ages to participate, facilitated by pre-recording opportunities for when it is inconvenient to do it live. Shorelines has built a

⁹² Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Dissertation. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.3-5.

⁹³ Michele Rosenthal, Introduction: The Triumph of Televangelism and the Decline of Mainline Religious Broadcasting. In: *American Protestants and TV in the 1950s*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1.

⁹⁴ Kip A. Wedel, *One Nation on the Air: The Centripetalism of Radio Drama and American Civil Religion, 1929-1962*. Dissertation, (Manhattan, Kan: Kansas State University, 2011), p.5.

consistent presence and an active community online, aimed at engaging people online. By being online they are accessible for most people, as long as they have access to a phone, and have the technological knowledge to phone a specific number to join the zoom meeting. This in itself is inaccessible to those without a phone, money for a phone bill, or electricity to charge a phone, or the confidence to learn this skill. This would largely affect how accessible the church service is to those below the poverty line, and those who are homeless. As there is no physical threshold to the church, it has been easier for non-churched people to engage. This is unique to what they are doing. They use a mix of live and pre-recorded content, enabling people to participate in the service when it is convenient. Wayne expressed that the online community was particularly key for older people who were physically unable to go to church. Whilst this is not specifically about young people, it has demonstrated that they are more than able to share in community and real connection in the online space, including growing their existing congregation to include new people across a range of ages. Wayne expressed that people who had been lonely had found connection to church. In discussing how they engage in communion online Wayne expressed that it was a unique experience as by engaging with communion online, the individual is able to control the environment they are in. The individual is able to shape the space they are in to influence how they connect with God. Wayne is challenging them to think about what is sacred to them. This extends to what they use, what they use for communion challenges their beliefs about communion and their theological understanding. This in itself makes people engage more in the act of communion with more thought than they had previously. In answering the questions around online Church, Wayne believes that there is still a corporate experience of worshiping together, and that deep and meaningful connections are built and relationships are maintained. People have been able to build a community and share in fellowship with one another in the online space, and it offers an accessibility for many people. They are beginning to see some engagement with young people, however this is not something they previously focused on.

2 Do you think that there is loneliness amongst the people you interact with, in particular amongst young people?

Wayne expressed that there is loneliness amongst those who engage with the online community, and part of the main reason people have engaged is because they are lonely. By being accessible and inclusive they are able to offer community to those who have not found it elsewhere.

3 Do you think what you are doing is addressing loneliness amongst young people?

Wayne expressed that the connections that were built were deep, and that this was addressing loneliness amongst those who engage. It might not be directly addressing young people's loneliness; however, the model was addressing loneliness amongst various groups of people. Whilst people can make deep connections online, there is no guarantee that these deep connections are

necessarily good. There are many fake accounts, or phishing accounts online which could try and cultivate deep connections to try and hack others accounts, or to scam people.

4 Is there anything you think you could be doing better to address loneliness amongst young people?

Wayne expressed that there are things they could be doing to directly engage young people. In particular he explored the intergenerational idea of encouraging young people to engage. The daily prayers are recorded by a different person each day. A way to encourage more young people to participate would be to see more young people engage in leading the prayers, and other ways of producing content. There were different ways of encouraging engagement from young people, but that this would need to be done with other young people.

Some other comments that we explored were that meeting online was not the be all and end all of church life moving forwards, but that it was a new dimension. Wayne expressed that what he was doing online was similar to what John Wesley was doing. Wesley stood on the street corners and addressed people, Wayne expressed that the internet, in particular social media, were the modern-day street corners. By having an online presence, people would come across it online, either choosing to stop and engage, or move past it. However, by being online is the equivalent of going to where the people are, and engaging with them. I think this is a fair comparison, and it is in the spirit of what Wesley was doing. Wesley preached to people as much as he could, engaging them in any way he could. When he was not allowed to preach in churches, he preached in fields⁹⁵. In the same way, people are no longer in churches or fields, but are online. With this online presence Wayne is engaging with people where they are. There is also the strength of people being able to engage when it is convenient for them.

The strengths of this model of mission is firstly the accessibility. 53%⁹⁶ of the global population, and 93%⁹⁷ of UK households have access to a mobile phone. With church numbers declining, and physical accessibility being an important issue, having an online presence is a good way of making church accessible to nearly everyone. The second benefit is that it is convenient for people, those who are lonely are often people who are new or single parents, carers, or physically disabled people. These people might find it the hardest to make time or to physically get to church consistently. Community and deep connections are made by consistency. Being online makes it easier to engage, and regularity of contact drives deep connections. It is clear that to some extent what Wayne is doing is addressing loneliness to some extent. Another strength of this model is that it is fairly easy, and

⁹⁵Lenny Luchetti, "Theological Empathy and John Wesley's Missional Field Preaching." *Great Commission Research Journal* 8, no. 2 (2017): p.181.

⁹⁶ Available: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/245501/multiple-mobile-device-ownership-worldwide/>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

⁹⁷ Available: <<https://www.uswitch.com/mobiles/studies/mobile-statistics/>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

cost effective to meet this way. There are no building costs, and so beyond employing a minister, there are very few costs. For churches where attendance is low and building costs are high, this might be a good option to consider. The last strength is that it is not restrained by physical borders, meaning people from all contexts can join. Although this itself can bring some risk, with people not being truthful around their intentions for joining. People from many different countries can worship together and learn and grow, and understand one another. By engaging with people from different contexts means they are sharing in the wider church. As the physical church serves the local people, the online church can serve everyone.

Some weaknesses of this model is that firstly the debate around if online church is a real church, where people can worship together. There is still much debate over this issue, especially over what we mean by church. The second issue is that some people may find it difficult to build community only online. Not meeting in person may be a barrier to people building relationships with people. Particularly if people engage without a camera, it could be difficult to see facial expressions and body language, meaning people struggle to build deep relationships. Similarly, if people are engaging with pre-recorded content, or watching it at a later date, they may feel that they are not worshipping corporately, and that by engaging in the comments at a later date there may not be any discussion or engagement with what they need. This may act as a barrier to building real community. Another critique is that whilst there might be an online community, once you log off you might still be alone in the physical world⁹⁸. This may make the feeling of loneliness worse due to the juxtaposition of connection and absence. Therefore, some work on how to make this feeling of connectedness last whilst offline would need to be done to combat this.

I do think to some extent online church does present an answer to the problem of loneliness. This model can be used as a missiological way to engage with people and to combat loneliness. The main questions with this model is if it constitutes permanent church without the need for in-person meetings. However, as a form of mission it is very effective at combating loneliness.

⁹⁸ Available: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/social-instincts/202301/are-you-struggling-with-social-media-induced-loneliness>> (accessed 31/09/2021).

Chapter 8. Evaluating the Research

Having looked at these three models of mission, we can pull out a few common themes which look at combating loneliness. The first is this idea of building relationships and building a community. Building relationships and a community naturally provides this social interaction which combats loneliness. The second key theme is creating an inclusive and accessible space. My making people feel welcome and accepted in the community, through an inclusive space, it will be easier for people to connect and to feel part of the community and less lonely. The third common theme is this idea of intergenerational involvement. Building an inclusive community is quite hard to define, however this idea of an intergenerational community embodies these ideas in a good framework.

So, what is an intergenerational church? An intergenerational church is a church which spans multiple generations and ages⁹⁹. It encourages learning, worship, and growth across all of these generations¹⁰⁰. This idea of involving each generation happens in a mutual way. It is about involving people of all ages equally, both young and old.

This idea of intergenerational worship might be fairly new and exciting, however before intergenerational worship there was all age worship. What is all age worship, and what is the difference between intergenerational and all age? All age worship was first popularised in the 1970's, the trend was an encouragement to see the church worshipping together¹⁰¹. However, over time it has evolved to sometimes mean a Sunday school, or more child-focused service rather than a mixed age service¹⁰². Alternatively, it can often mean a normal Sunday service but with some engaging provision for children¹⁰³. Over time the meaning of all age worship has shifted from being about genuine participation of all ages to one of these two extremes. This is not the case for every example of all age worship; however, it is a stereotype. The word intergenerational has recently become popularised, as a way of encouraging this all-age participation but in a renewed way. Intergenerational worship, and all age worship, act on the same premise of worship for all, not just child-centred worship. This allows children to be present and participate in the worship of church, and encourages children to express deeper expressions of faith.

Intergenerational worship has some strengths, the main one being it allows the church family to worship as a family. It also encourages different expressions of faith. It is accessible to everyone within the church. However, there are some weaknesses to it also, for example if it is done badly, it can alienate part of the congregation. Often, it can ignore either the older or the younger members of the congregation and

⁹⁹ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012), p.16.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Ryan Nix "The Ministry of Ezra: A Biblical Model of Intergenerational Worship." Dissertation (Lynchburg, Va: Liberty University, 2020), p.4.

¹⁰¹ Howard Vanderwell, 'A New Issue for a New Day' in H. Vanderwall (ed.) *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshipping Together*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p.7-9.

¹⁰² Vanderwell, 'A New Issue for a New Day', p.2.

¹⁰³ 'All Age Worship: a few thoughts' (2022), Available: <<https://stalbanscme.com/2022/01/24/all-age-worship-a-few-thoughts/>> (accessed 31/08/2024).

not satisfy anyone. Another weakness is that it can often be about what is done, rather than encouraging engagement. Intergenerational worship can be expressed in more creative ways and this could distract people from listening and learning from one another.

Intergenerational worship and an intergenerational community as a shape of mission would be good as it encourages the building of relationships between young people and older people. By focusing on all generations, not just children, it will encourage the whole church to participate. To be done well, the planning and participation must come from people of all ages. For young people to engage, they must also be part of the planning process. Intergenerational worship is about listening and learning, and so it is important to listen and to learn from young people, rather than organising something for them. I think encouraging whole church participation, and whole church listening across every generation and age group will encourage this community and build relationships which are key to combating loneliness.

Another key point to pull out from the case studies is that they all spoke at some point about listening to the whole church. The most significant part of connecting with young adults is to make them feel listened to, and to teach them how to listen to others. Intergenerational worship looks at how the church as a whole can worship together, across generations. However, the church is more than just worship, and listening to the whole church in the other areas of church life is also significant. Both practically, in hearing different people's opinions on the practicalities of Church life, and encouraging all ages to volunteer, to encouraging theological discussion across the whole church. By listening to the whole church, it is encouraging the whole body of the church to work together as a whole organism, with no parts ignored or forgotten about.

Whilst we have looked at how we can engage with young adults, and shape our mission to addressing loneliness, it is worth noting that a key part of this requires participation from Gen Z. Whilst we can offer new ways of engaging with young adults, online, or at festivals, or at the local church, it does still require engagement from Gen Z in the first place. It requires the individual to reach out. We need to create an environment which is welcoming and inviting, but the first step is always taken by the individual.

Conclusion

To sum up, we have explored the theme of loneliness in society, and within Christianity with particular emphasis for Gen Z which is young people born between 1997 and 2012. We first explored loneliness within society. We looked at the different types, the causes, and the trends. We established that loneliness was growing amongst people aged 15 to 25, and the frequency and intensity people feel lonely has also increased. This increase has been seen over the past decade, and was affected by the pandemic, although rates are beginning to recover from this. This has shown us that not only is loneliness growing amongst all ages, but it is at its highest level amongst Gen Z. The suggested solutions to loneliness are to connecting with people, and joining groups to spend time doing hobbies with other people. Whilst there are different factors which affect loneliness, and a range of groups which are most at risk of experiencing loneliness, people who are aged 15 to 25 are generally assumed to not be lonely, and are overlooked in trying to combat loneliness.

After establishing loneliness amongst Gen Z as a social problem, we looked to loneliness as a theological and missiological concern. We looked at the two types of loneliness in the Bible, loneliness as separation from God and loneliness as separation from other people. The loneliness as separation from God was caused by Adam and Eve in the fall, and was rectified by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. It is not good for humans to turn away from God, and they need to turn towards God. When God created man, it was not good that man was alone, even though man had God, so God created women. God recognised that humans need community, other connection. Throughout the Old and New Testament there are examples of God leading humans to community, and other human connection. We see that God cares about human loneliness, and that there are examples of humans being lonely in the Bible. Missiologically, there are a few approaches to combat loneliness. We have the Christian community built to have connection with one another. We have fellowship which looks at developing one another's faith journey, this is a deeper connection. We also have the theology of friendship.

After establishing that loneliness is something which God is concerned with, and that the Church has tried to indirectly address, we looked at three approaches to combating loneliness. The first was the traditional church model, and adapting it to focus on connection to combat loneliness. The second was a pop-up relational evangelism venue focused on creating space for deep and meaningful conversations. The third was an online church, looking to connect through a non-physical space. Some key aspects which have been drawn out of these approaches is the importance of local church, the importance of being welcoming and intentionally building connections, and of intergenerational connection.

Lastly, we explored this idea of intergenerational connection further, to see if this was something significant that Churches could explore.

We can conclude that there is not one specific answer to loneliness. However, we can see that there needs to be a push to create deep and meaningful relationships within church which span across the generations and ages. We need to create Opportunities that are welcoming, caring, and about connecting. To do this requires

listening to the whole church, and allowing real participation from all ages. This is what intergenerational connection is focused on. This is the shape mission should take to combat the growing loneliness amongst Gen Z.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Figure 1 Shows us the data of frequency of loneliness amongst different age groups from a 2016 study.

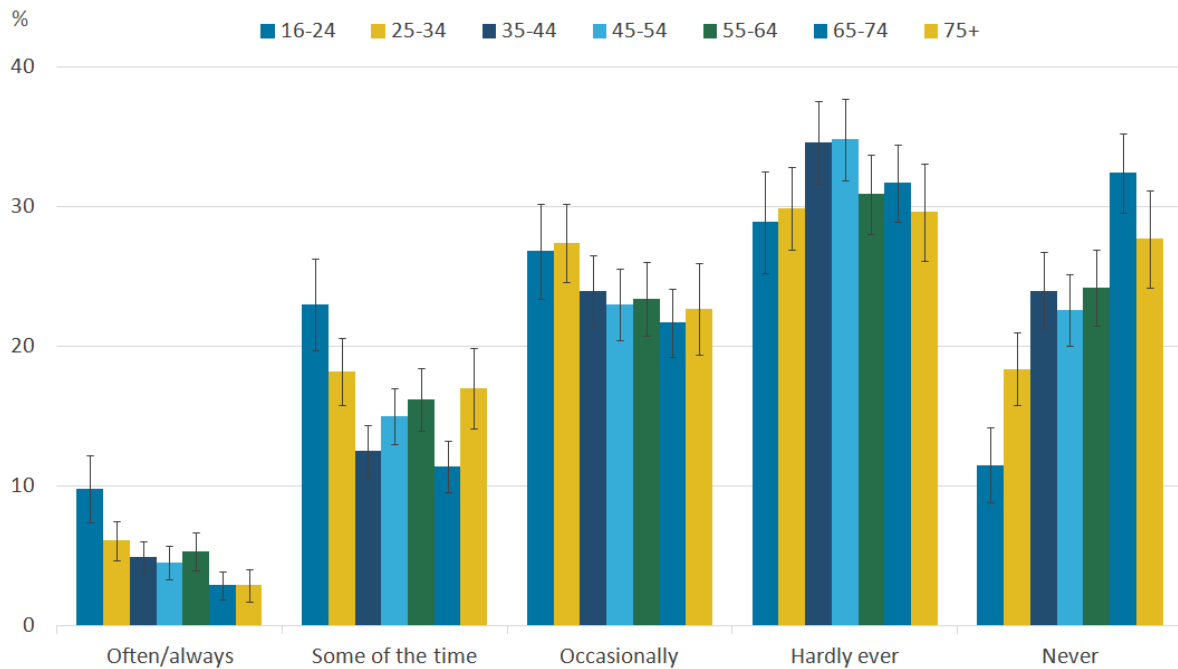


Figure 2 Shows us the data of frequency of loneliness amongst different age groups from a 2019 study.

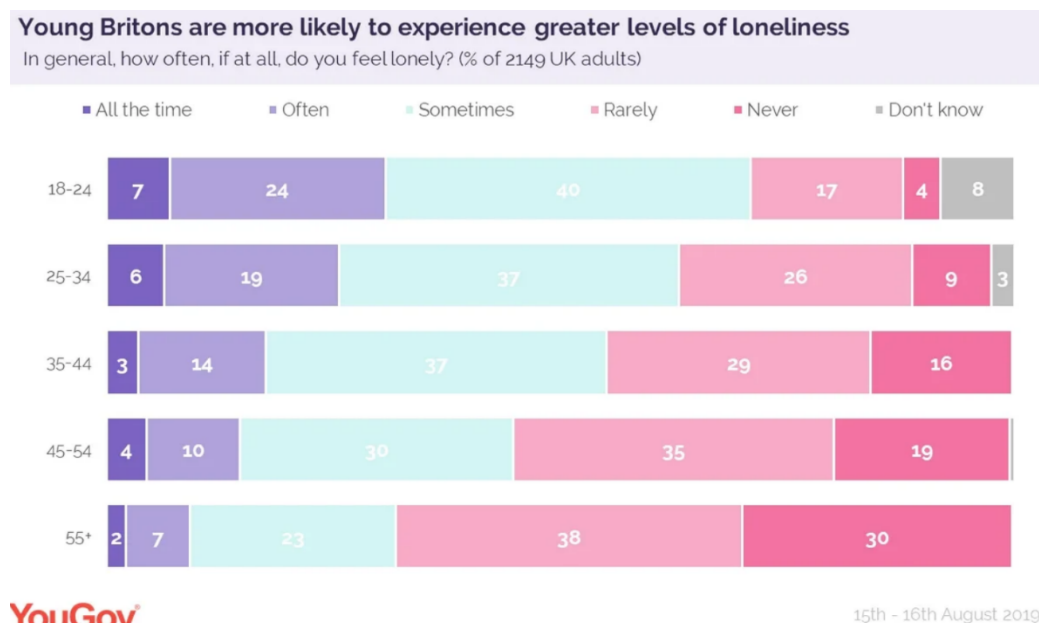
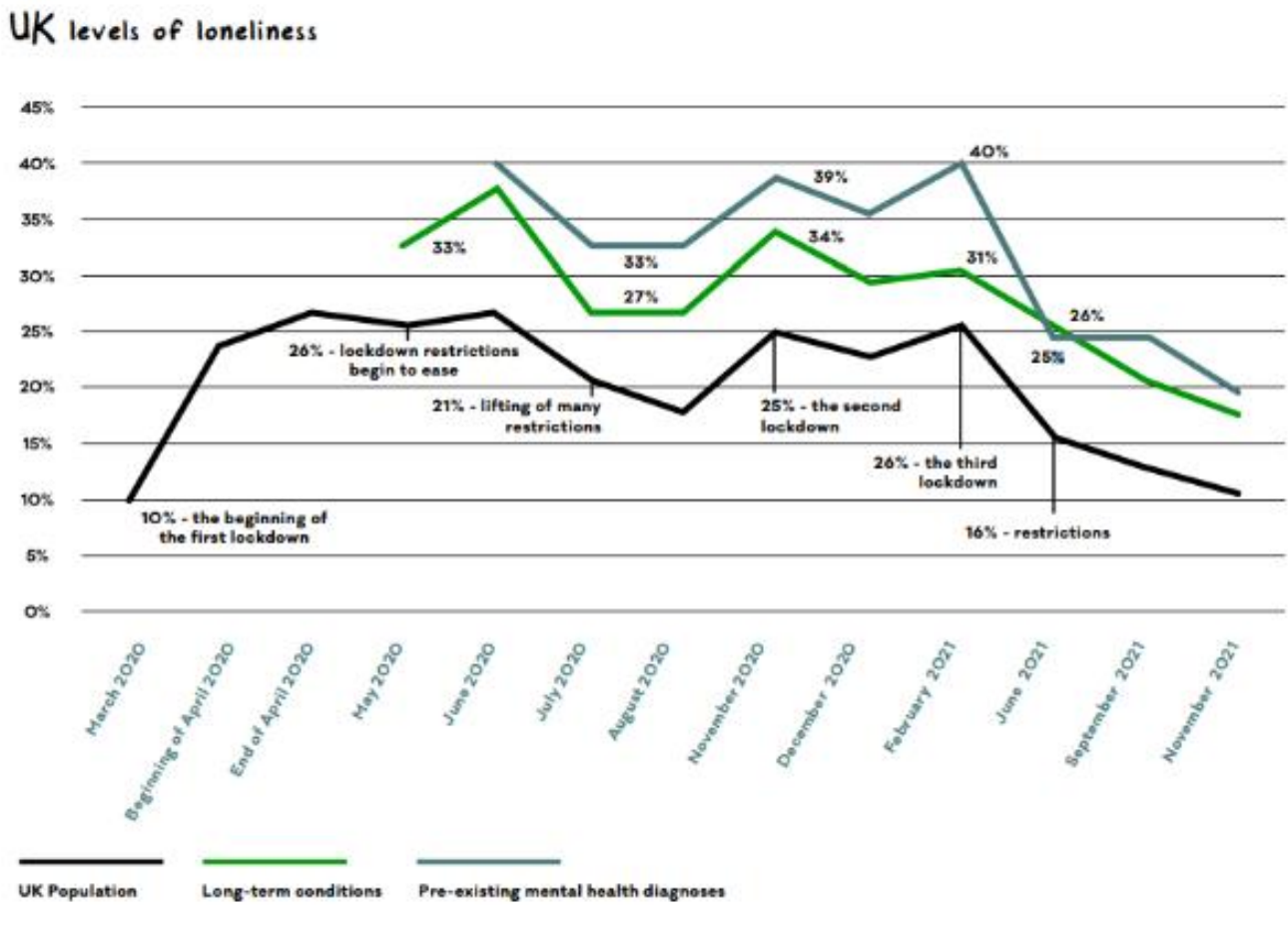


Figure 3 shows the levels of loneliness amongst the population during the Covid-19 lockdowns.



Appendix 2

Here are the consent forms for the interviews conducted.

Plymouth Methodist Central Hall: Jonny

Interview Consent Form

This form is to be used when a student from Cliff College interviews a professional colleague as part of their study. It is not to be used if the student is observing professional practice or undertaking any kind of interview or survey with clients/participants. The person being interviewed must complete the form.

Name of student: Jennie Lockett

Date of interview: 16 July 2024

- | | Tick box |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. I understand that my participation and consent are voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that this interview is solely concerned with my professional <u>practice, and</u> will not touch upon any other issues. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that the interview may be audio / video-recorded | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to the use of anonymous / non-anonymised quotes [delete as appropriate] | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I understand that this interview will only be used by the student to reflect on issues of professional practice, and that it will not be passed to other researchers, published in any public forum, and will only be shared with those academic / administrative staff at Cliff College (and external scrutiny bodies) that are required to see it for academic purposes. If the student or College subsequently wishes to publish any part of the interview, they would assure that anonymity is maintained unless further permission was sought from me to do otherwise. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

I agree for the student named above to interview me and write up that interview as part of their studies

Name and Position	Date	Signature
Jonny Libby Lay Pastor (PMCH)	16.7.2024	<i>Jonny Libby</i>

Interview Consent Form

This form is to be used when a student from Cliff College interviews a professional colleague as part of their study. It is not to be used if the student is observing professional practice or undertaking any kind of interview or survey with clients/participants. The person being interviewed must complete the form.

Name of student: Jennie Lockett

Date of interview: 17/07/2024

- | | Tick box |
|--|----------|
| 1. I understand that my participation and consent are voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason | |
| 2. I understand that this interview is solely concerned with my professional practice, and will not touch upon any other issues. | |
| 3. I understand that the interview may be audio / video-recorded | |
| 4. I agree to the use of non-anonymised quotes [delete as appropriate] | |
| 5. I understand that this interview will only be used by the student to reflect on issues of professional practice, and that it will not be passed to other researchers, published in any public forum, and will only be shared with those academic / administrative staff at Cliff College (and external scrutiny bodies) that are required to see it for academic purposes. If the student or College subsequently wishes to publish any part of the interview, they would assure that anonymity is maintained unless further permission was sought from me to do otherwise. | |

I agree for the student named above to interview me and write up that interview as part of their studies

Adam Wilkinson
Student & Young Adult Worker & Lay Pastor
16/7/24

Interview Consent Form

This form is to be used when a student from Cliff College interviews a professional colleague as part of their study. It is not to be used if the student is observing professional practice or undertaking any kind of interview or survey with clients/participants. The person being interviewed must complete the form.

Name of student: Jennie Lockett

Date of interview: 09/07/2024

- | | |
|--|----------|
| | Tick box |
| 1. I understand that my participation and consent are voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason | X |
| 2. I understand that this interview is solely concerned with my professional practice, and will not touch upon any other issues. | X |
| 3. I understand that the interview may be audio / video-recorded | X |
| 4. I agree to the use of non-anonymised quotes | X |
| 5. I understand that this interview will only be used by the student to reflect on issues of professional practice, and that it will not be passed to other researchers, published in any public forum, and will only be shared with those academic / administrative staff at Cliff College (and external scrutiny bodies) that are required to see it for academic purposes. If the student or College subsequently wishes to publish any part of the interview, they would assure that anonymity is maintained unless further permission was sought from me to do otherwise. | X |

I agree for the student named above to interview me and write up that interview as part of their studies

Holly Adams,

Evangelism and Contemporary Culture Officer

Name and Position

08/07/2024

Date

Holly Adams

Signature

Appendix 3

This poem was written by one of the people I interviewed, Holly Adams, about the experience of her work with the Hope and Anchor at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I felt that this demonstrated the connections found with strangers which I liked about this project so I have chosen to include it with her consent.

Listen

The weary and city worn wanderers

Finding oasis, sanctuary, sabbath.

Listen, hear their souls breathe:

This is what we need.

This is what we need.

This is our moment of wonder.

The people refusing to be enemies

Israel says to Palestine: I long for love.

Islam says to Christianity: All that matters is love.

Oh transcendent love come down,

Come around us on these holy streets greet

Us as old friends.

The people in a hurry who don't want to talk

But talk

And talk

And not even the rain can make them walk

away from this sofa space

Because “there’s something about this place that opens you up”

And “are you really going to listen?”

Listen: that’s grace.

The loved up couples:

Have you ever seen eyes as blue as hers?

And friends noticing in the other just how much they mean to one another.

Have you ever seen love looking back at you?

The seekers and the question askers

Bringing their stickiest starters

Like: How did the ascension work?

And: Let’s talk about sin

Or: What is Methodism?

Then: Do you believe in...

praying?

The travellers and wonder lusters

Far from home, often alone

cherishing connection and reflection

So high up the sun is going around them

Feeling their bodies healing

On their journeying

Ever on.

Those with eyes to see:

“This is a God wink”

Those with noses to smell:

“This smells like Jesus”

Those with hearts to feel:

“This is peace.”

Those of us still saying:

“I’ll never understand it”.

Those without words for all their stories.

The heartbroken and grieving

Believing that a bit of healing might not be impossible

After all.

Sitting down, diving off, saying it out loud,

Sounding the story and suddenly:

First smile in weeks.

The library lives of stories

Bodies birthing babies

Cancer survivors

Completed chapters

Celebrating, graduating, and navigating,

the fulfilment of one thing and start of another

Turning points with brave beginnings.

“Something is happening,

can you feel it?”