DOING MISSION TOGETHER:
How Partnership Promotes Gospel Growth

A study of missional ecumenism involving Church of England parishes and other denominations in English towns

The Council for Christian Unity
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Report summary

There is a growing perception that while 'institutional' ecumenism may be struggling, a more 'missional' ecumenism is thriving. Churches working together to transform their local community are changing the Christian landscape in this country. A key factor in supporting this change is claimed to be a shared awareness of the need to focus on mission – on how the church shares the gospel in every place. So how likely are Church of England parishes to be sharing in missional activities with other churches? To what extent does such cooperation tend to focus on particular aspects of mission? What helps cooperation be valued as effective by those involved? *Doing Mission Together* reports on a project to help answer these questions conducted over a two-year period by the Council for Christian Unity.

In the first phase of the project, twelve medium-sized towns from across England were selected, and every parish inside or overlapping with the municipal boundaries was invited to complete a survey. Among other features, the survey used the Five Marks of Mission[1] to investigate whether there were significant variations between how these parishes cooperated with non-Anglican churches with regard to different types of missional activity.

The analysis of the data received supported a number of significant points. First, around two-thirds of the respondents to relevant questions indicated that they collaborated with other denominations for one or more missional activity relating to the first and third Marks of Mission. Figures were somewhat lower for the second and fourth Marks and lowest for the fifth, but in all cases, it was only a minority of respondents who said they never cooperated with other churches in that area of mission. The fact that the second highest level of cooperation was reported in relation to the first Mark of Mission suggests that ecumenical relations have become crucial in many towns for sustaining effective evangelism, and not only for what may be perceived as social outreach.

In the second phase of the project, ten of the original respondents from seven of the towns were interviewed by a researcher from the Council for Christian Unity staff team, having been invited to bring with them a colleague from another church with whom they were involved in doing mission together. Interviewees were invited to reflect on positive and negative experiences of missional activities undertaken jointly with other churches, and on how they might assess whether such activities were 'effective'. The range of models of mission influencing Church of England clergy became apparent in this exercise.

Four factors in particular emerged from analysis of the interviews as significant for enabling positive experiences of doing mission together.

1. **Common calling to serve the local community**: a focus on the local community and its distinctive history, identity and current needs gave both motivation and shape to shared initiatives in mission that reach across the town as a whole.
2. **Concern for good use of resources**: awareness of limitations around venues, finances, staff time and volunteer capacity led churches to want to think hard about

how to avoid duplication, how to act together where this made sense (allowing that sometimes it did not) and how to let a church with evident strengths 'lead' while others then supported.

3. **Attention to building relationships**: in some places, these were deliberately kept very informal while in others formal structures played a key role, but in all cases the need to attend to building relationships of mutual trust and understanding was stressed, with a strong emphasis on relationships between church leaders.

4. **Commitment to sharing in prayer and worship**: again, this took a range of forms, from joint services at key points of the liturgical year to informal prayer meetings, but it was seen as critical for grounding both practical initiatives and emerging interpersonal relationships in the primary relationship between Christians of communion in Christ.

The data in this study of twelve towns lends support to the initial perception that a substantial proportion of missional activity for Anglican parishes in urban settings is now routinely undertaken in partnership with other churches. The partnerships examined in this study indicate that missional ecumenism does not focus solely on social justice but is also key for evangelism and discipleship. For such partnership in mission to flourish, ministers and congregations need a common calling to serve the local community, concern for good use of resources, attention to building relationships and commitment to sharing in prayer and worship. Missional ecumenism takes many forms. For the purposes of this study the Five Marks of Mission helped provide a working definition of what we mean by missional ecumenism: it is when churches from different denominations cooperate in activities relating to any of the Five Marks. In all its forms it needs space to evolve in its distinctive local context, but these are some identifiable 'environmental' factors that help to support and sustain it.

It is the hope of the CCU staff team that this report encourages more partnership across different denominations in local mission, by highlighting the significant contribution it can make to all facets of mission. The research indicates that Anglican parishes are involved in meaningful and productive relationships with a wide range of denominations, and we hope that those of whom this is not yet true will be encouraged to reach out to their church neighbours to explore how they can better share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the communities they serve together.

1. Introduction

For those who hope, pray and strive for the unity of Christ's church on earth, these can be puzzling times. From the tremendous energy and enthusiasm of the mid-twentieth century ecumenical movement, there emerged the more modest pursuit of progress towards the goal of full visible unity through a series of stages marked by formal agreements of various kinds. At international level, that included agreed statements from major theological dialogues. At national level, it meant declarations of mutual recognition and in some cases ecclesial communion with interchangeability of ministries. At more local level, it encompassed initiatives like Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The accumulation of such agreements, it was hoped, would take us gradually but inexorably towards the great goal of unity.[2]

On all these fronts, however, momentum can appear to have slowed if not stalled. Confidence that such efforts could in any case amount to significant progress towards the church's global unity has been dented by a number of factors, including the multiplication of new churches, many of whom would not easily fit the model assumed by existing ecumenical agreements, and the emergence of fresh fault lines within and between historic churches around church order and sexual ethics. Yet at the same time, in all kinds of contexts, Christians experience unity across denominational divides in a way that would have been unimaginable fifty years ago. In some places, this is the result of what was pioneering ecumenical work having become mainstream, even taken for granted: shared Lent groups, joint services, regular meetings for prayer and fellowship. But that is not the whole story.

In many villages, towns and cities, what characterizes the contemporary approach to Christian unity is that it is focused on looking outward beyond the churches themselves to the needs of the communities which they are all seeking to serve: practical needs, for food, housing, care for the vulnerable, and alongside all of that the need of every human person to know the love of God in Jesus Christ.[3] The ecumenical movement derived much of its original energy from the simple recognition that the churches' insistence on doing things separately was seriously getting in the way of effectiveness in mission. That same recognition is re-energizing ecumenism across England today, without people necessarily wanting or needing to call it 'ecumenism' at all. Moreover, it is a recognition that can readily be shared by newer churches that do not identify with the earlier history of ecumenical endeavour.

We take a closer look at this picture in the next chapter of the report. It has all kinds of implications for the work of those involved in ecumenism at national level, such as the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity. One of those is about how we help people in the churches to understand the opportunities and challenges of hoping, praying and striving for unity. When the model for deeper unity was progress through formal agreements, there was a particular need for expertise in doctrine, including the theological understanding of the church (called ecclesiology), and also in areas such as liturgy, church history and ecclesiastical law. The kind of research needed to support ecumenism was that associated with the Humanities, broadly speaking.

Seeking to understand the kind of missional ecumenism that has come into prominence in recent decades poses some rather different challenges. There is no shortage of people with stories to tell about how it is working successfully, or how it is proving difficult, or how success has turned into failure and vice versa. How do we begin to analyse and evaluate that? How do we build up a reliable picture of what is happening that can assist the churches – in our case, the Church of England specifically – in taking missional ecumenism into account in their planning for mission at every level, in a way that is properly informed and realistic? To

do that, we need the kind of research skills associated with the Social Sciences rather than the Humanities, as well as awareness of theological themes and critical questions for the church. Yet we have limited experience and resources in this area.

Addressing the need for reliable evidence and careful study regarding missional ecumenism will take time. The Council for Christian Unity decided to take a first step by initiating the project that is the focus for this report, on missional ecumenism in twelve medium-sized towns. The initial conception seemed simple enough. We knew that Church of England parishes sometimes engage in missional activities by themselves or with other Church of England parishes, and that they sometimes engage in missional activities together with other non-Anglican churches. What we wanted to understand better could be summed up under three headings:

1. how frequently they cooperated in mission in practical ways with non-Anglican churches;

2. whether such cooperation tended to cluster around certain points in the spectrum of activities that Anglicans would consider 'missional';

3. the extent to which such cooperation contributed to effectiveness in mission.

As will be seen from chapter 3, the initial survey exercise gathered interesting data on the frequency and types of missional activities in which Church of England parishes in English towns participate with churches of other denominations. The Five Marks of Mission provided a useful framework for exploring different examples of missional activity and gave us a working definition of missional ecumenism as churches working together in any of the Five Marks. The survey included examples selected by the Council for Christian Unity staff team and left space for 'other' examples to be included as well. The survey allowed us to explore the types and frequencies of activities done in cooperation. Some of the patterns that emerged here were surprising and suggested some specific topics to include in the second phase in order to bring the survey data into clearer focus.

In order to get greater clarity on the question of frequency, we were keen to explore how a church's cooperative missional activities related to their independent activities, and how decisions were made about when and how to work together. On the second question about where the emphasis fell in terms of the Five Marks of Mission, some clear patterns emerged about the types of missional activity that were done in cooperation most frequently, and we wanted to explore how that related to different understandings of mission in the different contexts.

On the question of effectiveness, the survey indicated a broadly positive perception of how important and effective shared missional activity can be, while also indicating variation in the extent to which people within the church or from the wider community were involved in different ways and places. In order to shed light on this data, the interviews explored how churches perceived their different activities and how they might define 'effectiveness' in their context.

The further questions raised by the survey data meant that the second phase of the project was particularly important for exploring the different parts of the initial research question. That phase, discussed in chapter 4, yielded some important insights including four significant factors for enabling positive experiences of doing mission together: a sense of service to the local community, concern for good use of resources, attention to building relationships and commitment to sharing in prayer and worship.

We have been asked on more than one occasion: why focus on towns? At one level, the answer is simply that in any endeavour one has to start somewhere. It seemed more manageable to contact every parish in a varied sample of medium-sized towns from different parts of the country than if we had attempted a similar exercise with larger urban units. While ecumenical relations flourish in many rural areas, in others they may appear somewhat irrelevant, as the only church building of which Anglicans are conscious within the parish is their own. Additionally, previous research has tended to focus on inner city or rural contexts rather than towns. It would, however, be fascinating to compare the picture that emerges from this study with an analysis of the kind of missional ecumenism that might characterize an urban estate, a larger village or a city centre. Are there any common factors that could be identified across them all that help to make partnership in mission fruitful for all involved?

It was stressed earlier that this project was conceived by the Council for Christian Unity as a first step into a new area for us. We plan to take further ones, but we would also be delighted if we can stimulate and provoke other people in other contexts – including universities and what the Church of England calls Theological Education Institutions – to do likewise and indeed to do better. We would also be very pleased if this could be the catalyst for some cooperation between different church bodies and different institutions to study much more fully than we could possibly achieve by ourselves what is happening in missional ecumenism in this country, so that we may be one, that the world may believe.

2. The Changing Face of Local Ecumenism: A National View

Take a lively and not atypical collection of churches forming a Churches Together group, for instance, Churches Together in Bishop's Stortford, a small market town not far from Stansted airport.[4] It has thirteen churches, many coming from the historic denominations, with the largest number of churches in a single denomination being the four from the Church of England. But among the others, there are four new, 'community' churches. What you have reflects the huge shift in British Christianity over the last few decades: there are many more churches, even in relatively small towns. Indeed, when Churches Together in England began in 1990 it was made up of sixteen churches, a reasonable representation of the Christianity of its day. At the time of writing that number has swelled to forty-nine and is likely to top fifty before too long. Over 40% of these churches are newer, and largely, though not always, Pentecostal or Charismatic in their spirituality.

This increase in numbers does not come from a single source. In part it is the result of the community church movements of the 1970s, which have flourished and matured in such a way as to start seeking engagement with ecumenical partners. In part it is also a result of the continuing development of black and ethnic minority churches, which have carried out a vigorous outreach especially among people of African and Caribbean descent. In part it is also the effect of migration, bringing, alongside members of Churches already strongly represented in England, Orthodox Christians and their Churches. Just down the road from Bishop's Stortford, in Stevenage, there is the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral of St George, consecrated in 2006, the first purpose-built place of Coptic worship in the UK. Just ten years later, a little further down the road in Acton, West London, another Oriental Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox, welcomed Prince Charles at the consecration of its Cathedral of St Thomas.

The influence of changes in the churches upon ecumenism

This shifting scene indicates immediately that Christianity in England is not simply experiencing decline, contrary to the impression given by much reporting in the media. Certainly, there has been steady decline since the beginning of the twentieth century in affiliation to the Church of England and the historic Protestant churches. But even these have not declined universally. Strangely enough, although growing churches are not necessarily peopled by the well-off, church growth is most common where there is increasing affluence, that is, where there is population growth and economic dynamism, not just in areas of immigration. Indeed, 'Corridors of church growth have developed alongside major economic arteries such as the A1 and the east coast mainline and the growing cities to be found on those arteries.'[5] The closer one comes to London, therefore, the more likely there is to be growth. Various reasons are put forward to explain this, among which is a proactive and missional strategy by the churches.[6] The pattern seems to be that churches that draw membership on the basis of duty or a sense of obligation are declining, while those that have a more entrepreneurial ethos are more likely to be growing. In addition, there are social factors affecting where growth takes place. The culture of the élite may be increasingly secularized, but, even though the white working class has been secularized to a significant extent, the culture of those in other social groups does not reflect the same trend.

All this has a massive impact upon ecumenism. Not only have the dialogue partners of ecumenism changed, but so have their expectations and their needs. The newer churches have not shared with the historic churches in the ecumenical journey and so come to inter-church relations with a different mindset. They are much more likely to emphasize the already-existing spiritual fact of unity in Christ, and to seek to go out into the world on that basis: together, therefore, setting out as the one body of Christ at work in any place, serving God's mission. They are less likely to see the value of older ways of doing ecumenism: committees, inter-church structures, theological dialogue and the range of questions to do with faith and order, although we should be careful of excessive generalization here. The emphasis on living out the spiritual reality of unity in Christ was a feature of ecumenical relationships which was emphasized in several of the towns surveyed for this project among a variety of denominations including both newer and historic churches.

At the same time, there has been widespread disillusionment among the historic churches with older models of ecumenism, in part following the failure of the English Covenant which would have brought together the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church, the United Reformed Church and the Churches of Christ (which merged with the URC in 1981), when it was rejected by the Church of England in 1982 as a result of not receiving the required two-thirds majority in the House of Clergy of the General Synod. At the time, and possibly as a factor in the rejection, it looked to some as if a rapprochement between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church might be possible; but neither did that come to pass. With the vote to ordain women a decade later, any such rapprochement became almost impossible to imagine in the foreseeable future. The feeling that ecumenism had perhaps had its day was compounded, at least within the Church of England, by another disillusionment: the Decade of Evangelism during the 1990s did not manage to stem the decline in attendance, since 'the majority of dioceses were performing less effectively at the end of the decade than at the beginning, in terms of a range of membership statistics'.[7] Could it be, many asked themselves, that anything that pandered to the church's obsession with itself, such as what seemed necessarily the case for the core concerns of ecumenism, was merely increasing the problem? After all, it had to be the church that put people off, not Jesus.[8] So, it seemed that the need was not for more church, but less church. The energy had to be focused outward, in mission. By cooperating on the kinds of missional activity discussed in chapter 3, churches could instead work together to meet the needs of the communities they served.

For the newer churches, on the other hand, the question is not one of survival. They have not tended to experience sustained decline. And their focus has always been missional. Thus it is on this point, in mission, that for different reasons there is agreement across the spectrum of churches. The pay-off for ecumenism is not just in the mutual recognition present in working together as members of the one body of Christ, but also that shared mission builds a deeper, relational harmony, where prejudices collapse and a new appreciation of the gifts of others is born, and this leads to a deeper mutual understanding. In towns all over England, this is just what seems to be happening. The research presented in the following chapters, and in particular the reflection on the interviews in chapter 4, helps us to see how that big picture of a new model of missional ecumenism might come into greater focus if we take a close look at some specific examples.

Doing mission together does not mean all doing the same thing

Somewhat paradoxically this pattern of difference leads to a greater ecumenical dividend, not *despite* but *because of* the contrasts among the churches. The Mission Statement of *Revive Rugby* is instructive in this regard. Together with care for individuals in their faith development and an explicitly evangelistic approach, the aim is to

- Encourage each church to reach out appropriately and effectively to the wider community, *reflecting their own character*.[9]

In the commentary that follows, the importance of this particularity is stressed. It is more than just celebrating diversity; rather, the ability to gain access to the variety of the churches' gifts enriches mission. In towns and villages across the land, where there are similar mission-in-unity projects, this would appear to be the case. Whether a church's main capacity is providing pastoral counselling, tending physical needs, providing social services, speaking about Jesus or exploring issues of faith, there is space for all.

At the same time, it is common for churches to cooperate in many kinds of specific mission activity. The survey data presented in chapter 3 shows that food banks and homeless provision are currently some of the most popular, though this does not in any sense preclude a huge range of other activities: from Street Pastors, bereavement or debt counselling, addiction treatment, transport provision, youth work, school help, family support to responding to hard questions. Of course, bringing together this diversity of gifts has a self-evident benefit for mission.

The Church Urban Fund's *Church in Action Report 2017*, showed that 'partnership working' was very important for the 1,094 Anglican churches which they surveyed and that this partnership happened most often with local schools, other churches, and local charities.[10] Although this project did not differentiate between other Anglican churches and churches of other denominations, it is interesting that the report found 62% of parishes worked in partnership with other churches, a figure that shows a marked change from 2011, when 41% of churches were found to be working in partnership with other churches.[11]

Empirical research, such as that engaged in by this report, is needed to provide a more detailed analysis of outward-facing unity and, in particular, the synergy between cooperation and mission.

Is mission enough?

Exciting as all this is, the benefit of Christian unity for mission does raise the question of whether the new model of mission-focused ecumenism seen in Rugby and elsewhere is enough. Some undoubtedly think so. It is seen as a vital corrective to the dull and apparently failed ecumenical agenda of the past, because it can eschew any search for organic unity or complete doctrinal agreements in favour of united social action and outreach in the name of Jesus.[12] Undoubtedly there is enormous value in what can be seen as a return to the initial spirit of twentieth century ecumenism, inspired as it was by the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh. More recently, thinking about the *missio Dei* has argued that God's trinitarian nature not only defines mission as rooted in God's being but links mission to unity in God's plan to reconcile all things. 'This theology is founded in the essential unity of the three persons of the godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church is called to participate in the work of God who, through the sending of the Son, is actively seeking to reconcile the

whole of creation.'[13] Such a vision of mission has ecclesiological implications, thus, 'It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world.'[14]

There are, however, five criticisms that must be made of any 'missional reductionism'. First, to reduce unity merely to a tool for mission would appear to be contrary to the logic of the very experience of mission. If, even before there is full agreement in doctrine, order, and worship, the coming together of churches benefits mission, how much more would mission benefit if the churches came still closer via agreement in doctrine, order, and worship? The problem, if problem there is, may not be so much in the process of uniting as in the flattening out of peculiarities, with their correspondent gifts.

Second, is it true that previous forms of ecumenism have failed? Theological dialogues,[15] marches of witness, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, ecumenical Lent groups, organizational and institutional changes are still taking place. Indeed, they have been remarkably effective in bringing Christians into deeper relationship in ways almost unthinkable just a hundred years ago. These forms of ecumenism are rather victims of their own success than failures. They may not have produced all that was hoped of them, especially structural and organic unity in every place (though this has happened sometimes), but they have in their time broken new ground and changed inter-church relations so profoundly that it is hard to think of Christians relating in any other ways than seeking to grow in love and deepening communion.

Third, what is mission for if not to bring people into communion with God and with one another? Can mission be so individualized that it is reduced to saving souls for heaven with no notion of a new relational life, a renewed humanity, people united because they are united in God? Clearly not. Unity in this sense is not just the means, but *the goal of mission*. Fourth, then, and in continuity with the previous point, unity is a mark of the Church; it is characteristic of the community set up by Christ, and so has value in itself as mandated by the gospel. When division exists, the Church is sick. Therefore, structural cohesion together with a common vision and understanding, as essential supports and expressions of a living unity, remain necessary. And finally, and perhaps most tellingly, to demote unity to a mere means to an end is to ignore the New Testament's presentation of unity. What Jesus prays for in his High Priestly prayer in John 17, for instance, is an experience of God lived among human beings, nothing less. People know and come to belief that God has sent him, because they experience God among his followers.[16] This is the substance of salvation witnessing to itself, the rule of God breaking into the world.

Perhaps what is needed is a new vision of unity, one in line with its transformative effects, and so rooted in the love-inspired mission imperative which must, in turn, be rooted in a love-inspired relationship among Christians. Mission cannot be truly the Church's mission without the living out of love both inside and outside the community, a love that brings about holiness not just in persons individually, but persons in relationship. This is unity in the Church, participating in God's triune life, at the service of unity in the world, essentially not an obsession of the Church with itself, but with the rule of God. Such a vision is in profound accord with the *missio Dei* mentioned above, but it still requires structures that can assist and ground relationships in regular patterns, and so it still has a necessarily institutional dimension,

but it places the emphasis upon the *relationship* served by the structures. The first inklings of this new vision can be seen already in the ways in which local ecumenism is being rethought.

A primary example of this rethink is *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, a document which, given that it is no longer entirely new, is coming to be called *A Flexible Framework for Local in Unity in Mission*.[17] One of the key insights behind this document is to go from a bureaucratic model that attempts to shoehorn ecumenical life into pre-set categorizations to a flexible model that attempts to offer differentiated institutional support for patterns of relationship as they are in fact developing. The question is now not so much: tell me what you want to do and I'll tell you how you must do it, but more: tell me what you are doing and I'll show how it can be helped. The difference in emphasis is crucial.

A further example of creativity, which captures something of the spirit of the new vision that is emerging, can be found amid the beauty of the Lake District. Church Leaders from four churches, the United Reformed, Methodist, and Anglican Churches and the Salvation Army, have signed an ecumenical Declaration of Intent, bringing into being an ecumenical county in Cumbria. They are supported by the other four main Christian denominations in the county (Roman Catholic, Baptist, Quaker and Church of Scotland) who are companions in the process. The ecumenical county has a mission focus and across Cumbria has set up what are called 'Mission Communities', the vast majority of which are ecumenical. The exciting thing is that this model is beginning to stimulate thinking elsewhere and so we could see further new forms of ecumenical life developing.

Receptive Ecumenism: a complementary discipline

An implicit theology can be noted in the emerging ecumenical vision. It is to recognize the variety of gifts in the coming together of different churches to share in the mission of God. This comes through at a couple of points in what we heard in the interviews for this project, e.g., p. 38 below. It also fits in well with a significant development in ecumenical thinking since the turn of the millennium, namely, Receptive Ecumenism, a deceptively simple form of engagement between churches. The champion of this, Professor Paul Murray of Durham University, says that the relatively modest aims of Receptive Ecumenism are 'the essential way forwards towards the anticipated goal of organic structural unity'.[18] It has been adopted by several bi-lateral, official dialogues, and the Third Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III), which has used this methodology, describes the process thus:

> Today's sober appreciation of the long-term nature of the ecumenical calling … has coincided with the recognition *within* each of our traditions of our respective difficulties and the need for processes of reform and renewal. We suggest that the current twofold task, as we seek to walk the way towards full communion, is (i) to look humbly at what is not working effectively *within one's own tradition,* and (ii) to ask whether this might be helped by receptive learning from the understanding, structures, practices, and judgements of the other.[19]

Not only are the churches going out in mission together, but they are also learning from one another, seeking healing for their own ills by receiving, in a way suitable for them, the gifts and practices of the other within the integrity of their ecclesial lives. Not only can they grow closer together but, as they become more Christlike, they can be more fit for mission. A new ecumenical spirit is beginning to emerge, one that recognizes the need for conversion and change within the churches, but also that recognizes the need to work for the transformation of the world. While it grows out of the difficulties that have been encountered in the wake

the very many successes of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century, it is not just a new departure. It complements and re-energizes older forms of ecumenism, while grounding them more firmly in the daily life of Christians, the struggle for holiness in faithfulness to God, and the struggle to build holy relationships in service to human beings who long, albeit sometimes unconsciously, for God, the faithful lover of humankind.

How typical are towns?

In the next two chapters, as already noted, there are numerous points where the data generated by the research project tends to support the 'big picture' outlined in this chapter about what is happening nationally, in terms of a medium-term shift towards what we are calling missional ecumenism. On the other hand, it is also the case that we did not encounter clear evidence relating to all the developments set out here. For instance, the significance of the growing presence of newer churches for patterns of ecumenical relationship did not emerge as a major theme in the research. In fact, almost all the representatives from other churches invited by Church of England interviewees to accompany them came from 'historic' denominations. It may be that newer churches are having more of an impact in larger towns and cities than in medium-sized towns, although it is also possible that our respondents simply took their presence for granted and therefore did not highlight it as a key development.

Nor did we encounter a strong narrative in the research about then and now, old and new; people did not seem to think that they were engaging in something radically innovative by doing mission together, as opposed to pursuing either Christian unity in non-missional ways or mission in non-cooperative ways. They were just doing something that seemed like the right thing to do in their context.

The four factors that emerged through the second phase of the project as key to sustaining partnership in mission – common calling to serve the local community, concern for good use of resources, attention to building relationships and commitment to prayer and worship together – suggest the importance of certain priorities and practices for enabling both theological questions about mission and unity and organizational questions about appropriate structures to be successfully negotiated. Would they be replicated in other social contexts? Roger Sutton's work indicates there would be a substantial overlap here with the experience of many who are doing mission together in cities.[20] Further research would be needed, however, to build up a comprehensive picture of what is happening across the country at the level of worshipping communities doing mission together, and the extent to which there are common themes in their experience.

3. 'Doing Mission Together' in English Towns phase I: Survey

Introduction

The *Doing Mission Together* project began with a desire to explore outward-facing, 'missional' ecumenism using empirical research methods. Knowing that Church of England parishes sometimes engage in missional activities by themselves or with other Church of England parishes, and sometimes with other non-Anglican churches, we wanted to explore:

1. how frequently they cooperated in mission in practical ways with non-Anglican churches;
2. whether such cooperation tended to cluster around certain points in the spectrum of activities that Anglicans would consider 'missional';
3. the extent to which such cooperation contributed to effectiveness in mission.

Methodology – Choosing the towns

The first phase of the project involved an online survey that was mainly comprised of quantitative questions. The focus of the project was on 12 towns throughout England. The project concentrated primarily on towns as there have not been as many projects exploring ecumenism in towns as there have been in rural or inner-city contexts. Although there is no universal definition of a 'town', for the purposes of this project it was defined as an urban built-up area with a population between 20,000 and 100,000. It was hoped that towns falling into this category would be big enough that there would be some variation in the Christian denominations present, thereby enabling a better understanding of ecumenical mission.

This definition, combined with government mapping categories, gave a list of 200 areas. Dividing this list between the two Provinces in England showed that three quarters were in the Southern Province and one quarter in the Northern. This ratio was reflected in the final list of 12 towns that was selected using a random number generator.[21] It was hoped that this would help the data set to be more representative of the current situation in England.

Every Anglican parish that fell within the mapped boundaries was sent an online survey. Parish and town boundaries are often different but overlapping. In order to include every part of each town, every parish was included, not just the ones that fell entirely within the town. This meant that some more rural parishes were included, which allows for some interesting reflection on the impact of location on ecumenical engagement.

Altogether, the list included 166 churches. Although it was not possible to contact all of them, a total of 151 churches or incumbents were individually emailed a survey. The diocesan bishop, County Ecumenical officer and, where possible, area dean of each town was also contacted and asked to support the research project. In total, 55 participants completed the survey. This means that we had a 36% response rate to the online survey, which is a good response rate for an email survey of this kind. In the analysis that follows, it will be noted that there are variations in the number of responses on which each graph is based, as not every question was answered by every participant.

Structure of the survey

In order to explore missional ecumenism and the different types of activities churches are involved in at a local level, we needed a working definition of 'mission'. The 'Five Marks of Mission', as they are now widely known, are a way of looking at mission that were developed

by the Anglican Consultative Council during the late twentieth century. The Anglican Communion website describes the Marks as an 'important statement on mission', which expresses 'the Anglican Communion's common commitment to, and understanding of, God's holistic and integral mission. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ.'[22]

The Five Marks of Mission:

1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
3) To respond to human need by loving service;
4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.[23]

Nonetheless, there are many different understandings and concepts of 'mission' and the word is interpreted in different ways, as shown by the Mission Theology Advisory Group's work on mission language.[24] This is the case both within and between churches, but although theological perspectives vary and overlap, the report on this work observed that the different paths of denominations and agencies in the UK and Ireland were 'interestingly convergent' and 'move in the same direction in areas broadly covered by the five… marks of mission.'[25]

The Marks of Mission were chosen for the project as they are widely used as a way of understanding what mission should look like and provide a useful framework for exploring the different kinds of concrete activities that churches are involved in at a local level. Additionally, as they feature in a number of Church of England documents and in Initial Ministerial Education, they had a degree of familiarity for the Anglican participants in the project.

In his reflection on rural mission and occasional churchgoers, David Walker explains that these Marks of Mission have been used by 'a number of dioceses as criteria against which to evaluate both existing work and new ventures'.[26] He further explains that 'they guide the Church towards identifying programmes of action to which all who would self-identify with the Christian faith can be called as both the agents of mission and the objects of mission'[27]; this highlights that using the Five Marks allows for the involvement of a variety of missional practices and, with that, a wide range of Christians. Accordingly, the Council for Christian Unity wanted to explore in this project how mission understood in this way could be ecumenical.

The survey was designed using the Five Marks of Mission to explore people's experience of and reflection on cooperating with churches of other denominations for local mission. These questions were designed with the help of the Research and Statistics Unit and the Council for Christian Unity. The survey asked participants to name the missional activities they ran with other churches which fit within the framework of the Five Marks of Mission and to list which churches they work with in their area.

Although sections of the survey asked about the marks individually in order to get more detailed information about how different activities are perceived to relate to the marks, they are interrelated parts of a whole. The Anglican Communion Office describes them by saying:

'they are not a final and complete statement on mission but they offer a practical guide to the holistic nature of mission.'[28]

There is overlap between the different marks, and an activity can often relate to more than one mark. The survey included specific example activities for each mark and left space for 'other' examples to be added by participants. The inclusion of many such 'other' activities emphasizes the overlapping nature of the strands of mission. The examples provided in the survey tried to minimize repetition but there was evidence of respondents understanding many activities as falling under more than one mark.

A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

Initial hypothesis

The project began with the initial working hypothesis that Anglican parishes were more likely to be cooperating with other denominations on the final three Marks of Mission, which are more focused on social outreach and shared ethical concern, than on Marks 1 and 2, which correspond more closely with what might be termed evangelism and discipleship work, in which significant differences in approach to 'faith and order' matters might be expected to surface more readily. The survey was designed to test expectations of how participants would respond regarding cooperation on the different Marks. The hypothesis was revisited and revised throughout the project.

Survey results

Which denominations feature as partner churches?

A range of different denominations were mentioned as partner churches by survey participants, including Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Non-conformist, Vineyard, Salvation Army, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Assemblies of God, and Independent.

Frequency of cooperation between churches

In a section about working with other churches, survey participants were first asked to describe the frequency with which they work with 'other churches' when they are organizing activities for their church and wider community; the answers to choose between were 'Always', 'Usually', 'Sometimes', 'Rarely', and 'Never'. A follow up question asked them to name the churches they worked with.[29]

The chart below shows how frequently all 55 participants indicated they work with other churches when organizing activities for their churches and communities. We can see that two-thirds of the churches that participated in the survey work with other churches in mission at least some of the time. This number also includes almost a quarter that do so more frequently. This indicates that there is a great deal of ecumenical cooperation and interaction happening in the towns surveyed.
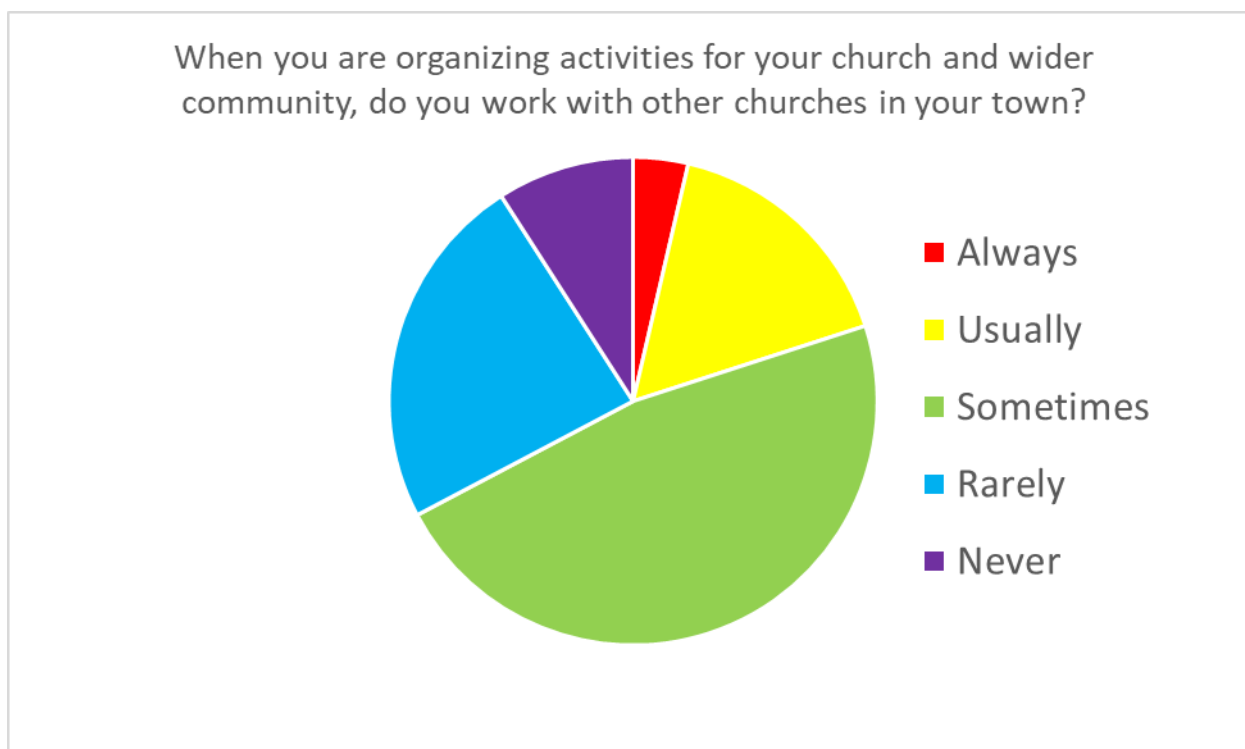
Figure 1 (Based on 55 responses)

It is interesting to note that over half of those who answered 'Rarely' or 'Never' indicated that this was because there were no churches of other denominations in their parish or benefice. There were several more rural parishes around the towns surveyed that had active ecumenical relationships, but many of the churches that indicated they were involved in little or no missional cooperation with non-Anglican churches were more isolated and further away from town. Several of these mentioned that their focus was on working with other Anglican parishes, often within large benefices. It is worth noting that each such location will fall under, for example, the local Roman Catholic parish or Methodist circuit, but the large areas that are covered make it difficult for ecumenical relationships to be established. Several of these responses indicated that they did have some links with other denominations in the local town or that they had been cooperating until the other church had to close.
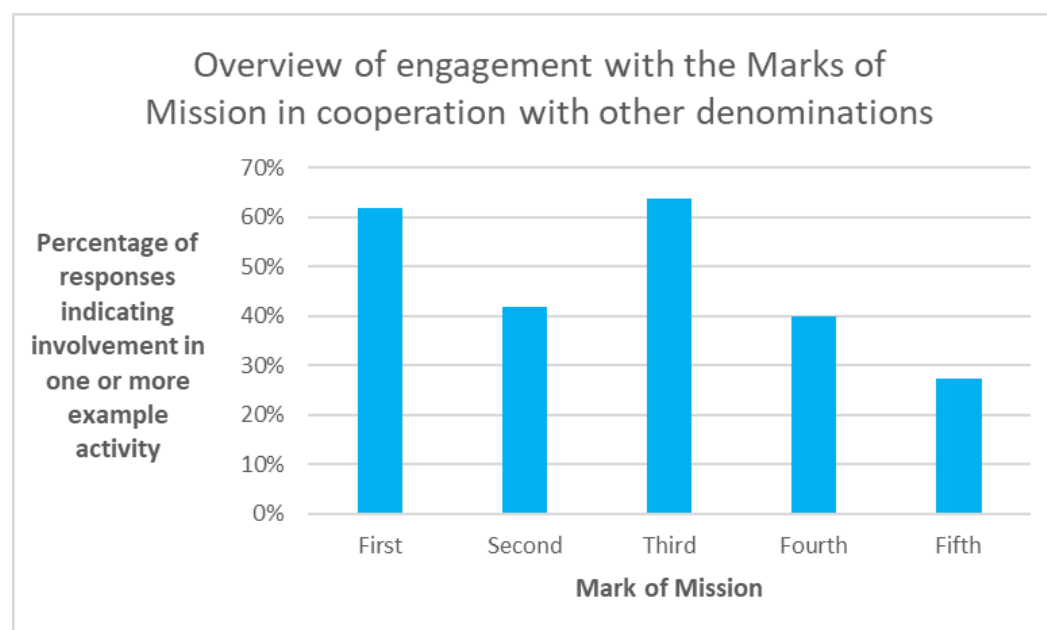
The Five Marks of Mission

This section asked respondents to explain if and how they practised the Five Marks of Mission in cooperation with other churches. For each mark, two questions were asked. The first asked how frequently they cooperated on that Mark of Mission; this is shown in a pie chart for each mark. The second gave a list of example cooperative missional activities and asked them to indicate if their church led or contributed to each activity. This is shown in a bar graph for each mark. Additionally, it asked them to name the churches they partnered with for each example.

In addition to the graphs showing answers to the questions about specific marks, it is useful to look at the number of different responses which indicated that their church was involved in at least one activity they would categorize as falling under each mark. These numbers give more detail by allowing comparison between the number of churches involved in any given example activity with the number involved in that mark more generally. For example, with

the second Mark of Mission, the most popular example activity has 13 responses. By comparing this number with the total number of responses that indicate involvement of one or more example activity in the second mark, which is 23, we can see that more work is happening in this area of missional cooperation than is shown by the examples alone. It is not the same few churches engaged in every example activity for a mark, but a wider number doing one or more example.

There are several important things to highlight at the outset about the involvement with the Five Marks of Mission indicated by an overview of the survey responses.

As shown in *Figure 2,* the first is that around two-thirds of the responses indicated that they collaborated with other churches for one or more missional activity relating to the first and third Marks of Mission. Slightly fewer indicated involvement with the second and fourth Marks of Mission, although this was still over a third of the 55 responses. The Mark of Mission that fewest of the responses said they were involved in was the fifth, where just over a quarter mentioned involvement in an example activity.

Figure 2 (Based on 55 responses)

This data challenges the initial hypothesis that Anglican parishes were more likely to be cooperating with other denominations on the final three Marks of Mission, focused on social outreach and shared ethical concern, than the first two, which correspond with more overt evangelism and discipleship activity. Instead, the data suggests that cooperation on the first and third Marks of Mission is most common.

Another way to look at the data as a whole is to consider how many of the Five Marks of Mission a church is involved with. *Figure 3* shows the variation in the number of Marks of Mission that responses indicated they were involved in collaboratively. It is interesting to see the wide variation in the number of missional areas the churches surveyed were cooperating in. When compared to the data in *Figure 2,* this overview shows a similar picture. Of the churches that were only working collaboratively in one missional area, they were all cooperating on the first or third Mark of Mission. Of the those which were involved in four

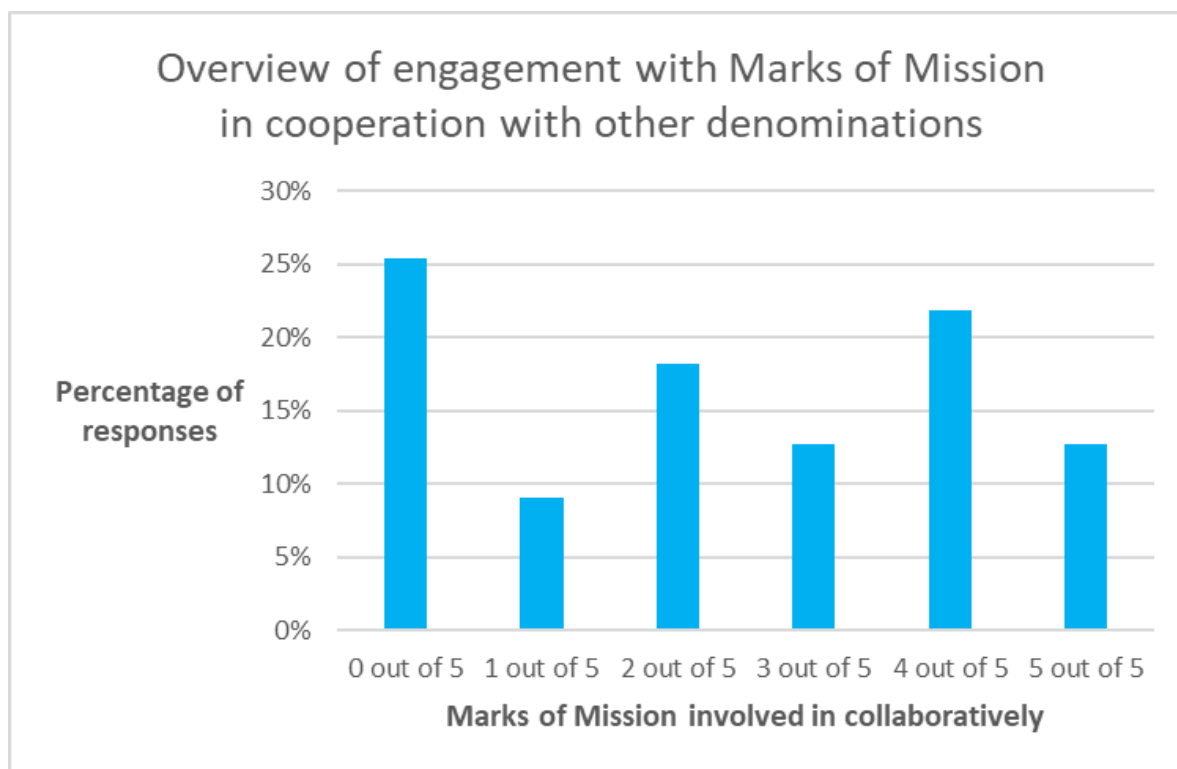out of the five missional areas, the one missing was the fifth Mark of Mission in three-quarters of cases.

Figure 3 (Based on 55 responses)

The survey data indicates that, out of the different types of missional activities they share with other denominations, Church of England parishes in the towns we surveyed are a 'lead' church most often for a Mark 1 activity and a 'supporting' church most often for a Mark 3 activity. Additionally, activities under the second Mark of Mission were typically done between a smaller group of churches, whereas activities under the third were done between a much wider group. There were several instances, for instance, where the majority of churches in a town participated in a food bank or homeless provision. This may indicate that there is in fact a significant difference between how Marks 1 and 2 feature in missional ecumenism compared to Marks 3, 4 and 5; it is not, however, about the relative likelihood of activity (as the initial hypothesis suggested), but rather the kind of relationships between churches that are needed for partnership to be pursued.

Overview of activities Church of England parishes led or supported
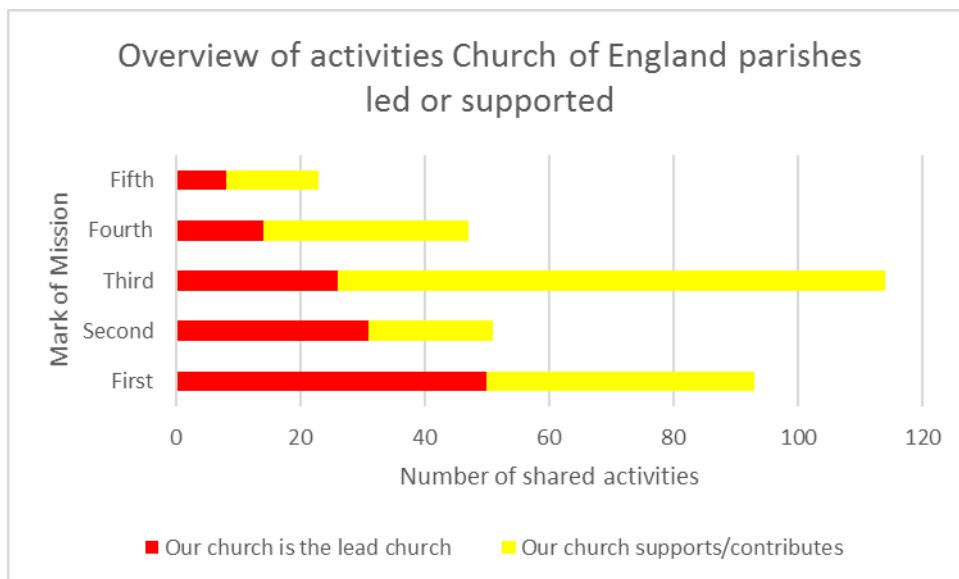
Mark 1: 'to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom'

Analysis of the questions about the first Mark of Mission, showed that the findings did not support the initial hypothesis that fewer churches would work in cooperation 'to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom' because it is the one associated with overt evangelism, where different theological approaches and tensions around which church a person might join might be expected to make cooperation especially challenging.

The data in *Figure 4* shows that two-thirds of the people who answered the question cooperated 'to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom' at least some of the time.
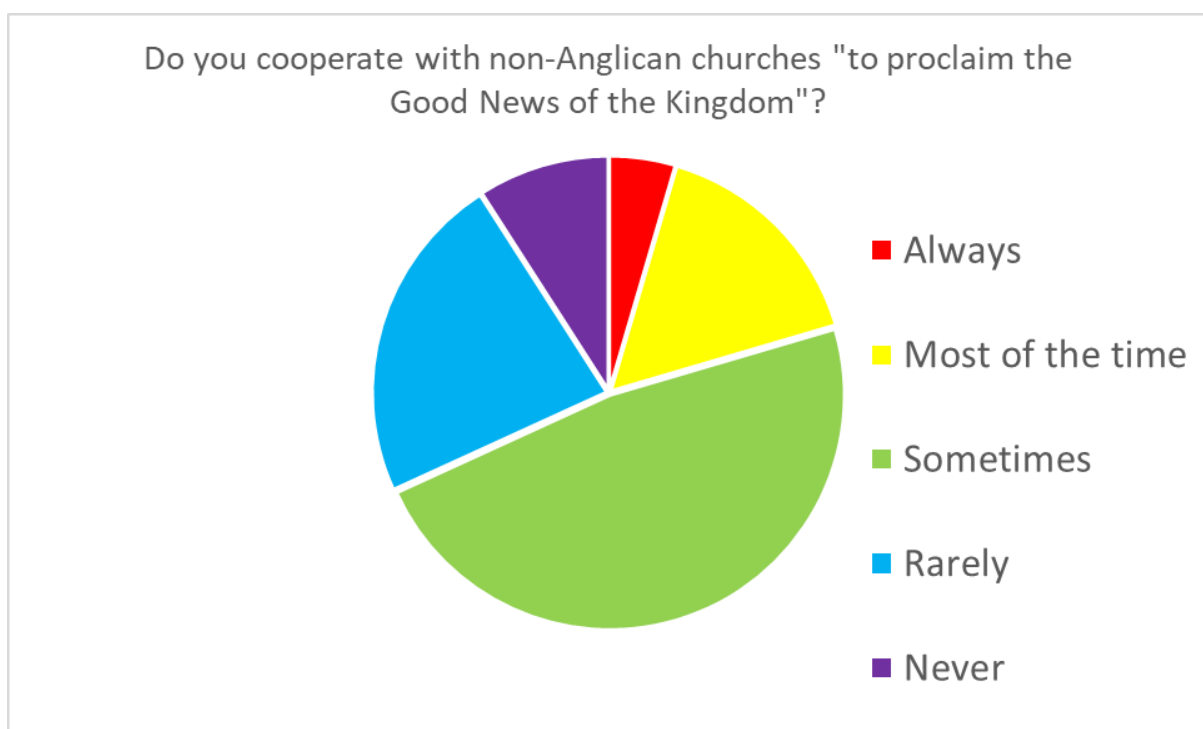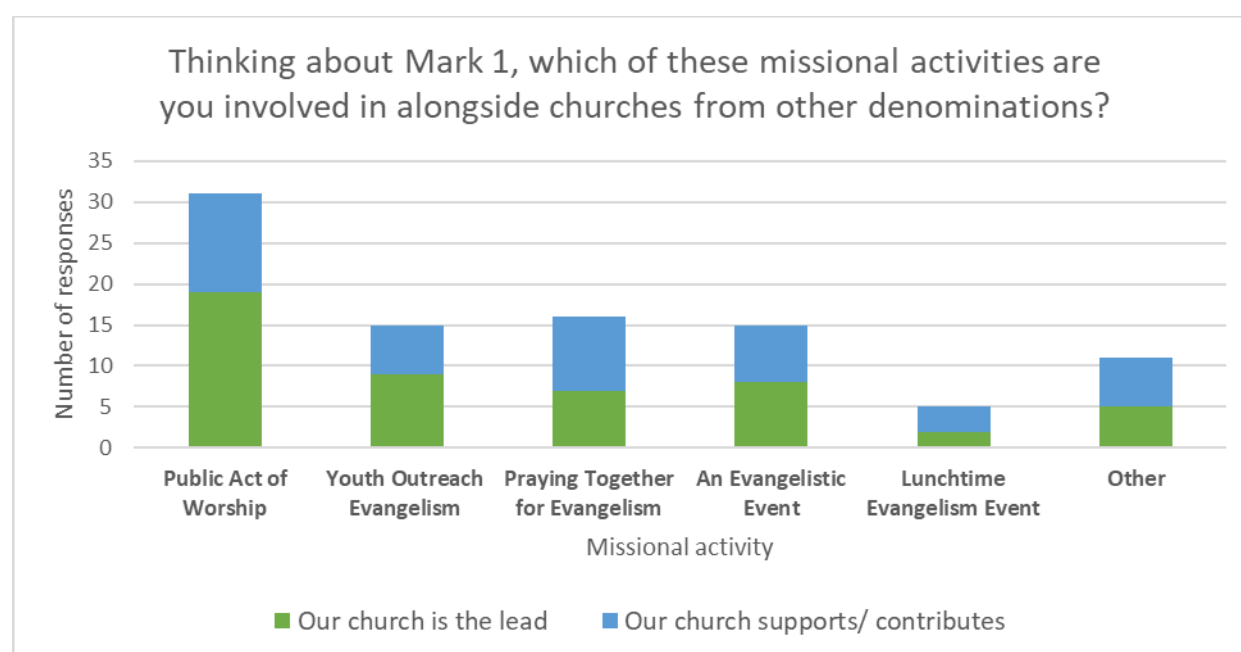

Figure 4 (Based on 44 responses)

When asked about the first Mark of Mission in more detail, over half of the responses said they were involved in one or more example activity that related to this mark with non-Anglican churches. It is on the basis of data from this question that we could say, in *Figure 2,* that 34 responses showed involvement with one or more missional activity under the first Mark of Mission.

Suggested activities included in this question were:

- A public act of worship, e.g., a Good Friday event, Carol Service, Pentecost in the Park
- Youth outreach evangelism
- Praying together for evangelism, e.g., Thy Kingdom Come
- An evangelistic event
- A lunchtime evangelism event.

Figure 5 (Based on 41 responses)

In addition, churches mentioned a number of other activities in the 'Other' box. These included:

- A town wide mission
- Regular Bible studies
- Prayer for schools
- Debates on ethical or theological issues
- An accessible church group for people with learning disabilities
- Village prayer walks
- Stands at local events.

Sometimes the 'other' box included suggested activities that were specifically included later on in the survey. This is perhaps because the Five Marks were not designed to be separate, but rather form an integrated whole that might be summed up by the first mark; in their different ways each of the marks is a way of telling the Good News of the Kingdom. The

communicative dimension of 'loving service' on the part of churches as witness to the gospel, or 'social liturgy', is stressed in the recent report by Theos on *Doing Good*.[30]

Of all the shared activities that can be seen in the survey responses, 'Public Act of Worship' was the most popular, with 31 responses indicating their churches led or contributed to Christians of different denominations worshipping together publicly.

As stated above, it had been hypothesized that the first mark would be one of the Marks of Mission where people were less likely to work together, because of the questions raised by evangelism about theological issues and also how those who respond should come to participate in the life of the church, and in particular which worshipping community they should join. However, these responses might suggest that these concerns are much less significant for the survey participants than had been expected, or at least that there is not an automatic assumption that existing differences of theology or practice should get in the way of cooperation. On the other hand, it is possible that those concerns remain present but are more likely to affect the kind of activities participants associated with the second Mark of Mission, where issues of basic Christian teaching and identification with a particular denomination inevitably come more to the fore. Alternatively, it may be that decisions about which churches to partner with are strongly influenced by differences in theology and practice but that there can be a sense of belonging to a shared tradition that remains despite denominational division.

Mark 2: 'to teach, baptize and nurture new believers'

In the section about the second mark, the data showed that a third of responses to this question indicated that they, at least some of the time, cooperate with churches of other denominations for activities that they would characterize as falling under the second mark.
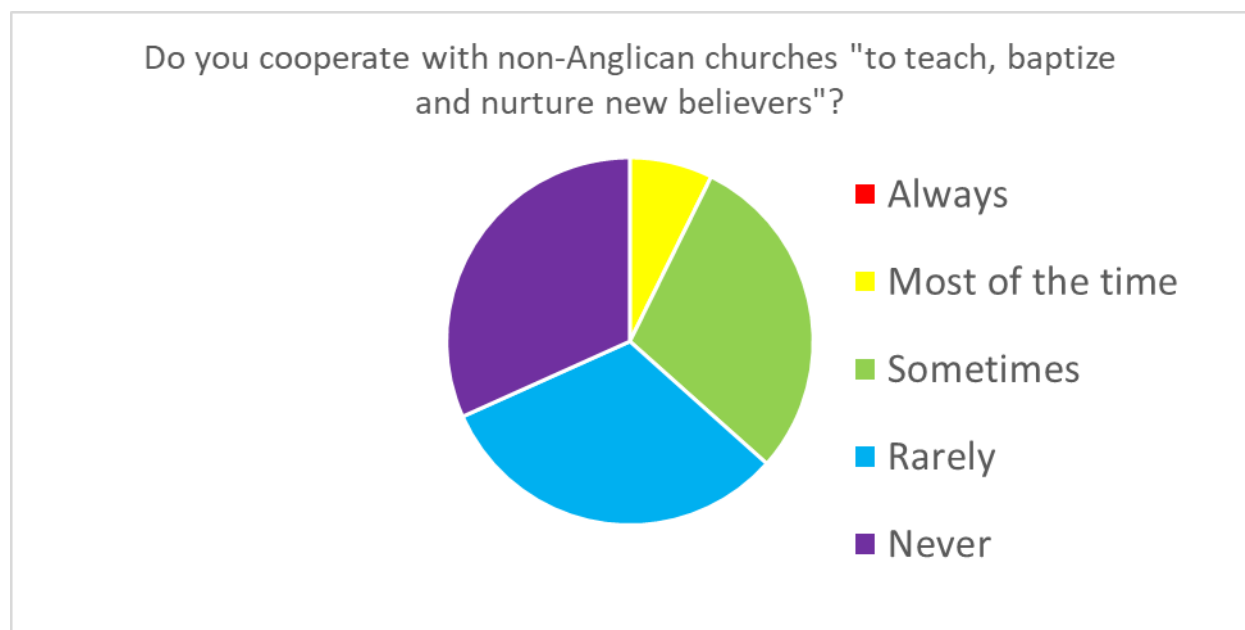

Figure 6 (Based on 41 responses)

This does, to some extent, correspond to the initial hypothesis that fewer activities would be reported under the more overtly evangelistic marks, perhaps because there is more potential for theological disagreement. Additionally, there could be scope for a sense of competition,

given that although baptism is widely understood as entry into the Body of Christ irrespective of denomination, in practice when a person is baptized he or she is usually seen as joining a specific church and congregation. Indeed, baptism services for adults would typically include features that signify specific denominational tradition and hence allegiance, such as confirmation and reception into membership.

However, as *Figure 2* above shows, over a third of responses indicated that they were involved in supporting or leading an ecumenical activity that related to the second mark. Suggested activities included in this question were:

- A Christianity basics course, e.g., Alpha, Pilgrim, Emmaus, Christianity Explored
- Baptism or confirmation preparation
- Deepening discipleship activities
- Messy Church
- Church leadership prayer meeting for mission.
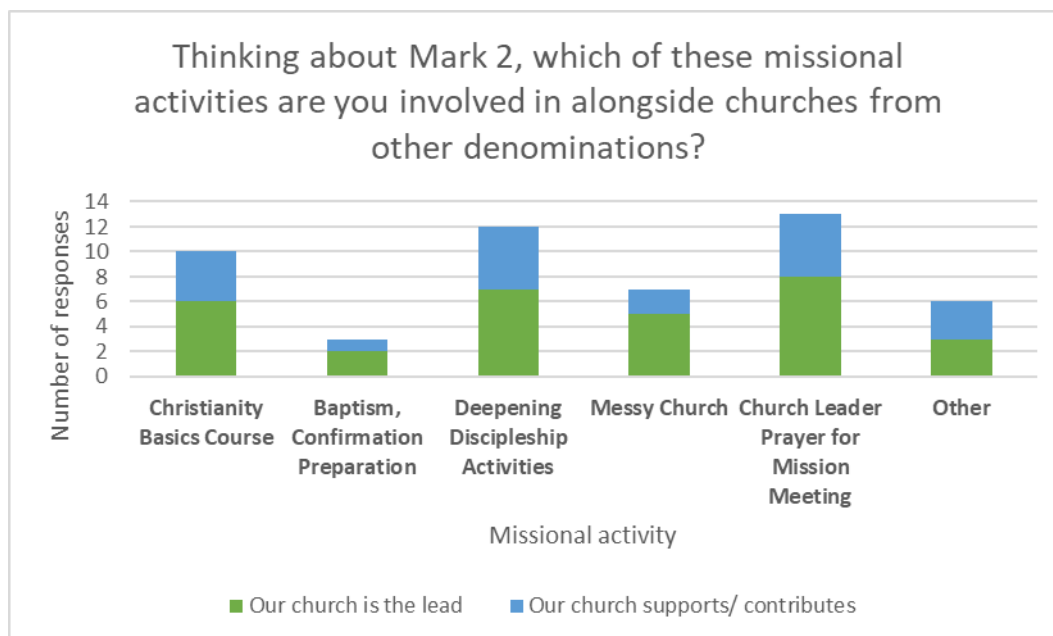
Figure 7 (Based on 39 responses)

In addition, churches mentioned a number of other activities in the 'Other' box. These included:

- Other Christianity basic courses, e.g., Start! and The World We All Want
- Other deepening discipleship activities, e.g., S.H.A.P.E., New Wine Discipleship
- Bible study
- Lent courses
- Prayer in the mission community
- Common mission forum
- Prayer breakfasts.

Analysis of these two questions showed that cooperative working on the first mark does not guarantee similar working on the second mark. In the first part of the question, which took the second mark as a whole, over a quarter of participants indicated that they do cooperate

with non-Anglicans at least sometimes. However, in the second part, which broke down the mark into a list of examples, there was no individual activity that more than 9 responses said their churches were involved in. *Figure 2* shows that 23 different responses included one or more example activity under the second Mark of Mission. Therefore, more churches are involved in doing this mark in cooperation than it might seem at first glance; it is not the same handful of churches engaging in every one of the example activities, but a wider spread of the sampled churches, each doing a smaller number of the activities.

Of the 39 responses to this section, there were 12 that indicated involvement in one or more of the example activities most obviously to do with discipleship: a Christianity basics course, baptism or confirmation preparation, or other deepening discipleship activity. This includes several that shared evangelistic courses like Alpha. This is interesting to note, as it shows that it is possible to share evangelism and discipleship activities with churches of other denominations.

In the follow up interviews, it was hoped we could explore the reasons people had for feeling able to cooperate in the activities they do.

Mark 3: 'to respond to human need with loving service'

The data from the section on the third Mark of Mission shows in *Figure 8* that more than half of those who answered this question are involved in missional activities that they would characterize as falling under the third mark with churches of other denominations at least some of the time.
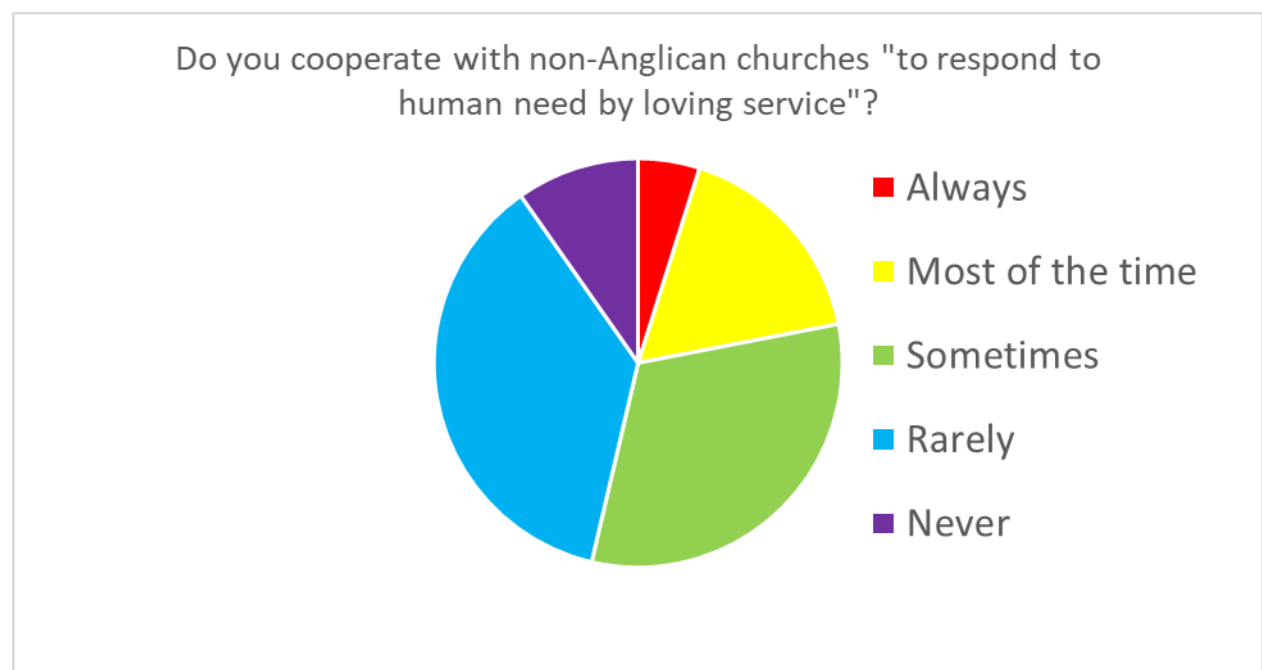
Figure 8 (Based on 41 responses)

When asked about the third Mark of Mission in more detail, almost two-thirds of responses indicated that their church supported or led at least one activity that related to the third Marks of Mission. As shown in *Figure 2* above, 34 out of the 55 responses said they were involved in at least one activity, which is the highest figure out of all the marks.

Suggested activities included in this question were:

- Counselling or support, e.g., debt counselling, relationship counselling, personal support
- Night shelter or other homeless provision
- Food bank
- Older people's lunch club or befriending scheme
- Street Pastors
- Children's and Youth Work (for wider community), e.g., holiday/breakfast/after-schools clubs, parent/carer and toddler group, youth club.
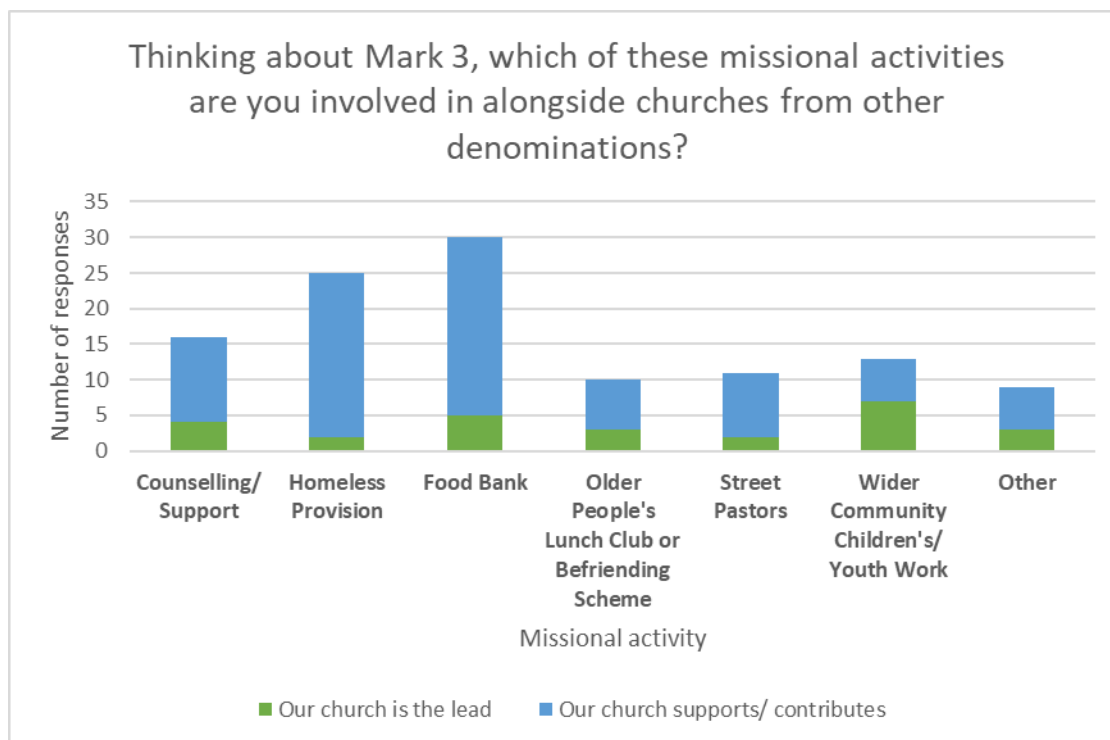

Figure 9 (Based on 39 responses)

In addition, churches mentioned a number of other activities in the 'Other' box. These included:

- Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
- Credit Union
- Women's Community Matters
- Community Charity Shop
- Breakfast with testimonies
- Coffee mornings
- Messy Church
- Holiday Club
- Open concerts.

Of all the shared activities that can be seen in the survey responses, the second and third most popular fall under this Mark of Mission. Altogether, 30 responses mentioned participation in a local food bank, and 25 in local homeless provision.

It is interesting to note that in addition to being the area of mission with the highest level of cooperation among survey participants, it is also the one where Anglican churches are most likely to be supporting rather than leading. This could indicate that it is easiest to cooperate in larger groups on a social justice projects, like food banks, because commonality in teaching and church order is less important than for other marks. Perhaps it is easier to agree on appropriate responses to the immediate practical needs of the homeless or hungry than it is to commit to sharing in discipleship activities where more theological agreement is needed, or in the kind of ethical advocacy implied by Marks 4 and 5, for which churches might feel less well equipped. It is by no means impossible for different denominations to cooperate on evangelism and discipleship, as the analysis above of our data for Marks 1 and 2 shows, but it is slightly less common and tends to involve smaller groups of churches, for reasons of both practicality and theological affinity.

It is interesting to compare these findings with the Church Urban Fund's *Church in Action Report 2017*, which also includes data on the types of social action 'organized activities' churches are involved in offering to their communities, although it does not differentiate activities done ecumenically.[31] In the sample of more than a thousand Anglican parishes, the three most popular activities were 'Community events' (94%); 'Food bank' (93%); and 'Lunch club' or similar 'hospitality for older people' (86%).[32] The data from the *Doing Mission Together* project, although based on a much smaller sample, suggests that the most popular social action activities for denominations to collaborate on ecumenically are slightly different. Of those who answered the relevant questions, 77% were involved in a 'Food bank'; 71% in 'Homeless provision'; and 42% in 'Counselling or support' such as debt counselling.

The differences between these two sets of results perhaps indicates that there are certain activities that it makes more sense to do ecumenically, such as homeless provision, in order to make use of a wider range of resources; and others such as 'fetes, parties [and] quizzes'[33] which it makes sense to do as individual congregations. The importance of building community and of making good use of resources will be explored further in Chapter 4 of the report.

There is a wide range of activities in this area which participants have highlighted, and it was important for the interviews to explore the ways in which these activities were perceived by respondents (see p. 34 below). At the beginning of the project the team expected there to be more activities under the final three marks of mission, and the evidence gathered through the survey does indeed suggest that a great deal of cooperation is happening at local church level in 'responding to human need by loving service.'

Mark 4: 'to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation'

The data from the section on the fourth mark shows that almost a third of those who answered this question engage in missional activities with churches of other denominations which they would categorize as falling under the fourth Mark of Mission. This is something we found surprising as we thought that churches would be involved in more cooperative activities

that were focused on social justice. This may, in part, be because of which examples we chose for each mark, although there were not many activities entered in the 'other' box. Perhaps it is also because the wording of this mark is more abstract than others with its mention of 'society'.

The *Church in Action Report 2017* found that only 33% of the Anglican parishes they surveyed were frequently involved in social justice campaigning activities, with an additional 55% occasionally involved in this kind of work. The activities most commonly cited in this report were 'participating in local forums, lobbying MPs and local representatives, joining in national campaigns, and advocating on behalf of people in poverty.'[34]

As has previously been stated, the marks are all intrinsically linked and it could be argued that the third and fourth have a large amount of overlap.
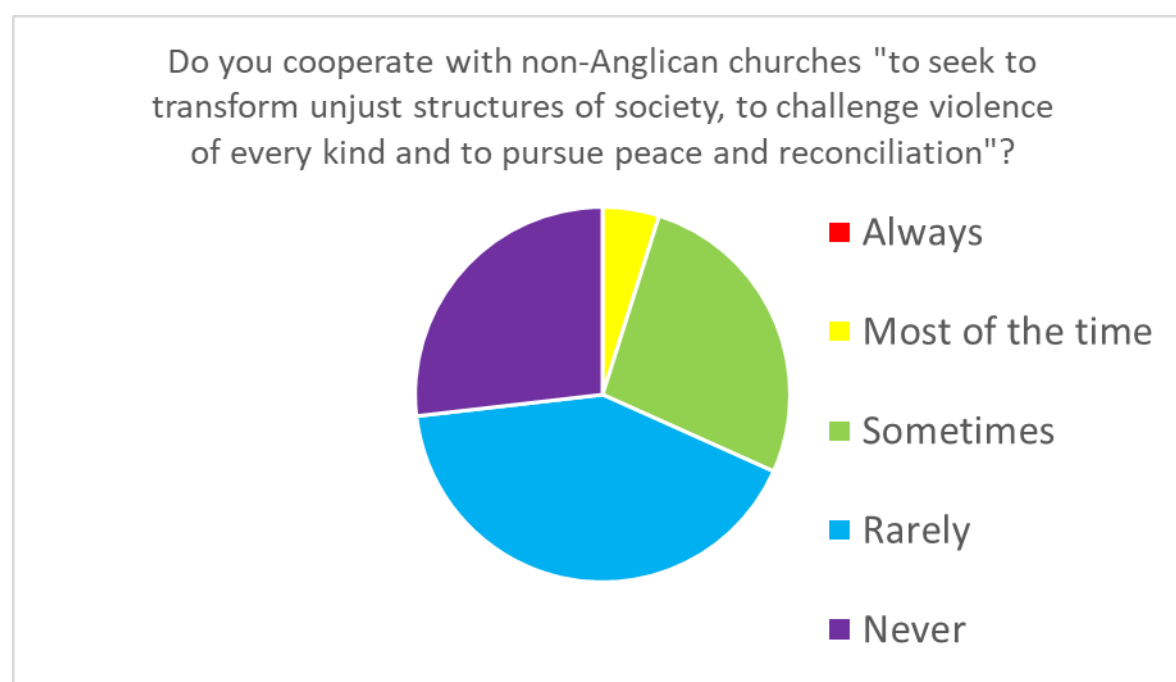
Figure 10 (Based on 41 responses)

When asked about specific examples of the fourth mark, fewer than a quarter of those who answered the question said they were involved in cooperating in the most popular activity – 'hosting political hustings'. However, 23 responses did indicate that they were involved in at least one activity, as shown in *Figure 2*, which shows that a range of churches are actually engaged in this area.

Suggested activities included in this question were:

- Charity Fundraising
- Charity Information and Justice Seeking Events
- Hosting Political Hustings
- Public Meetings on Local Issues.

Figure 11 (Based on 37 responses)

In addition, churches mentioned a number of other activities in the 'Other' box. These included:

- Christian Aid town centre events
- fundraising for Youth Work venue
- Stop the Traffik
- community health advocacy
- refugee group.

It is interesting that mark 4 activities which could be considered as tackling some of the more systematic challenges in social justice work, as opposed to the more immediate practical needs, are less evident in our data. It was important for the interviews to explore why there is a marked difference in the number of responses involved in the different kinds of activities.

Mark 5: 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'

The data from the section on the fifth Mark of Mission shows that it is the one where the smallest proportion of those who answered the question are involved with other churches. This could be because the fifth mark was added in slightly later and is, in general, still a new area of work for many churches that has not necessarily filtered down into the areas of work that churches expect to work together on, although the increasing profile of environmental issues may mean more churches bringing more creativity and imagination to addressing their environmental impact, which in future may make cooperation on the fifth Mark of Mission more common.

Something that the survey data does not make clear, and which would be interesting to explore in further research, is the extent to which the surveyed churches were *independently* involved in activities that fall under the Marks of Mission. This means that we cannot compare what a church does in cooperation with other denominations with the missional activities

they do independently or with other Anglican churches. However, the interviews did not indicate that the churches surveyed were doing much independently in this area either.
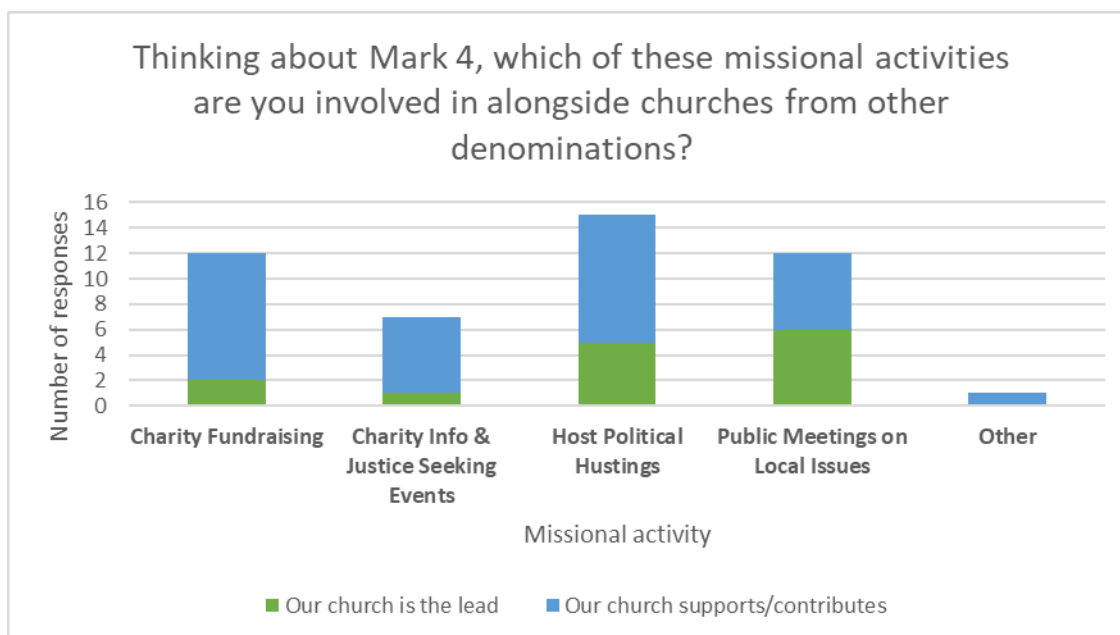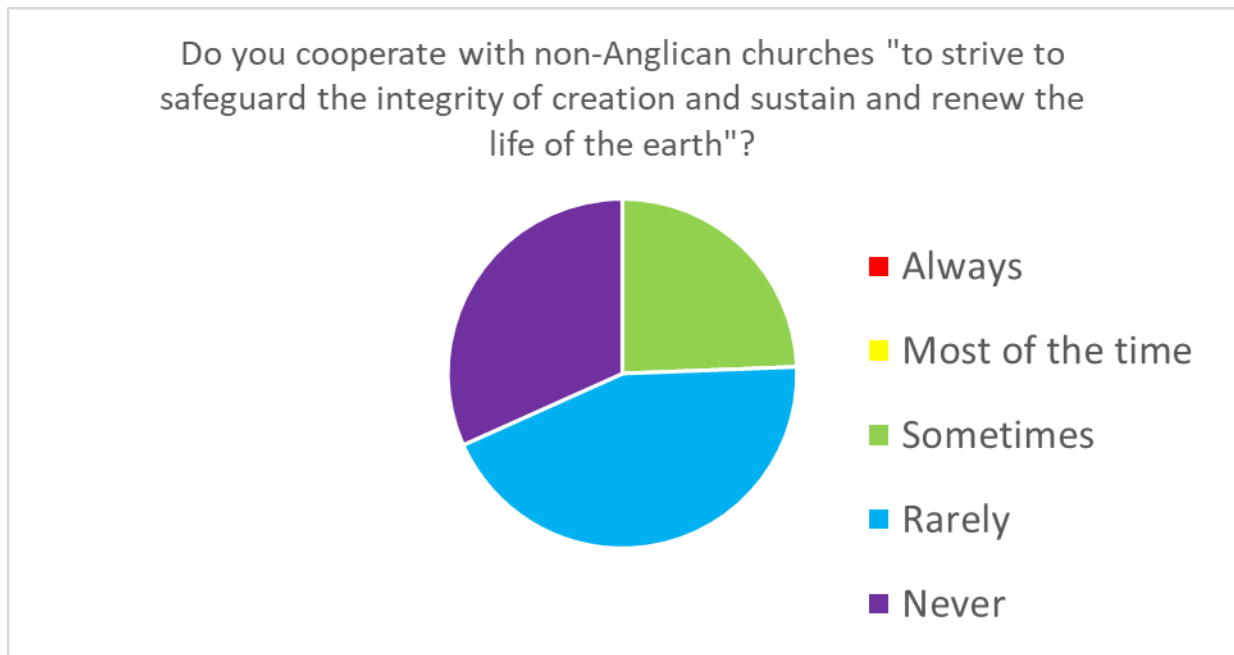

Figure 12 (Based on 41 responses)

Regarding the fifth mark, each of the examples we suggested had fewer than a quarter of those who answered this question saying that they were involved in this activity with churches from other denominations. While no individual activity had more than 7 responses saying their church was involved, a total of 15 responses indicated involvement with at least one activity in this mark.

Suggested activities included in this question were:

- Community gardening or vegetable patch
- Community transformation projects, e.g., local litter projects
- Engaging local schools on the environment
- Charity fundraising
- Public meetings on local issues.

Figure 13 (Based on 36 responses)

In addition, churches mentioned a number of other activities in the 'Other' box. These included:

- Prayer for the environment
- Activism, e.g., petitioning and marching
- Church leaders meeting with local MP to raise issues.

It was important for the interviews to explore if this was a new area of work for churches in a more general sense. If so, it could explain in part why there are fewer examples of cooperation.

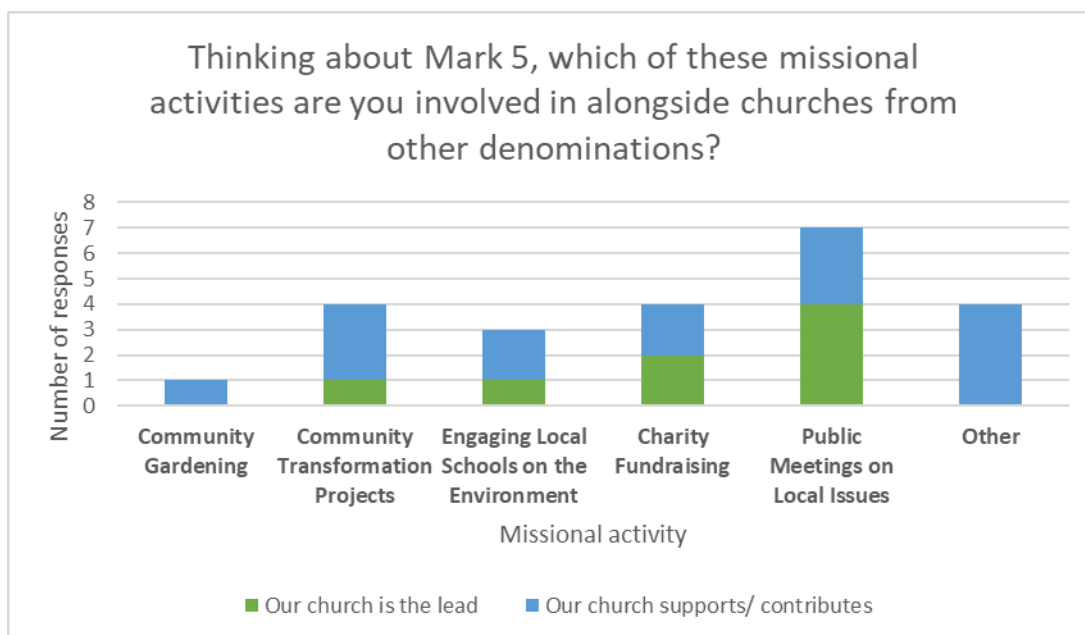## Survey results – Ideas around 'effectiveness'

A different section of the survey focused on ideas around 'effectiveness' in mission. There were four questions that asked about different ways in which activities done in cooperation with other churches could be effective. The data from these questions showed that working with other churches was perceived to be positive and important for effective mission. It is interesting to note that, while answers were particularly positive when considering cooperative activity as a whole, answers to other questions showed that there is more variety on the how 'effective' cooperative activities were at involving people from the community or the church. The majority of responses given in this section were positive and the lower scores were mostly in response to a question about how effective joint activities were at engaging people from their church to participate. This could suggest that ecumenical cooperation for mission is often more of a priority for church leaders.

'Effectiveness' in mission is difficult to define, and there are evidently different aspects to it. This was an important area for the follow-up interviews to explore in order to get a clearer picture of what ideas of 'effectiveness' are present among the respondents.

4. 'Doing Mission Together' in English Towns phase II: Interviews

Introduction

A number of different areas arose from the survey responses that we were keen to explore in more depth with a smaller group of participants in follow up interviews, in order to go into more depth about their answers to our questions and to give us more detailed information about some of the activities and partnerships they are involved in. These included the relationship of their cooperative activities to their independent missional activities; how they understood the mission of their particular churches; and how they might recognize an 'effective' cooperative missional activity.

The initial hypothesis that churches would be most likely to cooperate with other denominations on the final three Marks of Mission was revised based on the survey data. The revised hypothesis was that churches would be most likely to cooperate on activities that fall under the first and third Marks of Mission and least likely to cooperate on activities under the fifth Mark of Mission. The interviews aimed to explore some of the reasoning behind the decisions that church communities made about what kind of missional activities to undertake and whether or not they wanted to cooperate on each activity.

The quantitative data of the survey yielded interesting information about the types of missional activities the churches surveyed were involved in, as well as how frequently and, with which denominations. As was noted at various points in the previous chapter, however, it also raised important questions that we were unable to answer on the basis of the data generated. The qualitative interview stage was intended to shed more light on the survey data, particularly in regard to some areas of ambiguity, including, crucially for the project as a whole, how 'effectiveness' is understood in relation to mission.

Methodology

A sample of ten parishes from seven towns was selected from the original survey participants. Each interview took place either in the interviewee's home or church, and they were asked to invite an ecumenical counterpart to share in the conversation. The ecumenical participants came from a range of denominations, including Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and independent churches. This was important as it opened up the project to include perspectives from ecumenical partners, rather than focusing solely on Anglican experiences and perceptions of ecumenical cooperation. There was a mixture of lay and ordained among the ecumenical participants.

Each Anglican participant was invited, in preparation for the interview, to think of one missional activity that they found very encouraging and one they had found discouraging or disappointing. This was to help the interview conversation explore their priorities and perceptions around missional activities, and what 'effective' mission might look like in a parish context. It was important that the interviews included a variety of experiences and did not focus exclusively on positive experiences.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the topic guide used can be found in Appendix 2.

Expanding on the survey data

A number of specific areas were chosen for the interview conversations to focus on, in order to illuminate the survey data. Firstly, it was hoped to get a sense of the number of missional

activities the participant's churches are involved in independently, i.e., outside any cooperation with non-Anglican churches. The survey data gives an interesting picture of the number of cooperative missional activities a church is involved in but does not allow us to place that in the context of the church's missional activities as a whole. This is important, not only for understanding the work of individual participant churches, but also for understanding the data more broadly. The survey data shows that there is a significant difference between the number of churches we surveyed that are involved in Mark 3 (62%) and in Mark 5 (31%). What the data does not tell us is why this is. It could be that the churches feel less able to cooperate on this type of activity, or it could be that there are simply fewer relevant activities those churches are engaging with.

Secondly, it was important that the interviews enabled exploration of the thinking behind the answers given in the survey. There are three critical concepts that the survey had used: 'cooperation', 'mission', and 'effectiveness'. Each of these concepts can be understood in different ways.

The Marks of Mission provide a useful tool for thinking about the concept of 'mission'. They are designed to be interwoven, better thought of as elements of a whole than distinct categories. Nevertheless, even allowing for activities that interact with multiple marks, there is variation between the numbers of participants who indicated involvement with each of the Five Marks. When a church community is making decisions about what kinds of missional activity to engage in, they will not necessarily be thinking explicitly about the Marks of Mission. They will, however, be thinking about what they feel called by God to do, how they understand their mission as a church to fit into God's mission as a whole, and what resources they have. Decisions about priorities must, prayerfully, be made. The Five Marks offer a range of ways of participating in the *missio Dei*; speaking to those who do not yet have an explicit faith, nurturing new believers, transforming society and its political structures, and care for the environment are all aspects of God's work in the world.

The survey data indicates that there is a diversity of missional activities in which a wide range of Anglican parishes is engaged, with a wide range of partner churches. There was no one mark in which every church was involved with other churches, nor any one activity. This indicates that decisions are made in each church's context about what activities it is appropriate or possible to engage in, when and with whom. This echoes the example of *Revive Rugby* which was explored in chapter 2, where the diverse range of types of church and types of outreach was celebrated as a way to reach out to the wider community in an authentic and effective way.[35]

In order to open up these issues in more detail, it was important for the interviews to explore how participants understand the mission of their individual church; how they see that mission in relation to the other church communities around them; and how they would recognize an 'effective' missional activity when they experienced it.

'Effectiveness' in mission is as nuanced an idea as 'mission' itself. There is an ongoing conversation in the church about the relationship between 'mission' and 'growth', essentially asking is mission only 'effective' if it directly results in tangible numerical growth or are there other ways to measure it.[36]

The interviews explored this question by asking participants about their hopes and aims when they engaged in a missional activity, what experiences or outcomes they had found encouraging or disappointing. This is a similar approach to that taken by Allen Nauss in his exploration of ministerial effectiveness. In it he suggests two ways of categorising effectiveness, one of which is by asking people to describe specific occasions of effective or ineffective ministry.[37] From the examples given in the interview conversations, the four interrelated themes discussed below were developed as ways exploring missional ecumenism in terms of effectiveness.

Understandings of 'mission'

It was important for the interview conversations to explore how the participants understood their mission and the mission of their churches in the context of the *Missio Dei*. The following are examples of perspectives on mission that were shared during the interviews.

A) 'We very strongly believe that God's kingdom is present in this world. Not fully, and it won't be until God's kingdom is fully established in the world to come, but we strongly believe that we can see glimpses of it and that it is our responsibility to grow it in the here and now, in the expectation of what is to come and that we can make a real difference in a whole variety of ways.'

B) 'It's this amazing message of the good news of Christ. We are just coming up to Easter. We're about to celebrate the glorious resurrection and the life that God wants us to have. That's this amazing gift that he has given us in the sacrifice of his Son, that we actually are free to live our lives to the full, that God wants to take all this burden away from us that holds us back, that holds us down, of all the things that are not going so well…. Christ has once, for all, carried on the cross and we are free to start again, and again, and again if we ask for forgiveness.'

C) 'Well, I suppose I would say that my view of mission might be different from some of the parishioners, but I would say that God goes before us…. So the idea is that it's His mission, and it's a case of seeing what God is already doing and working within that. Also having an attentiveness to where he might be leading us.'

D) 'That whole mission [project] was about serving people and earning the right to have a conversation with people…. I think there's an understanding that we need to build relationships with where society is at, at this time, and people have no knowledge of Christianity, generally. So, you're not calling people back to something. You're actually having to introduce people to something.'

The four quotations provided above give an indication of the range of understandings about mission that were articulated in the interviews. While there is no straightforward contradiction between them, there is a noticeable difference of emphasis. In the two extracts on the left (A and C), the focus is on God's present activity in the world and how the church discerns this and responds to it. In the two extracts on the right (B and D), the focus is instead on how the church communicates to the world about God's activity, with the weight in the first of these clearly falling on what God *has* done in Jesus Christ. The two interviewees on the left might well assume that readiness to communicate to others about faith is an important part of mission, while in different ways the two on the right offer ways of understanding the value of activities that would most naturally

fall under Marks 3, 4 and 5 in relation to Marks 1 and 2. Yet even allowing for these overlaps, for the two interviewees on the right there is a felt imperative to communicate about God's activity to those beyond the church that is not evident in the two on the left.

This is not the place for an extensive investigation into contemporary understandings of mission, but clearly the extent to which mission implies communication by the church to the world about God's work will have a bearing on what effectiveness in mission is taken to mean.

Understandings of 'effectiveness'

A) 'We've got different criteria that we look at when we decide whether to take on another project or not: …we need to see that it's sustainable and that we've got the capacity of actually running it. And the danger is that we are trying to do too much and spread ourselves too thinly, and I think that is why we've started to combine forces in various areas because we've just discovered that we are more "effective" if we do it that way.'

B) 'I would want to talk about kingdom values… if we talk about the kingdom coming, I would have felt that could take place in many ways. So, at one end, you want people to be disciples of Jesus, come to faith in him and be his disciples but, actually, the kingdom comes when justice is more fully realized, when wrong things in the community are challenged, and injustices and prejudices are challenged.'

C) 'It's about presence, it's about relationship and, ultimately, we can't just judge this on how many people it draws into the church… we hope it will end up with people becoming disciples, but it may be effective without that being evident.'

D) 'Quite often we have put on new groups because they were oversubscribed, and we couldn't accommodate everybody. So, for us, that is one sign of effectiveness. Another sign of effectiveness is that the churches are growing.'

Quotation D implies an understanding of mission as church to world communication about God, in which effectiveness can be gauged by assessing the level of response to that communication from those previously outside the life of the church. B and C both allow that this is part of what is hoped for in mission and therefore implicitly part of missional effectiveness, but both are also keen to say that it is not the whole story either, and therefore 'headcounts' of attendance at church activities are not by themselves an adequate means of assessment.

Quotation A, on the other hand, takes a rather different perspective. Effectiveness here is bound up with sustainability, with the threat to effectiveness seen to be a lack of realism about what the churches can actually achieve. It also implies that there is a conscious investigation of potential effectiveness before new activities of missional ecumenism are undertaken.

Key Themes

Drawing together the different interview conversations, this section will explore four interrelated themes that emerge from the experiences and perspectives shared by the interviewees. The four themes are: location and local identity; resources; relationships; and liturgy and prayer and worship. As will become evident, they are interwoven with each other.

The four themes that emerged have some interesting parallels with the seven 'marks' of a healthy church set out in Robert Warren's *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A process for revitalizing your church*:

- Energized by faith
- Outward-looking focus
- Seeks to find out what God wants
- Faces the cost of change and growth
- Operates as a community
- Makes room for all
- Does a few things and does them well.[38]

Although developed with a focus on individual local churches or parishes, the emphasis on 'encountering the reality of God's presence in and through the life of each church' and focus on the '*quality* of the church's life' are also relevant to a broader definition of the 'local' church as the Christians in any given area.

'Energized by faith' is described as a foundational characteristic of healthy church: 'At the heart of these churches and their members is a reality about their awareness of the presence, goodness and love of God. Faith is the fuel on which these churches run.'[39] This was present particularly in the understandings of 'mission' and 'effectiveness' discussed above and is similarly foundational to how and why interviewees described engaging in missional activities, whether alone or in partnership with other denominations.

Common calling to serve the local community

For many of the interviewees, location was central to how they understand the mission of their church. Often linked with the physical location of their church(es) in the context of the surrounding area, interacting with the local identity and responding to local needs was a strong theme in the interviews.

When asked to describe how they understood the mission of their church, one participant said:

> For us, as a church, it's particularly to do with the place where we are…. It's right on the High Street next to the park, playing field area with the shops and cafes around about…. So, trying to be a church that is recognizing that the building is in a certain place, and making the most of that opportunity for mission as a parish church.

This sense of local calling is first rooted in the life of each individual church congregation; but it is also fundamental for ecumenical relationships and cooperation. If each church is called to serve the local community, a shared setting provides shared motivation and a common canvas for creative response and problem solving.

Several interviewees referred to low aspiration or low self-esteem in their parishes, both in the community as a whole and in the congregations, and emphasized the importance of building up people and communities:

> There's quite a lot of low aspiration here. Low self-esteem, lack of confidence. That's prevalent within the wider community, but it's also prevalent within the church as well.

Similarly, on a community level, there is an emphasis on engaging with local touchstones in order to 'meet people where they are,' both physically and spiritually. In some towns, this was done by engaging with the history of a place, and an awareness that many families had lived in the area for a long time. For example, in one town a particularly 'encouraging' instance of cooperation was coming together to commemorate the closure of the local mine because being a mining community is still fundamental to the shared identity:

> Yes, a strong sense of identity. Maybe one of our successes has been in a sense to home in on what people sort of want really because when we had our commemoration of the closure of the mine, that was sort of giving the people really what they were interested in because there was a sense in that it was something that we knew that they wanted to have that marked.

In other towns, where there has been more population movement and new-build housing estates springing up, there is more of a sense that churches have an opportunity to contribute to building community in a new setting. In one town, the ecumenical network's response included setting up a worshipping community in a newly built school and coordinating an outreach programme which, over a period of seven years, made sure every new family received a visit, a welcome pack, and a free homemade cake.

The decisions taken in relation to responding to new housing developments also relate to another key theme discussed later in the report, the question of how best to use resources. In response to a number of separate housing developments arising, all within the boundary of one Anglican parish, ecumenical partner churches in one town consciously avoided 'cramming in one estate', instead choosing to make sure each area had targeted outreach with a mind to establishing a worshipping community. This was, for them, 'the most effective way to grow God's kingdom.'

In several towns, one of the important ways churches engage with local identity is in the civic arena. This can include Remembrance services or interaction with the local regiment.

Additionally, several interviewees spoke about a shift in the relationship with the local authority, as austerity means they have fewer and fewer social services and are increasingly looking towards faith groups and charities to fill the gaps, particularly in areas of work where churches are already involved, such as youth work. Regardless of whether civil authorities actively reach out, the needs are still there. One interviewee explained that groups for the elderly are 'a growing need with all the cutbacks in the social sector', and that there are 'a lot of people out there that are just extremely lonely.'

The interviewees who spoke about this change in relationship also spoke about being cautious of taking on too much, particularly in specialized areas. They want to respond to these new opportunities and needs, while recognizing that many of the services local councils and police forces are looking to pass on, such as young offenders' counselling, cannot be taken on

without significant expertise and funding. The opportunity cannot be ignored but the 'boundaries' must be clear and realistic.

Christian theological thinking addresses all areas of human life and society, but in a 'post-Christendom' society religion is increasingly thought of as private pastime. Participation in broadly speaking 'secular' community activities helps to demonstrate that the local church is embedded in the local community and not just a group of individuals, and that 'church' is not just for Christmas and Easter. Doing that as the churches together in the town gives weight to that, while responding to an external initiative that none of the churches 'own' may in itself make cooperation between them more straightforward.

Engaging with specific local needs, such as contributing to a food bank or hosting a night shelter, allows churches to work together to address a need in the community context they share. A focus on local identity and history allows churches to participate more fully in shared community identity and contribute to bolstering community confidence and coherence.

While we may speak of finding 'common ground' when exploring ecumenical relations, or indeed any interaction between different cultural groups, it should not be forgotten that local churches share literal common ground that gives them shared community concerns, in addition to a shared calling as the Body of Christ.

Concern for good use of resources

Considering how best to use resources was a strong theme of the interviews, as individual churches, as local Christians, and as members of local society.

Responding to the interview data, this report takes a broad definition of 'resources'. In addition to obvious types of resources such as financial contributions and volunteers, the interviews also raised other types, such as: time; energy; expertise; premises; materials such as furniture, toys, and audio-visual equipment; trust; and prayer.

Each church has to make decisions about what they will prioritize as a community, and what resources they can bring to bear on an activity or project at any given time. Sometimes this will involve stepping out in faith that God will provide the resources necessary for what a community is being called to do. Other times this involves prayerfully stewarding current resources to make good use of them. As indicated in the introduction, a significant motivator behind the progress towards greater ecumenical cooperation is the recognition that churches insisting on doing things separately gets in the way of effectiveness in mission.

This is reflected in the interview data as many interviewees emphasized a desire to make sure that their local churches were complementing each other's work and not duplicating. There was an awareness that each church, particularly leaders and those members of the congregations that were volunteering in some activity outside regular worship, are busy people with many demands on their time. This awareness leads to a desire to use resources, whether that be people's time, energy and enthusiasm, or a church's money and premises, as effectively as possible.

In addition to the effective sharing of resources, it is also useful to think in terms of the sharing of charisms or gifts that can be found in the particular theological emphases and traditions within denominations. Interviewees spoke about being encouraged by partner churches that

had strong traditions of meeting in small groups to study scripture, or a particular gift for hospitality and using food to make people feel welcome.

This sharing of resources can also reach further than being solely between churches. Often missional activities that we have classed as falling under the third Mark of Mission, 'to respond to human need by loving kindness', are activities that can also be done in cooperation with other groups or individuals, identifying with other faiths or with none. Food banks are an obvious example of this, and other types of project were also mentioned in the interviews. One interviewee described how the local ecumenical network had cooperated with other locals to raise money to 'buy a house to accommodate another refugee family that the council would not have done otherwise.' Churches participating in wider community initiatives, in addition to spear-heading their own projects or activities, contribute to a sense of the church being rooted in the local community; this one way of moving away from churches doing things to/for the community and towards them doing things with the community.

Reflection

Ecumenical partnership helps facilitate effective use of resources in several ways. The first is when churches combine resources to provide a missional activity, such as a parent and toddler group. One church may have the physical space to hold the group, but not the volunteers or the stock of toys for the children to play with. As one interviewee explained, 'you need a lot of people, you need a venue, you need a certain financial capacity in order to be able to run events. So, unless we can tick all those boxes, we can't put on the event.'

By combining forces, each church is empowered to help meet a need it could not have met independently. Resources that might otherwise lie unused become something that belong not just to the individual churches, or even the local Christians, but also to the local community they are all seeking to serve.

In the Church Urban Fund's *Church in Action Report 2017*, which explores the social engagement by Anglican churches in England, there is an interesting statistical breakdown of the different types of contribution involved in running a project, which they describe as 'hosting [events], or providing volunteers, financial or in-kind donations, and pastoral support.' The data in the report, based on a survey of over a thousand church leaders, shows '93% of churches support food banks in one or more ways: 69% provide donations, 32% provide volunteers, 27% provide pastoral or prayer support, 19% run a food bank, and 8% provide a venue for one.[40]

Secondly, by facilitating conversation and the flow of information, ecumenical cooperation allows local churches to spread the net more widely, meeting a broader variety of needs. If one church in the area is already running, for example, a Christians Against Poverty (CAP) programme, it makes more sense for another church to focus on a different activity. Likewise, if a member of a congregation wants to set up a particular activity in their own church, it may be that it will be more effective for them to join in with what another church is already doing to address that need. A town does not necessarily need two local CAP organizations, but it will benefit from a set up that is better resourced in terms of volunteers, expertise, and finances.

Thirdly, churches and individual members of the congregation whose current circumstances prevent them from physically being present at a particular activity are enabled to participate

meaningfully by praying for specific activities in the community. If church leaders are proactive about keeping lines of communication open, a wide range of people can be praying for a wide range of missional activities, both in a general sense and in response to specific concerns and needs.

Every local community has a different set of needs with different emphases and points of crisis. Each community has multiple needs and decisions will need to be made about what to prioritize. By pooling available resources among a group of local churches to make them go as far as possible, in terms of both quality and breadth of provision, a local Christian community is empowered to minister to more members of the local community.

Attention to building relationships

Three interconnected types of relationship are important when considering how to make the most of ecumenical cooperation for effective mission, the relationship: between individuals; between churches on a formal, structural level; and between worshipping communities. The interview data provides evidence for the value in investing time and resources in personal relationships, particularly among church leadership, and in considering some degree of formal structure or semi-formal routines. As the interviews only included one person from each worshipping community, the data gives us limited information about congregational relationships. In some cases, interviewees spoke positively about congregational awareness and ownership of the missional activities, but this varied. It is perhaps an area where further work would be useful.

Among the different town settings where the follow-up interviews took place, there were different approaches to the question of formalizing ecumenical cooperation. In three towns, there were distinct examples of formal structures. One town had three threads of interwoven cooperation, each including different but overlapping subsets of the churches in the area. Another had two networks, a Churches Together network and another, overlapping network which coordinates and signposts people to activities being run by one or more of the member churches, focused on a shopfront in the local town.

A third town has taken a different approach by working to create a legal body with a recognized name or 'badge', under which six main projects are jointly delivered by partner churches. Additionally, different activities are able to apply to use the 'badge'. Each 'endorsed project' has a lead church and one or more of the other churches in the network will also contribute resources or volunteers. Interestingly, this network although long established has not been formalized with a constitution or affiliation with Churches Together in England. Nevertheless, it is very active and regular and has positive relationships, particularly among church leaders. One interviewee said that it started by being, 'very relational, rather than going down the constitutional route and we've talked about it a few times, and we've felt we want to keep it relational. We feel that's a strength because, actually, if our relationships go and we're just left with a formal agreement it's not worth anything anyway.' In this town, it is clear that the sustained and deliberate relationships of the ministers is foundational to an ecumenical environment that is active, creative, and positive.

In other places, cooperation is less structured or frequent and on a more ad hoc basis. This does not necessarily mean that there are not shared traditions or routines of cooperation that are built up over time.

Many interviewees mentioned the importance of being able to invest time in ecumenical relationships, not just amid the busyness of any church leader's life. The length of time each person is in post for, is also relevant here, with a bearing on the extent to which relationships have time to grow.

Often a key factor in determining how active ecumenical cooperation in an area can be is the extent to which leaders are able to prioritize spending time together in prayer and fellowship. Another interviewee described how ministers from local churches, representing more than a dozen denominations, had been meeting for 20 years, once a week for breakfast and prayer. One interviewee described this by saying, 'the main content is relationship, it's actually support. We worship together, we share together, and I think it enables what we do, missionally, to flow from trust… and relationship together.' This is a good example of an informal but regular space that allows personal relationships to flourish and is flexible enough to adapt to changes of post holders in the area.

Not only is this an indicator of openness to cooperation in the abstract sense, but the interview data makes clear that it is in this setting that leaders are enabled to recognize each other more deeply as brothers and sisters in Christ. Meeting regularly and openly allows each person to feed back what is going well and what is a struggle. It allows for shared awareness of opportunities and challenges, thereby opening the door to shared action in response. The importance of prayer for each other and each other's churches was also emphasized as of equal importance to shared activities and planning.

Another way in which leadership is influential in determining the ecumenical atmosphere in a town is the extent to which appointments have an impact on whether a church gets involved. There were some examples where a change of personnel led to specific churches falling out of the ecumenical habits they previously had. Conversely, in one town, one of the main reasons cited for positive ecumenical relations was that several church leaders had arrived to take up posts within a short space of time. They were able to support each other through the move, and from that relational root, more ecumenical activities have flourished.

Several interviewees expressed an awareness of the influence that leadership has on the ecumenical energy in a town. Just because people from different churches are working on a project does not mean that many such projects are not reliant on dynamic leadership from one or more individuals as a driving force. Several interviewees spoke about the need to work on sustainability, by sharing leadership and encouraging ownership among the congregation; they wondered too how things might change if and when they moved on.

Friendship between leaders was a strong theme in the interviews, not only in the sense that they have significant influence in deciding whether ecumenical relationships are worth prioritizing for a church, and if so with whom, but also because friendship and mutuality breed creativity. Many of the interviews included moments of laughter and in-jokes; several generated tangential conversations where the interviewees came up with new project ideas or potential solutions to a problem the other was describing. There were many instances where interviewees were keen to highlight the good work of the partner church/leader, and clearly took pleasure in the other's successes and rejoiced in the gifts they had been given by God.

Equally, when interviewees expressed frustration or disappointment and were asked what they might change in their ecumenical circumstances, it was often to do with a desire to see more people (churches/leaders) engage in relationship, either more deeply or by starting something entirely new.

It was interesting to see that several national initiatives were mentioned in the interviews including Churches Together in England, HOPE 18, Redeeming Our Communities, and the Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative. In one area, coming together to have a shared Thy Kingdom Come prayer event between three local churches was foundational to building a relationship out of which a variety of activities grew. Such national initiatives can become the catalyst for building relationships between churches at the local level when they participate in them together.

Reflection
The strongest relationships described by the interviewees were primarily between leadership figures, though not exclusively among the ordained. These relationships benefited from the investment of time, both in terms of length of time spent in post and living in the area, and in terms of prioritizing time spent in prayer and fellowship as a regular commitment. Several interviewees spoke of the depth of relationship built up this way as allowing them to recognize each other more deeply as brothers and sisters in Christ. Positive relationship at a leadership level, while not guaranteeing parallel closeness between worshipping communities, can release resources and create space for other relationships to grow. It would be interesting to explore at a congregational level the ways in which personal relationships influence ecumenical cooperation.

Commitment to sharing in prayer and worship
The four themes that have been highlighted are interrelated in various ways, but perhaps one of the most important interactions is that between 'relationship' and 'prayer'. It is important that relationships, both between church leaders and between church communities are rooted in prayer and not purely focused on the more 'project' based missional activities. This can take many forms including regular leaders' prayer meetings, Lent groups, and prayer meetings for schools. The interviews also highlighted many examples of shared, corporate worship that were often given when the interviewees were asked to think of a shared missional activity that they had found most 'encouraging'. Rather than sharing 'normal' Sunday worship, these services were focused mostly around events in the common liturgical calendar, such as Christmas, Easter, and Remembrance, but also around anniversaries commemorating significant events in local history and identity. Activities mentioned as 'most encouraging' in the interviews also included a Remembrance Service and a Thy Kingdom Come event. Rooting the more social justice orientated missional activities in the prayer life of the local churches is key to what gives distinct Christian character to an initiative such as night shelter or toddler club.

The Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative was often cited as a successful example of local ecumenical cooperation that was encouraging and growing. Having rapidly grown from an Anglican initiative, it is now nationally recognized by, e.g., the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches and involves many different denominations. It can involve many different styles of prayer and is a way of worshipping together without having to use a specific denominational liturgy.

Shared prayer and worship also demonstrate that all Christians can speak to God with one voice and come together to listen to God's word. Although shared corporate worship was not a priority for all interviewees, others greatly valued the opportunities for shared services that had been possible. Several interviewees explained that while there is little appetite for shaking up the routine of each church's pattern of Sunday services, there is greater openness to marking major dates in the liturgical year together, as noted above. This type of event often arises as relationships develop over time. One interviewee described a recent development where two churches directly opposite each other had, for the first time, decided to hold a joint Palm Sunday procession. Previously, each church had held its own procession, walking on the other side of the street and singing different hymns. Although the joint procession did not culminate in a joint service, it was a significant step towards unity and is a good example of a missional activity that engages a large proportion of the respective congregations.

Many interviewees spoke about recognizing the members of the other churches around them as brothers and sisters in Christ, but this did not always translate into the confidence to worship together. This is often because of uncertainty around differences of theology and practice. This awareness of difference need not be a negative thing, however. One interviewee explained that their town had a leaflet with information about each church and, when new people come to the area, they are helped and encouraged to find a church where they feel comfortable even if that is not the first church they visit. As part of not being in competition with each other, the churches here are aware that different people are drawn to different types of worshipping community. If someone visiting a church for the first time expresses a discomfort with the style of the service or a desire for more or for less formality, other local options can be suggested to them. The emphasis is on 'the responsibility to actually help people to find a spiritual home' rather than trying to 'hog the people that walk through your doors.'

This approach is similar to the approach taken towards the spreading out of resources by many of the churches involved in this study. The emphasis is on the local Christians, as a whole, ministering to the local community in a way that is as broad, as meaningful, and as sustainable as possible.

As mentioned in the 'resources' key theme, sharing information about potential and current missional activities allows churches and their members who do not have other resources to contribute to a particular activity can be actively praying and experience a sense of ownership of what the local church, as a whole, is doing.

Reflection
Making time for prayer and worship together enables leaders to develop deep relationships out of which resources can be managed and shared creatively in response to local needs. One interviewee described this, saying 'Some people, or some churches, are just stretched, and can't take anything else on, but because we discuss it… and we pray about it, and we're all aware of it, it's really endorsed by us all, whether we have an active input or not.' Equally, when such relationships are given time to develop so that friendship and trust can grow, it is easier to talk about difficult topics where there is a diversity of opinions.

Conclusion

The research project undertaken by the Council for Christian Unity on missional ecumenism, focusing on towns in England, confirmed the initial perception that a substantial proportion of missional activity for Anglican parishes in urban settings is now routinely undertaken in partnership with other churches. On the other hand, it challenged the initial hypothesis that such partnership is weighted towards social outreach action rather than evangelism and discipleship: in many places, it is integral for both. There are some interesting variations however, notably in the greater likelihood of the Anglican church being the 'lead' church for missional activity likely to be characterized as evangelism and discipleship. Nonetheless, the scale of missional ecumenism indicated by the research evidence assembled here strongly suggests that this is a mainstream dimension of contemporary urban mission that must be taken into account by those with responsibility for supporting it – through initial ministerial education, diocesan mission planning and national church policy, including the distribution of project funding.

Missional ecumenism – even within the limited social context of medium-sized English towns – takes many forms and needs space to evolve in its distinctive local context. It is supported by a range of structures, some more formal and some more informal, some more project-driven and some more institutional. Its participants include people with distinct understandings of mission and therefore different ways of thinking about missional effectiveness. Nonetheless, there are some identifiable 'environmental' factors that help to support and sustain it. Partnership between churches in mission is most likely to flourish where there is a common sense of calling to serve the local community, concern for good use of resources, attention to building relationships and commitment to sharing in prayer and worship. Promotion of these four factors in bringing churches together for mission could do much to invigorate the witness of the whole church to the whole gospel across the whole of this country.

Notes

[1] The Five Marks of Mission are
1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
3) To respond to human need by loving service;
4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx (accessed 29.07.2019).

[2] A useful collection of these agreements involving the Roman Catholic Church can be found in Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits* (London: Continuum, 2009). For the Church of England, there have been a series of significant agreements: with the Evangelical Church in Germany (the Meissen Agreement, 1991); with the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland (the Fetter Lane Declaration, 1995); with the United Protestant Churches of Alsace and Lorraine, the United Protestant Church of France (the Reuilly Agreement, 1997); with the Methodist Church of Britain (An Anglican–Methodist Covenant, 2003); with the Church of Scotland (the Columba Declaration, 2016). Particularly significant was the agreement between the four Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland and the Lutheran Churches of the Baltic (the Porvoo Common Statement, 1992). From 1994 to 2014 it has set a up an expanding communion of churches, as new churches have joined, all in full communion with each another.

[3] See for instance the many stories of local initiatives in Roger Sutton, ed., *A Gathering Momentum: Stories of Christian Unity Transforming Our Towns and Cities* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2017). For an argument that the turn to mission across the churches represents a moment of opportunity for ecumenism to connect with its historic roots, see Jeremy Worthen, '*Evangelii Gaudium*: Good News for Ecumenism,' in *Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, and the Renewal of the Church*, ed. Duncan Dormor and Alana Harris (New York: Paulist Press, 2017), pp. 218–38.

[4] Note, while specific examples of ecumenical working are mentioned in the report, these towns were not included in the research survey or interviews and are merely illustrative. All towns involved in the project have been anonymized.

[5] David Goodhew, *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Ashgate Publishing: Farnham, 2012), p.8

[6] See John Wolffe and Bob Jackson, 'Anglican Resurgence: the Church of England in London', ibid., pp.23-40.

[7] Leslie Francis and Carol Roberts, 'Growth or Decline in the Church of England during the Decade of Evangelism: Did the Churchmanship of the Bishop Matter?', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January 2009, pp. 67-81. This was a study based on the Church of England's official annual data.

[8] As David Cornick put it when addressing the Cambridge Ecumenical Council on 16 April 2015, 'At the same time that decline was happening, new things were coming to birth, slightly off radar, so either we didn't clock them or we thought they them of no importance. Decline prompted the churches to immerse themselves in mission. Maybe it was the church that was putting people off, not Jesus, so let's see if new ways of encounter and being church work. And somewhere within that process of responding to the crisis of the 1960s, ecumenism began to be perceived not as the solution but as an integral part of the problem.' *Changing landscape of ecumenism* https://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=152022 (accessed 05/09/19).

[9] See Mark Beach, *Revive Rugby - A New Ecumenism* (September 2012) https://rugbydeanery.org.uk/Articles/325479/Rugby_Deanery/News_and_Events/A_New_Ecumenism.aspx (accessed 05/09/19).

[10] Church Urban Fund, *Church in Action Report 2017,* https://www.cuf.org.uk/assets/documents/Church_in_Action_Report_2017.pdf (accessed 05/09/19), p.17.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Mark Beach reflects on this in *Revive Rugby*, the final section entitled 'A New Ecumenism?'.

[13] Colin Marsh and Jim Currin, *Mission-shaped Unity: Missio Dei and a New Way of Being Churches Together* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013), p.4.

[14] *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in A Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), pp. 84 & 103, quoting Tim Dearborn, *Beyond Duty: a passion for Christ, a heart for mission* (Monrovia: MARC, 1998).

[15] See Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009) for one example of the list of agreements from Roman Catholic perspective.

[16] The Greek ἵνα of John 17:21 and 23, translated as 'that' in '*that* the world may believe/know', need not be rendered only in an instrumental sense, as 'in order that' but also causally, as 'with the result that'. Jesus' prayer, therefore, is not just for unity with the purpose of belief and knowledge (by acquaintance), but unity with the result of belief and knowledge (by acquaintance). The curious notion that unity, which is sharing God's own life – 'I in you and you in me' as Jesus says to the Father – can be a mere means to an end would appear to be without gospel warrant.

[17] See the CTE website: https://cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_New_Framework/A_New_Framework.aspx (accessed 05/09/19).

[18] Paul Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda', in ed. Paul Murray, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 15.

[19] *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal*, An Agreed Statement of the Third Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC III), Erfurt 2017, Section III, §78.

[20] Sutton, *Gathering Momentum*.

[21] The final 12 towns were selected using a random generator system. This involved dividing the number of towns in the Northern Province by three, making three separate sections of seventeen in population size order. Using a random number generator, one town was chosen from each data section. Similarly, the towns in the Southern Province were divided into nine sections in population size order and one town selected from each by a random number generator. This meant that the 12 towns were part of the whole population spread and have a good index of multiple deprivation (IMD) spread in each province. The use of the random generator minimized the risk that towns would be selected on the basis of pre-existing knowledge of ecumenical work around the country.

[22] 'Marks of Mission'.

[23] 'Marks of Mission'.

[24] Anne Richards et al., *Foundations for Mission: A study of language, theology and praxis from the UK and Ireland perspective* (London: CTBI, 2010), p. 106.

[25] Ibid., p. 108-9.

[26] David Walker, 'Marks of Mission and ways of belonging: shaping the Anglican agenda for occasional churchgoers in the countryside', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol 9(1) 100-116, 101.

[27] Ibid.

[28] 'Marks of Mission'.

[29] This combination of questions made it possible to see not only the number of other churches, but if they had understood that we meant churches of other denominations. In instances where this was not the case, i.e., they named only adjacent Anglican churches, their responses have been re-coded accordingly.

[30] Nick Spencer, *Doing Good: A Future for Christianity in the 21st Century* (London: Theos, 2016).

[31] *Church in Action Report 2017*, p.15

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., p19.

[35] Mark Beach, *Revive Rugby - A New Ecumenism.*

[36] See e.g. Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission-Shaped Church*, p. 93; and General Synod of the Church of England, 'Report of the Task Force on Resourcing the Future of the Church of England', GS 1978, 2015, https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2139976/gs%201978%20-%20resourcing%20the%20future%20task%20group%20report.pdf , §§2, 4, 5, 24 and 46, which records theological discussion taking place around mission and growth, in particular what 'good growth' means in the context of mission (§11), while also acknowledging the restriction of information for its proposed assessment of 'mission strength' to numerical evidence (§17).

[37] Allen Nauss, (1972), 'Problems in Measuring Ministerial Effectiveness,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 11(2): pp.144-5.

[38] Robert Warren, *The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A process for revitalizing your church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2016), pp.16-17.

[39] Warren, *The Healthy Churches' Handbook*, p.16.

[40] *Church in Action Report 2017*, p.16.

Welcome to the Cooperation in Mission Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey. The Church of England's Council for Christian Unity is hugely grateful for your involvement in our research. This is part of a wider project on how cooperation between churches can support mission and what may be some of the challenges for this.
Thank you!

Church Information

* 1. From the following list which town is your church in or closest to?

○
○
○
○
○
○
○
○
○
○
○
○

* 2. What is the name of your Church?

[   ]

* 3. What is your postcode and / or address?

[   ]

Working with Other Churches

Thinking about all churches in your town, we are interested in what activities you have participated in together.

* 4. When you are organising activities for your church and wider community, do you work with other churches in your town?

◯ Always ◯ Usually ◯ Sometimes ◯ Rarely ◯ Never

5. Please name which churches you work with. Please include any other congregations that meet in your place of worship that you also work with:

☐

Missional Activities

These questions ask for more detail about the activities you do jointly with other churches.

* 6. Do you cooperate with non-Anglican churches "to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom" (mark 1 - five marks of Anglican mission)?

☐ Always ☐ Most of the time ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

☐ Never

* 7. Thinking about the above, which of these missional activities are you involved in alongside churches from other denominations?
Please tick all that apply to your church

And detail the partners for each project in the comment boxes below each activity:

	Our church is the lead church <u>running</u> this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church <u>supports/ contributes</u> to this activity run by another church	N/A
Public Act of Worship e.g. Good Friday Event, Carol Service, Pentecost in the Park	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Youth Outreach Evangelism	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Praying Together for Evangelism e.g. Thy Kingdom Come	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

An Evangelistic Event. please describe	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Lunchtime Evangelism Event	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Other - please describe below	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Missional Activities

These questions ask for more detail about the activities you do jointly with other churches.

* 8. Do you cooperate with non-Anglican churches "to teach, baptise and nurture new believers" (mark 2 - five marks of Anglican mission)?

☐ Always   ☐ Most of the time   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Rarely

☐ Never

* 9. Thinking about the above, which of these missional activities are you involved in alongside churches from other denominations?
Please tick all that apply to your church

And detail the partners for each project in the comment boxes below each activity:

	Our church is the lead church <u>running</u> this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church <u>supports/ contributes</u> to this activity run by another church	N/A
A Christianity Basics Course e.g. Alpha, Pilgrim, Emmaus, Christianity Explored	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Baptism, Confirmation Preparation	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Deepening Discipleship Activities	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Messy Church	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Church Leader Prayer for Mission Meeting	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Other - please describe below	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Missional Activities

These questions ask for more detail about the activities you do jointly with other churches.

* 10. Do you cooperate with non-Anglican churches "to respond to human need by loving service" (mark 3 - five marks of Anglican mission)?

☐ Always   ☐ Most of the time   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Rarely

☐ Never

* 11. Thinking about the above, which of these missional activities are you involved in alongside churches from other denominations?
Please tick all that apply to your church

And detail the partners for each project in the comment boxes below each activity:

	Our church is the lead church running this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church supports/ contributes to this activity run by another church	N/A
Counselling/Support e.g. debt counselling, relationship counselling, personal support	○	○	○
Please name the other churches involved in the project:			
Night Shelter or other Homeless Provision	○	○	○
Please name the other churches involved in the project:			
Food Bank	○	○	○
Please name the other churches involved in the project:			
Older People's Lunch Club or Befriending Scheme	○	○	○
Please name the other churches involved in the project:			
Street Pastors	○	○	○
Please name the other churches involved in the project:			

	Our church is the lead church running this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church supports/ contributes to this activity run by another church	N/A
Children and Youth Work (for wider community) e.g. holiday/breakfast/afterschools clubs, parent/care and toddler group, youth club	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Other - please describe below	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Missional Activities

These questions ask for more detail about the activities you do jointly with other churches.

* 12. Do you cooperate with non-Anglican churches "to seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation" (mark 4 - five marks of Anglican mission)?

☐ Always   ☐ Most of the time   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Rarely

☐ Never

* 13. Thinking about the above, which of these missional activities are you involved in alongside churches from other denominations?
Please tick all that apply to your church

And detail the partners for each project in the comment boxes below each activity:

	Our church is the lead church running this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church supports/ contributes to this activity run by another church	N/A
Charity Fundraising	◯	◯	◯

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Charity Information and Justice Seeking Organising Events	◯	◯	◯

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Host Political Hustings	◯	◯	◯

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Public Meetings on Local Issues	◯	◯	◯

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Other - please describe below	◯	◯	◯

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Missional Activities

These questions ask for more detail about the activities you do jointly with other churches.

* 14. Do you cooperate with non-Anglican churches " to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth " (mark 5 - five marks of Anglican mission)?

☐ Always   ☐ Most of the time   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Rarely

☐ Never

* 15. Thinking about the above, which of these missional activities are you involved in alongside churches from other denominations?
Please tick all that apply to your church

And detail the partners for each project in the comment boxes below each activity:

	Our church is the lead church running this activity in a partnership with other churches	Our church supports/ contributes to this activity run by another church	N/A
Community Gardening/Vegetable Patch	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Community Transformation Projects e.g. local litter projects	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Engaging Local Schools on the Environment	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Charity Fundraising	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Public Meetings on Local Issues	○	○	○

Please name the other churches involved in the project:

Other - please describe below	○	○	○

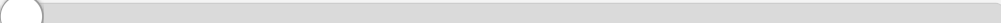Please name the other churches involved in the project:

How Effective is Mission in Cooperation?

Based on the examples you have described how effective are your missional practices when working with other churches?
Please answer the questions below, showing the scale of success your missional activities have when done in cooperation with others in comparison to as those you may do alone:
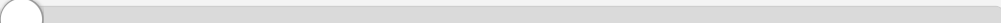
* 16. Based on the activities you have described how effective are these joint activities as mission?

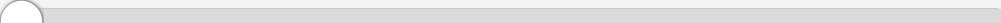| Less Effective	No change	More Effective	

* 17. Based on the events you have described how effective are these missional activities at engaging people from your church to partipate?

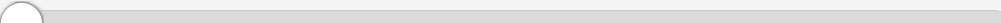| Less Effective	No change	More Effective	

* 18. Based on the activities you have described how effective are these missional activities at engaging people from outside your church to partipate?

Less Effective	No change	More Effective	

* 19. Based on the activities you have described how effective would you say working with other churches is for your church's mission?

Less Effective	No change	More Effective	

* 20. What impact/effect has working with other churches had on your mission?

* 21. Why do you think this?

* 22. Why do you believe these other churches work with you?

* 23. Do leaders of other churches support you in your church's mission?

◯ Yes ◯ Yes if also their mission ◯ Usually ◯ Occasionally ◯ No

Comment

[   ]

Why Cooperate in Mission?

* 24. Why do you or do you not work with other churches for mission?

[   ]

* 25. How important do you believe it is to work with other churches?

◯ Extremely ◯ Very ◯ Somewhat ◯ Not so ◯ Not at all

Please explain your answer

[   ]

In Missional Practice

* 26. Do you use resources produced by Churches Together in England?

◯ Yes

◯ No

27. Please specify which resources:

[   ]

* 28. Do you use resources produced by Hope Together?

◯ Yes

◯ No

29. Please specify which resources:

[   ]

* 30. Do you use resources produced by Thy Kingdom Come?

◯ Yes

◯ No

31. Please specify which resources:

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* 32. Do you use resources produced by any other church networks?

◯ Yes

◯ No

33. Please specify which networks and resources:

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* 34. Are you part of any networks national or local, where churches meet together?

◯ Yes

◯ No

35. Please specify which networks:

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Further Information

* 36. Are you:

◯ An ordained member of the Church of England clergy?

◯ A lay person?

◯ Other (please specify)

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* 37. What is your role in the church?

○ Vicar or priest in charge

○ PCC

○ Church Warden

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

Future of the Project

* 38. We plan to produce a short summary report about this project would you like to receive a copy?

○ Yes

○ No

* 39. We would like to follow up with a few people are you happy to be involved?

○ Yes

○ No

40. If either answer above was a yes please add email address:

[   ]

End of Survey

Thank you so much for completing our survey!
Best wishes,
The Council for Christian Unity

The Phase I survey is very broad and covers a number of different areas related to Cooperation in Mission. It will therefore be necessary to narrow down the focus for the Phase II interview questions. Although there are many areas from the survey which could be further explored, I think focusing on the following four topics will maintain a balance between the three areas of the research question (How extensive is cooperation in mission? Is there a characteristic pattern to cooperation in mission? What helps cooperation in mission work well?):

1. Participants' understanding of mission in the life of their church
   a. What do they understand their church's mission to be? As a Christian church? As an Anglican church?
   b. Do they think about the Five Marks of Mission?
   c. What proportion of their missional activities do they do in cooperation with churches of other denominations? What proportion do they do alone?
   d. Do they engage more in a particular Mark of Mission in cooperation with churches of other denominations? What would have to change for them to work more on other Marks?
   e. What motivates them to cooperate with churches of other denominations? What prevents them from doing it more? (Theological differences? Practicalities? Relationships/personality clashes? Prayer & worship style differences?)
   f. What effect/impact do they hope for? (conversion? New church members? Showing a 'united' church to the world? Building relationships with leadership/congregations of neighbor churches? Working towards the unity of the Body of Christ?)

2. The missional activity that their parish has cooperated with churches of other denominations on that they felt was most encouraging or fruitful
   a. (Facts about the missional activity) Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
   b. How do you see it in relation to the five marks of mission?
   c. (What is the relationship like?) What is good about working together? What is less good about working together?
   d. What challenges and opportunities have there been?
   e. How effective was the missional activity? What would have to change for it to have been more effective?

3. The missional activity that their parish has cooperated with churches of other denominations on that they felt was most challenging or difficult
   a. (Facts about the missional activity) Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
   b. How do you see it in relation to the five marks of mission?
   c. (What is the relationship like?) What is good about working together? What is less good about working together?
   d. What challenges and opportunities have there been?
   e. How effective was the missional activity? What would have to change for it to have been more effective?

4. **(With ecumenical project partner)** The missional activity the Anglican parish cooperates on with the ecumenical project partner invited to the interview
   a. (Facts about the project) Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
   b. How do you see it in relation to the five marks of mission?
   c. (What is the relationship like?) What is good about working together? What is less good about working together?
   d. What challenges and opportunities have there been?
   e. How effective was the missional activity? What would have to change for it to be more effective?

I will ask the interviewees in advance to identify for discussion in the interview one of the 'most encouraging or fruitful' projects they have cooperated on with churches of other denominations, and one of the 'most challenging or difficult'.

I will use the above four topics as a guide to the conversation, rather a regimented questionnaire. If the project the ecumenical partner invited to join the interview is involved in is also one of the other projects being discussed, I can change the order of the questions or shorten the interview accordingly.