

# Dwelling in the World with People of Peace

## Missional Discipleship within the *Missio Dei*

### NICK LADD

Nick Ladd has been an Anglican minister for 37 years, during which time he has served in six parishes of very different social makeup. For eight years he was Director of Ministry, Formation and Practical Theology at St John's College, Nottingham, and has also spent time overseeing the training and support of curates for Birmingham diocese. At present, he serves with his wife in a parish in Birmingham and works freelance, supporting churches in their missional development, teaching, researching, and offering spiritual accompaniment to clergy. He has recently submitted a doctorate on Christian community formation and maturity. Contact: [nick.ladd57@gmail.com](mailto:nick.ladd57@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

DWELLING IN THE WORLD is a practice designed to help churches to form a public shared identity in the mission of God with people in their wider communities who want to work with them—their “people of peace”. Grounded in the *missio Dei*, this practice offers a concrete example of missional discipleship. How does this work in practice? And what happens between church members and their

people of peace? Based on research conducted in 2020, this article presents that research and its findings, paying close attention to the lived experience of those involved. It argues that an exchange takes place which is relational rather than transactional where the partners are drawn together into the life of God as they join together in God's mission. This is a disturbing and transforming public journey, which decentres discipleship from the private, individualised world of church and, by means of attention to the "other," re-centres it in God and God's agency in mission. Therefore the outcome may be appropriately named as missional discipleship.

## INTRODUCTION

At the International Research Consortium (IRC)<sup>1</sup> in Wellington, South Africa, in June 2019, I was asked to conduct research on the practice of "Dwelling in the World" (hereafter DitW). This practice is one of six "faithful disruptive" missional practices of the *Partnership for Missional Church Process* (hereafter PMC).<sup>2</sup> It involves congregational members forming public relationships, on behalf of their church with "people of peace," who they connect with in their wider community. PMC is a three-year journey of spiritual discovery for clusters of congregations who learn together. It began in

1. The IRC is an invitation-only annual international conference that has been running since 2004 which aims to offer a theologically rigorous approach to inter-disciplinary research on the practice of mission in the local church. Academics and practitioners are invited to present their research and reflections on missional practice in an atmosphere of positive critique and mutual learning. Specifically, but not exclusively, it has been where research and evaluation of the Partnership for Missional Church process has been shared. Some of the members are also founders of this journal and their institutions have sponsored the journal. No financial transactions were involved in enabling this research.

2. The others are (Rooms and Keifert, 2014):
  - Dwelling in the Word
  - Corporate Spiritual Discernment (and a personal version of this)
  - Hospitality
  - Announcing the Kingdom
  - Focus for Missional Action

North America in the 1980s and 1990s through the *Church Innovations Institute* and has become established elsewhere—notably in South Africa and the UK (Church Innovations Institute, 2021). In the UK, the Church Mission Society partners with Church Innovations to offer the process to local churches. This research took place in participating churches from four Anglican Dioceses across the country.

PMC, as a relatively long-term process of missional accompaniment, enables Christian congregations to form partnerships with their wider communities within the mission of God—forming a public and communal Christian identity in ways appropriate to the pluralist context of a post-Christendom world (Keifert, 2006; Rooms and Keifert, 2014). It does this through inculcating communal spiritual practices, one of which, DitW, involves engaging in one-to-one conversations with people in the wider community who are perceived as people of peace—people who share something of the church’s values and aspirations and may then become partners in a shared missional experiment (Rooms and Keifert, 2014: 20–24). The early formation of this practice drew on the one-to-one methodology found in *Community Organising* (Alinsky, 1971). This was revisited in the UK from 2012 through connection with *Citizens UK* (Citizens UK, 2021) in Nottingham.

The data in this research points to a re-drawing of the parameters of discipleship within the mission of God—a concrete example of what the *missio Dei* looks like in practice.

### People of Peace as a missional concept within the “*missio Dei*”

In PMC, the attention to people of peace arises from one of the six spiritual practices; Dwelling in the Word with Luke 10.1-12 over a period of up to a year. Dwelling in the Word is a practice of attending to the voice of God through Scripture in community. People listen in pairs to what each other hears in the passage and then give voice to what their partner says to another pair or to the others in the group. The group then reflect together on what they

are hearing from the passage through each other. Dwelling in this passage led to the idea of seeking people of peace to partner with God in mission. Grounded in the *missio Dei*, the idea that God is already at work in the person of peace leads to a mutual recognition which is expressed in the verse, “And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person” (Lk. 10.6). Literally the first part of the verse reads, “If there, there is a son of peace” and thus arises the concept of the “person of peace.” Dwelling in the Word is thus an embodiment of the *missio Dei* and leads to the focus of this research: does this exchange actually happen in practice? What is happening when peace is exchanged and it rests on another who *already* shares in it?

The concept of people of peace does not have a wide usage elsewhere in missional practice. Where it does, it is employed in substantially different ways to PMC.

Some Church planters use this methodology, seeing people of peace as those chosen by God to be receptive; they are people of influence who act as a bridge to the community. Furthermore, a person of peace cannot be a person of faith as they are by definition someone who is “lost” (Matthews, 2019: 188–191). The Church planter’s task then is to form relationship with persons of peace in their own world and await opportunities to bring the lost to faith (Breen, 2010). Their strategy is to seek out receptive and responsive people of reputation and influence in a community (Baumgartner, 2011: 398–400).

Matthews is critical of this person of peace approach both in terms of the indeterminacy of waiting for a response and the prescription to move on when there is none. Moreover, he is uneasy about the propensity to seek people of influence and forget the poor and the outcast. The potential down-grading of education, community development and medical care is also a concern (2019: 191–197).<sup>3</sup>

3. Matthews also has an exegetical critique of using Luke 10 as a mission strategy. However, as the task at this point is to explain rather than defend the approach to people of peace in PMC, I will not be addressing this aspect of his critique.

PMC configures the approach to people of peace differently. First, DitW sees the encounter with a person of peace as a *mutual* exchange in which both bring something to a potential missional partnership—“partners in God’s mission NOT objects of ministry”(PMC UK, 2019: 4). This creates a relationship in which there is an intersubjective discovery of embodied knowledge rather than a one-way evangelistic transaction (Yong, 2007: 60).<sup>4</sup> This decentres the church as the bringer of hospitality in a practice that is grounded in the hospitality of God (Yong, 2007: 62). This seems appropriate for a pluralist context (Suurmond, 1994: 198–203); evidence is that this practice gives Church members a way to express faith publicly with integrity. Because this is a partnership in mutually discerned action, the need to wait passively for response from the person of peace is removed as is the temptation to manipulate them to reach this point. This is a further connection to the *missio Dei*: the reception is the discernment.

Second, rather than being a strategy driven by the practitioner, DitW encourages a practice of listening and discernment of the presence and activity of God. The aim is to be led by the Spirit to shared action in God’s mission, to experiment together and then reflect together on what is done. To move on where no shared connection is discovered is not then abandoning the strategy or failing to persevere; rather it is the recognition of the need to respond to a God-given moment where our “peace rests” on another (Lk. 10.6).

Both of these perspectives are grounded in PMC’s commitment to the *missio Dei*—mission as participation in the mission of the Triune God; an approach which adds to the classic doctrine “another ‘movement’: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world” (Bosch, 1997: 390). It is perhaps unsurprising that a concept such as the *missio Dei* that has been embraced so widely has many faces—from those that are deeply rooted in Trinitarian theology to others which offer a secularized vision of mission or one where the “ecclesial nature of mission might be seen as trivial or unnecessary” (Bevans and Schroeder, 2004: 304).

4. See also Barrett, 2020; and Barrett and Harley, 2020.

PMC draws from the *missio Dei* the formative conviction that God is already present and active in God's world. This does indeed decentre the Church's agency in mission. Resisting colonising approaches, DitW proceeds with the assumption that God is at work in people of peace, who will have something to bring to the missional partnership, making this a transformative spiritual journey for all involved.

However, the vision of mission remains ecclesial and Christological, as can be seen by the choice of Scriptures for communal reflection via Dwelling in the Word in the three-year process.

- Year 1: Luke 10.1-12 focuses the congregation's listening and discovering of partners on Jesus' sending of the disciples.
- Year 2: 2 Corinthians 4.1-12 grounds the missional experimenting in the death and resurrection of Christ.
- Year 3: Acts 6.1-7 positions the congregation's discernment of its missional vocation in the struggle of ecclesial formation.

In seeking people of peace, PMC places spiritual transformation in Christ at the heart of the missional journey. However, it removes the control of that journey from the hands of the church and trusts that God is nevertheless at work in ways that will be transformational for all partners in the relationship. In biblical terms, this can be seen in the way that both Peter and Cornelius are transformed by their encounter in Acts 10—a transformation that is the initiative of God throughout.

Over time, this practice has a profound impact on the way people perceive and express their discipleship, specifically enabling them to lay down a privatised approach based around the perpetuation of their own congregation and set sail on a more public journey with unfamiliar others, centred on the mission of God.

## **METHODOLOGY, DEMOGRAPHICS AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

### The Research Question

To enable the research to be grounded in lived experience, the decision was taken to focus on the story of what took place in the relationships between the interviewees and their people of peace. The focus was on the interviewees' experience, which we have first-hand. What we know of the partners is only through the interviewees' reporting.

The research question was shaped in two parts:

What is the exchange that goes on when our "peace" rests on another?

How are people formed and changed by this practice? Specifically in:

- Relationships with others
- Relationship with God
- Understanding and practice of discipleship
- Vision of mission and the gospel

### Methodology

The research project worked with the methodological assumption that learning happens as people reflect on their experience and articulate that reflection. Furthermore, this learning is best arrived at not by direct question but through encouraging people to tell their stories and then reflect on them. So it uses a semi-structured interview approach developed for the listening exercises in the Congregational Discovery interviews in the first year of PMC (PMC-UK, 2018). But in addition to facilitating story-telling, the interview guide of five questions was designed to encourage reflection on the

experiences that interviewees described. In the same document, research ethics protocols for the interviewers were articulated.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst recognising the reflexive component in all such research, the desire was to honour the voices of the interviewees as fully as possible and ensure that they were recorded well. Interviewers summarised the interviewees' responses to each question, using the interviewees' words, and then checked their summary of the interviewees answers, either question by question at the time of the interview or by providing the interviewees with a draft of the transcript to comment upon. The agreed summaries were then sent to me.<sup>6</sup>

The approach of this research is akin to appreciative enquiry. The positive nature of the picture presented here is due to the fact that the purpose was to understand church members' experiences of people of peace and how this experience had shaped and formed them. However, one question did focus on obstacles and constraints; the purpose of this was to give the opportunity for interviewees to talk about the discomfort and disruption of the missional journey. However, there is a more complex and conflictual account to be written about how churches journey with missional transformation in PMC, something that I have done in my recently completed doctoral research (Ladd 2021).

## Demographics

14 interviews were conducted in the UK across four Anglican dioceses between 25th February and 27th April, 2020. The four dioceses chosen were Durham, Leicester, Southwell & Nottingham and Oxford, each of which has been involved with PMC for at least two 3-year missional journeys and in most cases for more than this. Such a time-frame is realistic for assessing the embedding of new practices.<sup>7</sup>

5. Interview guide and research ethics protocols available on request.

6. I completed 2 of the interviews myself; the other 12 were carried out by 4 other interviewers.

7. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others on Skype due



A cross-section of people was interviewed in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, reflecting the make-up of the congregations. Those interviewed had been involved with DitW as one of the PMC spiritual practices for between three and eight years.

The interview base also represented a wide cross-section of roles within the church: one clergy, a number with a range of leadership roles, some with no role and some with roles that they had taken on through the PMC process.<sup>8</sup>

### Analytical approach

Each of the five questions were analysed in turn involving:

- Numerical grouping of the data
- Stories and quotations to give a more embodied sense
- My reflective comments and questions

### *Numerical*

I employed a content analysis approach to the data. This revealed a lot of common themes, which led me to conclude that it would be valuable to group the themes numerically according to frequency of occurrence. This was not statistical sampling, but grouping the data revealed the recurrence of certain experiences and the importance of certain themes across the data.

### *Stories*

Though there was much overlap of themes, the stories that illustrated them were diverse. Therefore, alongside the numerical grouping, I included quotes and stories of slightly fuller length, staying close to the language of the interviewees, to strengthen the

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to COVID-19 restrictions.

8. Full analysis of demographics available on request.

embodied flavour of the analysis. Because of the scale and nature of the project, it was neither possible nor desirable to adopt a grounded theory approach. However, the approach was still inductive with the aim of letting the interpretation arise from the interviewees' narratives rather than trying to shed the narrative skin in the cause of theory-generation.

### *What did I notice?*

Once I had completed the above process with each question, I added a further section on what stood out to me immediately from the data. I felt it was important to allow some interpretation to arise before focusing more deliberately on the research question. In this way, I tried to include myself as researcher in the exploration—given my own experience both as researcher and practitioner in the PMC process in other contexts. It would be disingenuous to imagine that my experience was not at play here, but it can also be used to correlate this research with other research and experience of the process that I have.

In the next section, I will present the findings focusing on the first two stages of the analysis before continuing in the next section to correlate with my observations and to explore how this data answers the research question.

## **FINDINGS<sup>9</sup>**

### Question 1:

Tell a story about how you first met a “person of peace” and the journey to get there.

Reflect on: What encouraged this journey, gave it life? What constrained or was an obstacle in this journey?

9. Full findings available on request.

Some ran one-off “plunging” events to build relationships and conversation around a possible missional challenge. Others found the courage to talk to people that they already knew but with whom they had never had an in-depth public conversation. Others found that shop keepers, school teachers and members of groups in the community were interested in having conversations about shared interests and concerns.

The range of experiments that were developed was extremely broad. Here is one example of the discovery of a person of peace and what they did together:

I met someone with shared love of woodland and art: we created an art-based Act of Remembrance event; they are giving time freely, connecting church people and outsiders; they have become an occasional attender at church who offers honest feedback!

Encouragement came from the recognition of God’s prior involvement in their communities and the call to discern rather than create interest—this was a new way for them of responding to God. They met with responsiveness and hospitality and the mutual recognition of the value of doing things together. The wonder of the journey is captured here: “From not knowing a person to Dwelling in the Word with them in your own home.”

They valued the church’s prompting, owning and sustaining of this journey, but personal change was important too. Freed from “bashing people over the head with faith”—as one interviewee put it—they stepped into the public space; the PMC process built confidence and empowerment.

But there were constraints, too, like failures to deal with conflict in church and community alike. For example: “Church hospitality only goes so far . . . and there was frustration when the missional experiment impacted on church time and space in the building.”

There were personal constraints too; people spoke about the significant level of fear and uncertainty they felt about making first steps towards those in the community. They mentioned their own shyness and lack of confidence and uncertainty about being

received as a stranger. Most of all was the fear of their reception and wariness about approaching people; one person spent three weeks of anxious anticipation before summoning up the courage to speak to someone. She commented that she was not “a person who went out and talked about my faith a great deal.” Another spoke of realising that their faith existed in a private space and not “out in the street.”

## Question 2:

How would you describe a person of peace?

Reflect on: What experiences have shaped the way you see this?

Here are some of the ways they described their people of peace:

- Mutuality—purpose, connection, partnership and working together
- Shared values—care, love and respect
- Receptivity—people who see you and want to know you
- Desire for ongoing and growing relationship
- Make connections for you and the church in the community

When asked to reflect on the experiences that shaped this, most evident was the participation together in the missional experiment: “In our ‘bridge community’<sup>10</sup> I met new people who were people of peace—I just didn’t know them before—people who have energy and ideas and enthusiasm.”

People reflected on how they began to see God in their new partners and how the process helped to recognise that God was already at work in people in their wider community before they had reached out to them. There was genuine reciprocity; they discovered people who wanted to give something to them without

10. The “bridge community” is formed of members of the church and the community who work together on a missional experiment.

thought of gain. This subverted their habitual picture of discipleship as involving them in doing all the giving.

### Question 3:

Think of some of the “persons of peace” you have connected with; what did it mean to you and to them to “share in peace” together?

Reflect on: The Luke 10 passage says that if we meet a “person of peace” our peace “rests on them.” What has this looked like in your experience?

They described their experiments as shared spiritual journeys. By sharing in Dwelling in the Word from the beginning, the members of the “bridge community” learned to listen and receive from each other as they attended together to Scripture. Being open about faith meant that it was not seen as the church’s project but rather a journey of discernment to which all contributed. This led to a growing spiritual engagement for all: the Bible came to life in dialogue with the people of peace and they found themselves “living the story.”

People of peace moved from passive acceptance of prayer to an openness to the Spirit and began to make their own prayer requests. They were able to embrace partnering with Christians and shared a sense of God being in the journey. For some, the church became their church. Christians learnt from their people of peace and valued their reading of Scripture and discernment. They described this as “immersing yourself in God and trusting.”

This was a spiritual journey because it was a relational journey. The experience of God was mediated by mutuality and sharing of life described in question 2. Here they mention again: support, relationship, sharing gifts and acting together.

In terms of Luke 10, for those who “go,” their courage was rewarded by discovering people who welcomed them, showed hospitality and wanted to work with them in fulfilling their aims; they saw this as “peace resting.” Those who “received” discovered

they had something to give that was wanted and began sharing in a relationship that made faith accessible. They in turn became people who brought others to share in what the “bridge community” was doing. Together they went on a journey from suspicion to trust, participating in a corporate discernment of God at work.

#### Question 4:

Tell a story of how a “person of peace” became a “partner” in mission.

Reflect on: How did you know when someone became you partner? What happened between you? What helped it to happen?

PMC uses the word “partner” to describe a person of peace who becomes someone who shares fully in the missional experiment. The easiest way to illustrate this is with a story:

We met C. She seemed very enthusiastic and I was not surprised when she said, “I want to join your team.” We run a fortnightly drop-in for people as a mental health support and she is a partner in that. We have had to switch this to Facebook (COVID-19) and she is running this. Because she has suffered in mental health herself and in her family, we listen to her and look to her for guidance; we are learning from her. We could not have done this without her, she is the voice we needed to listen to. That’s why it feels like a partnership—it’s a two-way thing; not just the church, it’s theirs as well.

The fundamental mark of partnership to them was where people began to take initiative and responsibility in the missional experiment, because they had connected with the shared agenda and values. This meant that they were actively involved in shaping the experiment. A further mark was that they were able to integrate other community groups and people into the journey.

Partnership happened because they took time building relationships especially with *Dwelling in the Word*. Honouring the

other's culture, being real and learning to listen, whilst receiving their hospitality; learning that God is calling their partners.

### Question 5:

Thinking about your whole experience of relating to people of peace, which words from this list best capture how this practice has enabled you to grow as a disciple of Christ? If none apply suggest your own words that express your growth through meeting people of peace.

*Prayer, worship, community involvement, evangelism, discernment, hospitality, Bible knowledge, listening, fellowship, awareness of God*

Tell a story about each word you have chosen.

Reflect on: How is your choice influenced by your experience with people of peace?

The heart of this research was to understand how this journey with people of peace had affected the interviewees' discipleship. As they responded to the words, they told stories substantially through the lens of partnership:

- Listening to others who were different or not usually listened to who challenged them and shaped their learning
- Prayer—expressing active dependence on partnership with the God who had gone before them
- Community involvement—enabling participation in the mission of God with partners in the public space
- Hospitality in which relationships were formed, possibilities emerged, stretching them beyond their past approaches to being missional; changed mindset
- “People of peace changed our awareness of God in everything”

With more “traditional” words like the Bible and fellowship, their comments showed the influence of their journeys with people

of peace. They focused on transformational encounter rather than developing biblical knowledge. They reflected on how God used surprising people in the Bible—like Rahab—and that they had learned much from their people of peace reflecting on Scripture. On fellowship, they moved away from the closed language of the “family,” speaking about how the other who is different is truly welcomed in.

## **INTERPRETATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

### Introduction

The use of the concept “exchange” owes something to social exchange theory whose roots lie in behavioural psychology. Here, I want to side-step the more instrumental language of profit and loss and focus on the way this theory attends to interpersonal relationships—what it might mean to “love and be loved in return.” A further step proposes that “outcomes for the two participants are *jointly* determined by their actions” (Hogg and Vaughan, 2008: 501). How do people give and receive as “persons of peace,” what makes them decide to make this mutual “investment” and how is each changed in the process?

### What is the exchange?

The interviewees were not used to forming a public identity as a church in the community. They noted the private nature of their faith and were candid about the fears and anxieties they experienced at the thought of taking such steps. This experience is mirrored strongly in my research of this process in other contexts (Ladd, 2021). Taylor’s concept of the “buffered self” conceptualises this experience. In contrasting this with the “porosity” characteristic of earlier ages, he argues that the “buffered self” is a boundaried



and autonomous self, grounded in disengagement; a mind-centred personhood, which is self-referential (1989: 25–54). Such “disengagement” may not be “hospitable to a sense of community” (Taylor, 1989: 42). Living in such a privatised and individualised culture, means that steps towards the other in the public space are fraught with anxiety and uncertainty and need to be handled with care (Rooms, 2019: 16).

Though this research focuses on the positive experiences of partnering with people of peace, full weight should be given to their honesty about the struggles with this, recorded in their answers to question 1. “Talking about God in practice” is a complex and unnerving experience in contemporary western culture (Cameron et al, 2010: 7–17). Longer-term research on these practices reveals just how difficult this is in a post-Christendom context (Ladd, 2021).

However, the energy with which they tell their story of journeying outwards suggests that the desire to do this eventually overcame their fear. Whilst the PMC process and DitW provided the vehicle to carry them forward, the energising power came from God—something they increasingly grasped (1 Cor. 12.4-6).

What they experienced was mutuality borne of a deep sense of connection with their people of peace through the discovery of shared values and desire for community transformation. At the deepest level, it was about forming a relationship—being known and valued, “They see you, they want to see you, want to know you. They don’t talk over you; they allow you to speak and listen to you.”

It was a two-way exchange in which both parties gave and received. The interviewees discovered people who wanted to work with them and who grew to value them. The people of peace discovered ways to be involved and use their gifts in ways that transformed their communities. Both interviewees and people of peace saw the work they did together as genuine partnership. This was a profoundly relational journey described as a movement from neighbors to friends. But it is a different kind of friendship to that which we normally look for in life and in church. They were seeking a language to describe the growing of relationship not in the

private world of family but in the public space of the community, “Really connecting—becoming friends who have similar objectives: not necessarily people to invite home for a meal or go on holiday with—but much more than just acquaintances.”

Is this simply an experience of sociality? Or are the partners being drawn into the life of God together? What I have described so far is a very human connection; but in our incarnational faith, the human mediates the divine (Jn 1.14; 2 Cor. 1.3-4; 1 Jn 4.7-12). Indeed, it was the commitment to the relational journey that made the journey with God possible as they shared life together. And there was real awareness of a spiritual journey. The interviewees did not disguise their faith, but were transparent about it through encouraging the shared practice of Dwelling in the Word (2 Cor. 4:2-3). But they did not approach this as a one-sided transaction, but learned to be genuinely open to the spiritual insights and discernment of their partners. Their partners in turn also saw this as a journey of spiritual discovery and some drew closer to the community of the church.

It was engaging with the spiritual practices—DitW, Dwelling in the Word and hospitality—that enabled these public communities of faith to develop. A further practice—Announcing the Kingdom—is evident in the way the interviewees talk about and reflect on their experience; this is the practice that encourages church and community members to notice and name the presence of God in each other’s lives. So, what is happening here may be understood more as an exchange of God, or an exchange within God. When Christians let go of the assumption that they are called to manage the process of bringing others to faith, they may be drawn into the flow of the mission of the Trinity and become participants, along with their partners, in the mutual indwelling love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Jn 17.20-26). The miracle of ordinary human relationships being caught up into this divine conversation is perhaps the root of the awe and amazement that can be seen as they share their story.

## How were people formed and changed by this practice?

The questions were designed to focus on understanding what happened to people's relationship with God and with others through sharing life with people of peace. However, the interviews also generated comments on the relationship with the church and with the self.

The word "God" appears at least as much as the word "church" in the data. For those who have worked on missional accompaniment with Anglican Churches, and probably most churches, this is something that has significance in understanding the interviewees' journeys with God.

Instead of being a passive receiver of their worship, God became active, an agent and leading partner in the missional process. God prompted and called them to this. God's leading challenged their busyness and control. God was already present an active in the wider community, so their call was to discern what God was doing and to be intentional about and alert for "God moments."

This new experience of God was mediated to them through the experience of people of peace. They saw God in people of peace in their actions and words. They saw God in the spiritual journeys that they took. They discerned together with people of peace. They saw God in the way people of peace brought in others—continuing the Luke 10 journey. They met God as they did Dwelling in the Word with people of peace, learning to receive insight from unexpected people.

Not only were relationships with people of peace central to this journey, but those relationships were also changed by this experience.

First, they learnt to see the "other" outside the church not simply as a focus for mission but as a partner and a gift of God's presence and activity. If God was to be found active in the wider community, then Christianity could not be a private thing that they invited people into. Instead it was a vulnerable relationship in which they depended upon the hospitality and welcome of the other as well as offering hospitality themselves.

Moreover, they learned that relationships were an end in themselves and not an instrumental tool for making disciples. And therefore that it was in long-term growing relationships that God was encountered in the mutual giving and receiving of missional experimenting.

The church played an important role in sponsoring and supporting the process but did not handle well the conflict that arose through the changes that the missional experimenting wrought—often leaving the interviewees feeling like “piggy-in-the-middle” between two groups. Though the interviewees found that the partnerships changed them from wariness and anxiety to confidence and empowerment, the same is not true of the church as a whole. Individuals were changed by the experience of partnership, but the church community as a whole was not experiencing the same journey. The implication therefore is that there is a journey of maturation for communities as much as for individuals, which is easily lost in an individualised culture.<sup>11</sup>

### What happened to their understanding and practice of discipleship and mission?

When I constructed the final question, I chose five words (prayer, worship, Bible knowledge, fellowship and evangelism) which I felt encapsulated traditional understandings or practices of Christian discipleship and five (listening, discernment, awareness of God, hospitality and community involvement) which I felt reflected PMC discipleship practices.

Of their top four choices, three were from my “PMC” group; the fourth, prayer, could be argued as a PMC priority and people certainly gave it a missional shape. Of the other four, two were from my “PMC” group and two from the other. All were read through the lens of partnership with people of peace.<sup>12</sup>

11. This is the focus of my recently-submitted doctoral thesis; something that I will write more about in due course.

12. See the summary in Question 5.

In Christendom mode, though the forms may vary, the focus of discipleship is on drawing people into church and developing their understanding of the faith and their socialisation within the Christian community. The focus is on the personal formation of the individual centred on the church community. In the process, people speak of losing touch with their “non-Christian” friends and the task then becomes an uncomfortable and unnatural one of going “out there” to bring people “in here.”

The data shows how discipleship was formed less around the individual’s agenda and more in relationship to the “other.” The primary “other” in this was God and therefore discipleship became a way of life which took God as agent seriously and in particular his prior presence and action in the wider community.

But the focus was also on the human other—proximate and distant—placing the wider community as the locus of discipleship, because this was where the God of mission was to be found. Their discipleship was shaped in the crucible of relationship with others in the community, through shared practices—people who became their partners within God’s mission.

This mutuality of partnership in mission meant that they viewed the communication of the faith differently. They were not trying to provide something that was absent (although they recognised that they did have things to share that could add to people’s apprehension of God), rather they approached others with respect and with the knowledge that it was God who was at work and that their task was to notice and name God’s activity. Moreover, their partners were deeply involved in bringing others into the orbit of the missional challenge; in terms of Luke 10, those who received peace became also the givers of peace to others.

## **CONCLUSION — MISSIONAL DISCIPLESHIP**

The use of the language of “exchange” to speak about the interviewee’s journeys with people of peace draws attention to the mutuality of the relationship and what each gains from the other in the formation of these relationships. Seeking people of peace

was a way of forming relationship in the public space in which a journey together with God could happen which worked in their communities.

Because of the mutuality of the relationship, it was not a matter of one seeking to implant their truth in the other, but rather forming a kind of “third space” in which people formed knowledge together with genuine openness to the other (Irigaray, 2000: 51, 62–67). These relationships were not only with the human “other,” but with the otherness of God who was mediated through this complex of relationships—seeing God through the impact of one person upon the other (1 Jn 4.12), rather like the unseen wind of the Spirit of which Jesus speaks in John 3.5-8. In this case, both partners may be experiencing re-birth as they are drawn together into the mission of God.

The relationships with people of peace generated what might be described as missional discipleship in which the ecclesiology of the interviewees was redrawn with its centre in the mission of God.

Along with the parish council, we brought a bus-based youth ministry to the village. One [young person] said to me, “This is fantastic! Why can’t we do it every night?” I told him of the cost and that other people were paying. He replied, “Why don’t you sell the church building so you would have money to do this for us?”

His question had a profound impact on me. We need lots of money to fund a building where a relatively small, aging group come to worship. But this effective mission activity was only funded up to a small level. Does the church generate money for mission, or absorb money that could have gone to mission?

We are protective of our domain, this becomes our focus; it becomes a reason not to do stuff. The bus work started with 6 young people and grew to 30, but it was not about numbers, it was about engagement. A penetration into unreached areas of the community on God’s terms.

Through working with people of peace, this interviewee sees the church, discipleship and mission differently. Through sharing

spiritual practices—Dwelling in the Word, DitW, Hospitality, Discernment, Announcing the Kingdom—in the public space, the focus of discipleship has gradually shifted from the church to the mission of God. The challenge then is how to lead the whole church community on the same journey.

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