THE PALACE AND THE PARISH:
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S APPROACH TO INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH MUSLIMS NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY, 2005-2021

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the character of the established Church of England's engagement with Islam from 2005 to 2021. It contends that there is a dual method which can be understood on the levels of the national and the local. With a view to the national, the year 2005 marked the Church of England's founding of Presence and Engagement, a programme whose remit is "to think about the reality of religious diversity and how it might shape mission and ministry." There are five core Presence and Engagement reports spanning 2005 to 2017 which are analysed alongside their concomitant General Synod debates. The Church of England's approach to interreligious engagement with Islam on a national level is a process of inward-facing dialogue, wherein the Church of England's chief concern is how its own identity *qua* national church is affected by the growth of Islam in England. As such, the Presence and Engagement reports are analysed as documentary evidence of the Church of England's emerging subjecthood as it encounters an increasingly multireligious England. The discussion of the national level forms Part 1 of this dissertation. Part 2 of this dissertation considers the local level through a case study of the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham. The case study is based on ethnographic interviews with parish priests and other central Anglican figures, conducted in 2020 through 2021. It finds that the local church participates in outward-facing interreligious dialogue with Muslim individuals and communities through diverse activities in everyday life, challenging the notion of dialogue as formal. While the national and the local levels have differing priorities, they share a common vocabulary, e.g., hospitality, witness, and love, and the central motif of the parochial system. This vocabulary is used by actors across the Church to understand how they should engage with Muslims.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GS: The General Synod of the Church of England

P&E: The 'Presence and Engagement' Programme and Task Groups

Reports, following the filing conventions of GS

GS 1577: *Presence and Engagement*, a 2005 report by P&E

GS 1720: *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully*, a 2009 report by P&E

GS Misc 956: *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, a 2010 special report

GS 1838: *Generous Love for All*, a 2011 report by P&E

GS 2063: *The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society*, a 2017 report by P&E

What in this [multireligious] context, is the distinctive call of God to us as the Established church of this land?...above all, we hope that confidence in God will grow as we gain deeper insights into the distinctive contribution the Church of England has to make to these communities of faith with whom we now share our national life…

- Presence and Engagement national report (Church of England 2005, 3)

I think that's one of the tensions of being in the national Church. There are *national* institutions that undertake great pieces of work *nationally* and publish *national* papers. But that's looking through the window the wrong way. I want to look at interfaith through the window of [my parish], not through the window of Westminster or Lambeth.

- Kenneth, parish priest in Birmingham

INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of the Topic of this Dissertation

At the beginning of this doctorate, I set out to study Christian-Muslim relations in the United Kingdom, broadly conceived. My master's dissertation involved fieldwork in Aberdeen researching a church and a mosque that shared a building. I found that each community had a unique perspective on the sharing relationship as informed by their respective theologies, social positionality, and aims. This piqued my interest in the sharing of space between Christians and Muslims. Now I wanted to pursue a bigger picture: What does it look like for Christians and Muslims to share neighbourhoods, cities, a nation?

In the process of finding my niche in this broad and rather ambitious question, it soon became apparent that the Church of England would appear at every turn. When I investigated Near Neighbours, an organization that convenes many interreligious events and, significantly, mediates funding from the government to local religious communities and local initiatives, I found that it was administered by the Church of England through the Church Urban Fund. The Christian Muslim Forum, which describes itself as "*the* leading national forum for Christian-Muslim engagement,"[1] was founded by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In Birmingham, the site of my case study, the presence of a full-time Anglican 'Director of Interfaith Relations' reporting to the Anglican bishop influenced the interreligious climate of the city. The literature on interreligious relations in the United Kingdom was replete with scholarship by Anglican priests and laypeople.

Over dinner in Lady Margaret Hall around this early stage in my doctorate, I found myself sat next to the college's chaplain — fittingly, himself a priest in the Church of England.

[1] "Homepage," Christian Muslim Forum, ChristianMuslimForum.org, accessed 13 December 2022. Unlike other sources which will be cited in-text, I will be using footnotes to cite webpages in order to provide the requisite details without unsightly interruptions in the body of the dissertation. URLs can be found in the bibliography.

Having completed a doctorate himself, he was eager to give advice. His words were prescient: "The one dissertation you will *never* write is the one which you set out to write." Indeed, though I had intended to pursue an understanding of Christian-Muslim relations, I had not anticipated that my research would focus on the Church of England, or focus almost exclusively on the Christian half of the equation. Surely Christianity was dominant enough in public life and scholarship, I had thought. Surely Islam needs more attention if my research is going to skew more toward one religion. As I persisted, I found that my thinking was wrong on two counts. It overlooked the rich existing scholarship on Islam in the United Kingdom, some of which is shared later in this dissertation. It also failed to recognise that much of the scholarship on Christianity and interreligious relations in the United Kingdom, though equally rich, is oriented either historically or theologically. An anthropological and non-confessional analysis of the Church of England's place in Christian-Muslim relations could prove to be a unique contribution to scholarship — one that would participate in the growing sub-field of the anthropology of Christianity[2] as well as Religious Studies.

The final deciding factor was a visit to Lambeth Palace (commemorated as 'The Palace' in the title of this dissertation) in December 2019, where I met with the 'National Inter-Religious Affairs Advisor for the Church of England.' I admit to being impressed by the scale of the site: what other religious organization owns a *palace*?[3] An expert himself in Christian-Muslim relations, Canon Dr Richard Sudworth affirmed my hopes that an anthropological study of the Church of England's approach to interreligious relations would prove an asset.

[2] The development of an intentional anthropology of Christianity began to flourish in the early twenty-first century. One can see Harding 1991; Harding 1991;Harding 1991;Harding 1991; Robbins 2003; Cannell 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Hann 2007; Keane 2007; Engelke and Robbins 2010 for seminal reflections.Robbins 2003; Cannell 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Hann 2007; Keane 2007; Engelke and Robbins 2010 for seminal reflections. Robbins 2003; Cannell 2006; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006; Hann 2007; Keane 2007; Engelke and Robbins 2010 for seminal reflections.

[3] In fact, the Church of England has multiple palaces including Lambeth, Bishopthorpe, and the Bishop's Palace at Wells. Moreover, the royal palaces are not entirely unconnected to the Church, with the monarch being its Supreme Governor. I make a point of mentioning the impressiveness of Lambeth because it leads into a discussion, later down, about the significance of the sheer resources of the Church of England including land, finances, and personnel.

Having worked in Birmingham for many years, he also pointed me to the potential fruitfulness of the city as an area of focus. At that time, I had been considering Bradford, Leicester, and London in addition to Birmingham. His offer to put me in touch with the Birmingham diocesan interfaith advisor — a guaranteed first contact — helped me make my choice. Thus, my research topic was developed. 'Christian-Muslim relations' was narrowed to the Church of England's approach to building relations with Muslim communities and individuals. The United Kingdom as a geographical area was narrowed down to just England and Birmingham as a case study.

The Question Considered in this Dissertation

This dissertation examines a central research question: *What is the character of the established Church of England's engagement with Muslims and Islam?*[4] I have sought to answer this question in two ways: through an analysis of the Church's reports and a case study of the Diocese of Birmingham. The time frame that I consider is 2005-2021. The year 2005 marked the Church's establishment of Presence and Engagement, a task group whose remit is "to think about the reality of religious diversity and how it might shape mission and ministry."[5] There are five core Presence and Engagement reports spanning 2005 to 2017 which I analyse alongside their concomitant General Synod debates. My case study of the Diocese of Birmingham takes place from 2020 to 2021, as this is when I carried out my interviews.[6]

There are several considerations to note about this question. The first is that when I refer to the 'Church of England' it is always with a view to its status as the established church of the English nation. The meaning of an established church in a religiously diverse nation and the responsibilities this may entail toward other religions is a line of inquiry that runs throughout this thesis. It should also be noted that the Church's relationships with Muslim

[4] Hereafter I will often abbreviate 'the Church of England' to 'the Church.' When I refer to 'the Church' in a different sense, e.g., the Church universal, I will make it clear.
[5] "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023.
[6] I will explain my methodology in detail later in this Introduction.

communities cannot be separated from its approach to interreligious relations with other major religious traditions and communities. In its official remit, the task group Presence and Engagement concerns itself with interreligious relations in general rather than with any particular religion. In Birmingham, my interlocutors engaged in interreligious relations with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jews.[7] Finally, it is also worth noting that the 'local' in this thesis is represented by a case study of the Diocese of Birmingham while the 'national' refers to the level of the General Synod and the National Church Institutions, especially the Archbishops' Council.[8] These are symbolically summarised as 'the Palace' and 'the Parish' in the title of this dissertation. The contradistinction between these two levels is axiomatic in my argument and the structuring of this dissertation, as I will explain below.

It is also worth clarifying my choices of terminology. The phrase 'Muslims and Islam' in my research question is admittedly inelegant. However, I have maintained it to indicate the reality that at times the Church of England is engaging with Muslim communities and individuals, while at other times it is engaging with a reified idea of 'Islam.' Likewise, throughout this dissertation, I use the term 'interreligious dialogue' as well as 'interreligious relations' to refer to the Church of England's engagement with Muslims and Islam. I understand "dialogue" in a very broad sense, one that moves beyond formal dialogue groups and encompasses everyday interactions between Anglicans and Muslims. This is explained in much greater detail in the chapter "Varieties of Interreligious Experience."

Finally, where possible I have chosen to use the terminology of '(inter)religion' rather than '(inter)faith,' though the latter is the preference of the Church in the Presence and

[7] In recent years the Church has begun to talk about building relationships with people of all religions *and none.* The work being done on dialogue with people who do not identify as (institutionally) religious falls outside the remit of this thesis.

[8] General Synod is the Church of England's national legislative assembly. The National Church Institutions are administrative bodies that support the Church's operation.

Engagement reports.[9] The constructed category 'religion' is not without its theoretical issues and I am highly sympathetic to the body of literature in religious studies which interrogates the term 'religion' and its development as a category which deceptively presents as *sui generis* (Smith 1993; Lincoln 1996; Fitzgerald 1997; McCutcheon 1997; Masuzawa 2005; Aaron Hughes 2012; Cotter and Robertson 2016, to name representative works for just some of the seminal actors in the sub-field known as 'Critical Religion.') However, 'religion' at least encompasses a sense of practice, whereas 'faith' implies a focus on belief or creeds at the expense of embodied, ritual elements of religion, making it even more so tied to Protestant Christianity and its biases. In this case, then, I put aside my issues with the term 'religion' as it is the soundest option when considering the alternative of 'faith.'

The Significance of This Topic

The topic of the Church of England's approach to interreligious relations is significant because of the Church's unique role among the religious communities of England. The church-state settlement in England affords its Church the political advantages of twenty-six bishops in the House of Lords and the Monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church. [10] It also provides the institution with an enduring cultural influence, not least of which is the association of Anglicanism with belonging to the English identity, as the very name suggests. Such an association has consistently been encouraged by the Church; in his enthronement sermon as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1945, Geoffrey Fisher declared: "Church and nation have grown up together, and we see God's providence at work in both" (quoted in Grimley 2007, 904). As will become apparent in my discussions of the Church's reports on interreligious relations, this

[9]When I quote documents or my interlocutors, I do not change the terminology. Many of my interlocutors use the term 'interfaith.'

[10] I write 'political advantages' because some have argued that they pose theological disadvantages, including former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams—see Chapman 2010.Chapman 2010.Chapman 2010.Chapman 2010. The Anglican case for disestablishment, a decades-long discussion, has been advanced most recently in Chaplin 2022 Chaplin 2022 Chaplin 2022 Chaplin 2022. The issue of establishment will be taken up in the chapter 'Levels of Locality.'

attitude endures today. As identified by Chapman, Clarke, and Percy, "Anglicanism has continued to be associated with Englishness and the legacy of Empire, at least in the popular imagination" (2015, 6). That this cultural influence — the elision of Church and nation, or Anglicanism and Englishness — is incommensurate with the Church's membership is evidence of its ability to maintain power even without popular participation or assent.

The fact that the Church of England is responsible for administering government funding to other religious bodies in England via Near Neighbours has been highlighted by Melanie Prideaux, among other evidence, in advancing the argument that the Church of England *qua* established church has "shaped the nature of interreligious dialogue activity in England" (Prideaux 2020, 474). It is unsurprising that the Church of England should appear as central. No other singular religious body in England has the institutional unification and thus the concentrated power to set the conversation in the way that the Church of England does.[11] As of 2021, the Church of England's endowment sat at 10.1 billion pounds with an average annual return of 10.7% over the last ten years (The Church Commissioners for England 2022, 32). The manner in which the Church of England decides to allocate its thousands of buildings, and billions of pounds in assets and its political influence affects all other religious bodies, directly or indirectly. As such, this dissertation aims to provide a vantage point from which to analyse one of the major actors in England's (inter)religious life. Moreover, it aims to understand this actor not as it might wish to be understood institutionally, e.g., in reports from official spokespeople, as seen in the reports, but by capturing local experiences and then comparing these two realities.

[11] However, it should be noted that institutional unification – a contingent of Anglicans in a single body – does not equal unification of outlook. The internal diversity and even contradictory elements are apparent in the documents, as will be discussed in what comes.

Argumentation

I argue that the Church of England's approach to interreligious engagement with Islam takes place on two levels. The first level is the national church, which predominantly carries out inward-facing dialogue: its chief concern is how its own identity is affected by the presence and growth of other religions in England, especially Islam. The second is the local church, which participates in formal and informal interreligious dialogue as part of its everyday life. These two elements form the first part title of this dissertation, with 'the Palace' referring to Lambeth Palace as a symbol of the national, and the parish as a symbol of the local. While the national and the local levels have differing positionalities, priorities, and participants they do share a common vocabulary. The motifs of hospitality, neighbourliness, love, presence (often understood through the parochial system), and mission are used by figures across the Church to understand how they should engage with Muslims and people of other religions.

To clarify my assertion that the Church can be understood through two levels — the national and the local — it is necessary to account for its ecclesiology. The Church of England's spatial organization spans from the parish (e.g., St Giles') through the diocese (e.g., Oxford). It is in these and through these that the Church provides its care for others and carries out its ministries. The ideal is a priest for every parish and a bishop for each diocese, with each of these figures being accountable to other clergy, to the faithful, and in fact to all people of England. I argue that the parish and the diocese function as symbolic categories that encourage the enactment of theological ideals such as the universal presence of the Church ("a Christian presence in every community," as the Church of England's by-line states on their website). This is especially true of the parish, which is central to the local ministry of many of my interlocutors, and the use of the parish church building as a space where interreligious relations take place. The historical and theological significance of these various entities in the Church of England has not been lost within scholarship on the Church of England, especially the parish

(Pounds 2000; Inge 2003; Rumsey 2017; Robinson 2019; Lees-Smith 2021). It is this aspect of the Church — its church buildings, priests, and parishioners, its bishops and cathedrals — that I refer to as 'the local.' The Church's religious life is carried out in these places.

However, the Church of England is not simply the sum of its ecclesiastical layers and the participants therein. In addition to the above, there is a large administrative superstructure. This is the national level. It consists of seven units called the National Church Institutions (NCIs): the Archbishops' Council; Bishopthorpe Palace (the Archbishop of York's administration); the Church Commissioners; the Church of England Central Services; the Church of England Pensions Board; Lambeth Palace (the Archbishop of Canterbury's administration); and the National Society for Promoting Religious Education. It is the national level that organises the General Synod, the Church's national legislative body which meets tri-annually.[12] While the 'religious' life of the Church is the focus of most theological scholarship, the Church of England cannot be fully understood without reference to the administrative apparatus which has ultimate control over finances, human resources, legal, communications, and Church of England schools. Though the Church of England is technically governed by the General Synod, the NCIs have an influence that is rarely acknowledged. Indeed, the Archbishops' Council, just one of the NCIs, lists 'Governance' as one of its nine objectives: "To operate the national governance arrangements of the Church of England as cost-effectively as possible in pursuit of the Church's mission."[13]

Unlike a diocese or a parish, the administrative apparatus is not easily identifiable as being rooted in a given place. The 'national church' is not a bounded place in the manner of a parish; the majority of its offices are in London[14] but it is not coterminous with London. Rather, I argue, the level of the national church sees all of England — the nation both 'imagined' and

[12] As such, when participants from the local church leave their parishes and dioceses to come to General Synod, they are partaking in the national aspect of the church.
[13] "Archbishops' Council," The Church of England, ChurchofEngland.org, Accessed January 2023.
[14] "National Church Institutions," The Church of England, ChurchofEngland.org, Accessed January 2023.

geographical — as its focus. This is tied to the *raison d'être* of the Church of England. The modern Church of England (e.g., as a Protestant body independent from Rome) is the creation of the English state and is dependent upon it for its existence. While 'Anglicanism' has become a broader phenomenon — largely through the colonization of lands that were once considered part of the British Empire — the Church of England *an sich* has as its remit to serve England, and in turn, the English state enables, at least for now, the continued existence of its established church. Its goal, as stated by the Archbishops' Council, one of the NCIs, is "To be a Church that can provide a home for all people in England."[15] This informs its approach to Islam and other religions.

Both the national and the local levels engage with Islam, but with different aims. Locally, the priest has the cure of all the souls within his or her parish, including those of other religions. Space and place are central to this task: the parish is not a simple division of space, but a manner of enacting a theological posture about places and the people that inhabit them.[16] The priests I interviewed ran food banks, advocated for the needs of their parishioners at the city council, facilitated structured dialogue groups, and participated in informal, everyday forms of dialogue. The local church's engagement is not with 'Islam' as a religion but with Muslim individuals and communities. The national church, conversely, often engages with the idea of 'Islam' as a reified whole as this is the closest analogue to the Church of England as a whole. This makes it difficult for the Church *qua* national institution totake part in outward-facing dialogue, as "…dialogue does not take place between ideas, books, or even religions as abstractions but between concrete persons" (Mojzes 1989, 199). Therefore, for the most part, the national theorises and passes down the results of its findings to the local. However, it should

[15] "Archbishops' Council," The Church of England, ChurchofEngland.org, Accessed January 2023.
[16] A strict distinction between space and place is difficult when using interviews for data. My informants would often use space or place-based language and unsurprisingly, did not seem themselves to be preoccupied by the academic differences between the two.

be noted that the exception to this is ceremonial interreligious dialogue on the part of senior members of the Church of England. For instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury often meets with leaders from other religions, as does the National Inter-religious Affairs Advisor for the Church of England. This plays a vital function in sustaining diplomatic relations between religious groups and institutions, but is of a markedly different character to the local dialogue described elsewhere in this thesis, such as in Chapter 6.

National Church task groups such as Presence and Engagement develop their ideas in reports and debates at General Synod. Despite the efforts of the national level to disseminate the results of their reflections, there is not a lot of conversation between the two levels, at least not for my interlocutors in the Diocese of Birmingham. However, as noted above, the two levels share a common vocabulary which at first gives the appearance of a common strategy, though the recurring motifs, such as host and guest dynamics, are understood differently *within* both the national and the local levels. The 'broad' theological quality of the Church of England holds true on the topic of interreligious relations.

In summary then, the Church of England's approach to engagement with Islam has two central features. There is a local approach which involves building relationships with Muslim individuals and communities. Then there is a national approach which aims to provide the theoretical backbone to inform the local approach and to reflect on the ramifications of being the established Church of England in a time of religious diversity. It is exigent to stress that I am not proposing a binary between the national and the local. They are two elements of the same Church, and indeed they are structurally interconnected within the ecclesiology of the Church of England. However, they represent two different approaches. One might be tempted to make a qualitative judgement in comparing these two approaches; the approach of the local with its real relationships might appear more appealing. However, I want to be clear that it is my job to elucidate the Church of England's approach to the reader based on my interviews

and textual analysis. In anthropological terminology, I aim to *translate* (Geertz 1973)the phenomenon that is the Church of England to make it intelligible to the reader. This leads to my methodology.

The Disciplinary and Social Positionality of this Dissertation

This work of research is carried out within two main lineages of study. The first is the Study of Religions sometimes known as Religious Studies or History of Religions in North America. This has its roots in German *Religionswissenschaft*, or 'science of religion,' as distinguished from confessional theology. The second is anthropology, in particular, the social anthropology of religion and even more particularly, the developing field of the anthropology of Christianity. For my purposes, the merit of this approach is its ability to 'make new' what might otherwise pass unnoticed; in other words, to examine what has been normative. In England this very much includes Anglicanism. As Joseph Webster noted in his introduction to his study of Protestant fishermen in Scotland, "if familiarity breeds contempt, the development of an anthropology of Christianity was always going to struggle" (2013, 12). It is a struggle worth pursuing. Likewise, the academic contribution of this dissertation can be understood both disciplinarily and thematically. By this, I mean that it both builds upon research within religious studies and anthropology as disciplines and it contributes to an academic conversation about religion in contemporary England which reaches far beyond those disciplines.

I am an Eastern Orthodox Christian and thus not a member of the Church of England, though I attended a local Anglican church for a portion of my time as a doctoral student and learned much about the Church of England in doing so. The question of own religious identity arose as a topic only infrequently in interviews. When asked, I would answer honestly and move the conversion back to my informants, the centre of my study. As expressed above this thesis is not written as a work of confessional theology. I cannot claim a lack of bias or total neutrality — nor can anyone — but I can assert that this thesis emerges from my training in

religious studies and anthropology and has the aim to advance those fields in which I belong. My relationality to the Church of England is neither critic nor advocate but that of an academic commentator.

Methodology

My data from the national level is derived from Church of England reports and General Synod transcripts. I decided to focus on the Presence and Engagement programme and its output because it is its self-proclaimed effort to "encourage the Church of England to think about the reality of religious diversity and how it might shape mission and ministry" (Church of England n.d.) From this decision, it was a straightforward process to select texts to analyse. Presence and Engagement has five reports that are either directly authored by its task group or closely associated with its efforts. These are *Presence and Engagement* (2005), *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* (2009), *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010), *Generous Love for All* (2011), and *The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society* (2017). These reports were all readily available online and are currently publicly accessible on the Church of England's website. As the reports were authored by a national task group reporting to the Archbishops' Council, it is Church policy for them to be presented and debated at the Church of England's General Synod. The Church takes minutes at General Synod which are then published into proceedings.

In doing so, I found that the reports were not without controversy. As a result, I analyse the General Synod debates alongside my discussion of the reports. I also used media archives to access public coverage of the reports and their debates, especially for 'Sharing the Gospel of Salvation,' which was particularly controversial due to having an overtly evangelistic agenda. There were a small number of other reports that I considered including in my analysis but chose not to for reasons of scope. All of these were not published by the Church of England but by associated bodies. For instance, the report 'Generous Love' was published in 2008 by

the Anglican Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON). NIFCON brings together participants from over 165 countries who are members of the global Anglican Communion. As such I could not analyse 'Generous Love' to understand the Church of England's approach to engaging with Islam because it was influenced by other Anglican bodies who have unique perspectives.

As I mention above, I finalised my decision to undertake a case study of the Diocese of Birmingham by speaking to the Church of England's national interfaith advisor who offered to put me in touch with the local interfaith advisor in Birmingham. Dr Andrew Smith, the Interfaith Advisor to the Bishop of Birmingham, was my first contact in Birmingham. When we met the first time, I gave him an overview of the aims of my project. He was both kind and supportive. I asked him to provide me with a list of local contacts who might be willing to be interviewed. I began with this list and shortly moved on to a 'snowballing' method. I also found contacts independently to avoid speaking to only those who were like-minded and already connected. I did this by searching the websites of parishes across the Diocese. This was important because it allowed for diverse perspectives. I sought out contacts across parishes with varying socio-economic profiles, religious demographics, church traditions (e.g., Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic) and population sizes. The contacts who I interviewed include several female clergy and individuals of different racial, national, and religious backgrounds.

My approach to triangulating sources provides the advantage of considering multiple ways in which the Church of England has expressed itself. I have respected reports as the chosen medium of self-expression for the national Presence and Engagement programme, while not being bound to the written form as I have also considered speeches given at General Synod. Conversely, local religious leaders tend not to produce reports and semi-structured interviews allowed for a natural recounting of their daily experiences. I did not interview

Presence and Engagement task group members because this would have led to individual opinions, while the reports expressed the collective output of the programme.

I gained ethical clearance for this project through the ethics board of the University of Oxford. When I contacted a potential interviewee, I attached a consent form and a document with details about my project. These are found in the appendix of this dissertation. The majority of my interviews were with parish priests. Other people interviewed were area deans, one churchwarden, and one Anglican lay leader of an interreligious forum. I perceived several advantages to focusing on the clergy. By virtue of their ordination, they are representatives of the Church of England and as such anything they said could be used to advance the answer to my research question: *What is the character of the established Church of England's engagement with Islam?* While laypeople are equally members of the Church, they are not always willing to have their views and experiences be taken as anything other than their personal opinion, an issue which became clear with the two laypeople who I did interview. However, I did not want to be clericalist and I was careful to ask my interviewees to describe the activities and perspectives of their respective congregations. I also attended and participated in ten sessions of 'Birmingham Conversations,' a Birmingham-based interreligious discussion group.

Each interview was semi-structured. I had a list of interreligious-related topics which I wished to discuss but my chief aim was to uncover what my interlocutor saw as important within the topic of interreligious relations. As a result, no two interviews were the same. The interviews were an hour in length on average and conducted using Zoom due to the Coronavirus pandemic. In total, I interviewed twenty-five individuals in the Diocese of Birmingham. I conducted multiple interviews with Canon Dr Andrew Smith as he was my main point of contact. Other than these three individuals, my interlocutors will be identified by pseudonyms, as will the names of the churches to which they belong and serve, and the name of the

neighbourhood, village, or city of the church.[17] Details such as 'churchmanship' — i.e., whether a given church community identifies itself as evangelical, for instance — remain unchanged because they are important to the study and would alter my analysis if changed.

The Structure of this Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two parts beyond this Introduction and Chapter 1, which lays the groundwork. "Part 1: National and Institutional Perspectives," analyses the Church's national-level discussions around interreligious matters, namely the Presence and Engagement reports and relevant debates and discussions at General Synod. I argue that the Church is in the process of dialoguing with itself and determining its identity in multireligious England. Moreover, I argue that since 2005, the Church's interreligious efforts have been concerned with Islam far more than any other religion despite 'Presence and Engagement' not having a stated focus on Islam. Chapter 2, "Presence and Engagement: A New Era of Interreligious Relations in the Church of England," analyses the establishment of the Presence and Engagement programme, its eponymous report, and its debate at the General Synod. Chapter 3, "Competing Visions for Presence and Engagement?" analyses two reports: *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* (2009) and *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010). It concludes with an analysis of the final two Presence & Engagement reports, *Generous Love for All* (2011) and *The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society* (2017) and introduces the analytical shift to the local level.

"Part 2: The Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham" presents my case study of the Diocese of Birmingham. It is organised according to the themes that emerged from my interviews. Each chapter in this part will contain detailed studies from Birmingham and extracts from my interviews. Chapter 4, "Levels of Locality: Birmingham and Relationships to the National Church" compares the local context as seen in Birmingham to the Church's national

[17] Despite its name the Diocese of Birmingham contains churches in cities other than Birmingham.

framework. In it, I argue that the local and national are connected structurally but that this has little bearing on daily life in the parishes of Birmingham. I address how my interlocutors persistently chose to focus on the local over the national, and why the national Presence and Engagement reports from the previous section had little impact on the local level. In Chapter 5 "The Parish in Birmingham," I examine the parish and why it is central to the ministry of many of my interlocutors, including their interactions with Muslims. I consider the different ways that parochial life can be experienced with three in-depth case studies. In Chapter 6, "Varieties of Interreligious Experience," I challenge the normative view of interreligious dialogue as formal and elite, instead looking at dialogue in the everyday lives of my interlocutors in Birmingham with a focus on the 'mundane' places where the dialogue occurs. Finally, in Chapter 7, "Women's Groups," I examine women's interreligious dialogue groups as a unique form of Anglican-Muslim engagement in Birmingham. The dissertation ends with a Conclusion which considers key themes throughout the thesis and advocates for further study of the Church of England as a central actor in England's (inter)religious life.

CHAPTER 1
Laying the Groundwork: The Church of England, Islam, and Space

This chapter aims to provide the information necessary to contextualise my study. In what follows I present a brief account of demographic and social considerations around the Church of England and Islam in England. The quantitative and qualitative data, when juxtaposed, demonstrate a somewhat paradoxical situation. While the Church of England is on a demographic decline, it maintains social influence in the life of the nation. Conversely, while Islam is the fastest-growing religion in England, it is both over-scrutinized and invisible. This accounts for an overview of my topic. I then proceed to my theoretical lens, space, and its significance for this study.

The Church of England and Islam in England: Demographic and Social Considerations

Demographic Considerations: Growth of Islam in England, Decline of Church of England

The time frame of this thesis, 2005-2021, witnessed two demographic trends of particular note: the decline of the Church of England and the growth of Islam in England, as measured by self-affiliation.[18] The census for England and Wales has had a voluntary question about religion ("What is your religion?") since 2001.[19] In 2021, 46.2% of census respondents identified themselves as Christians (Office for National Statistics 2021) . This was the first time that the number fell below half of the population, a fact which drove much media coverage. In the 2011 census, 59.3% of the population identified themselves as Christians, which was a decline from 71.6% of the population in 2001 (Office for National Statistics 2001, 2011).

Notably, the census does not distinguish between Christian denominations. For more specific data one must identify alternate sources, such as the British Social Attitudes Survey.

[18] My research focuses on England and its national church. However, some of the data which I draw upon include studies that refer to all of Britain, or at other times England and Wales, such as the Census. Accordingly, some slippage between 'England' and 'Britain' and variants is inevitable. Wherever possible, I specifically refer to England.

[19] In fact, the very existence of this question marks a significant instantiation of Muslim-Anglican relations in English history. The question was added to the census after a campaign by the Muslim Council of Britain, which was bolstered by key Anglican allies within the government's Inner Cities Religious Council, namely the Reverends David Randolph-Horn and Leslie Francis (Sherif 2011).(Sherif 2011).(Sherif 2011).(Sherif 2011).

The 2019 survey asked: *Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion*?[20] Of those who responded in the affirmative, 38% identified as Christian, with 12% identifying as Anglicans (The National Centre for Social Research 2019). [21] This was a decline from the 2010 BSA in which 20% of respondents identified as Anglicans. The decline in nominal affiliation to the Church of England is commensurate with declining attendance statistics, which the Church measures assiduously and publishes an annual report on under the title 'Statistics for Mission' (Eames 2022). However, the decline is less of a contemporary phenomenon than sensationalist media might have the public believe. The 'peak' of church attendance in Britain was in 1851 when about half the population was in church on a given Sunday (Bruce 2020). More recent data show that 9% of Anglicans in Britain attend church weekly (Bruce and Voas 2019).

The potential reasons for the decline in affiliation with the Church of England are manifold, and each theory of decline is likely to contain truth. They include secularization in its various iterations (e.g., Wilson 1969; 1976, Bruce 1995; 2002; 2011; 2020, Martin 2005, Brown 2009), pluralization (Barker 1990; Berger 2014; Woodhead 2016), societal liberalization with which the Church of England has not aligned itself (Woodhead and Brown 2006; Woodhead 2016b), believing without belonging (Davie 1994; 2015), lack of societal pressure to name a religion, and death of the religious elderly (Day 2017). The salient and core fact is that there are consistently fewer people in a Church of England church on a Sunday as time passes. As I argue in Part 1 of this dissertation, this is a fact which informs the Church of England's approach to relationships with other religions. This is especially true with Islam, which is the fastest-growing religion.

[20] As will be discussed in what follows, responses to this question should be taken as *affiliation* rather than practice or even belief.
[21] Given the scope of the British Social Attitudes Survey this includes the Church of England and its sister churches in Scotland and Wales.

It is important to note that Muslims, like Christians, are not a homogeneous social group, a fact which will be explored below in my qualitative discussion of Islam in England. Nevertheless, one of the most striking trends in religious demographics over the past two decades has been the growth of Islam in England, however broad the category may prove to be. Muslims have formed a notable part of England's cultural and religious life for decades and these figures demonstrate that it will continue to do so. Per Steve Bruce, "in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Muslim population increased almost ten times faster than the non-Muslim population" (2020, 157). Indeed, in the 2001 census Muslims represented 2.7% of the population, a figure which grew to 4.9% in 2011 (Office for National Statistics 2001, 2011). The 2021 census saw 6.5% of the population identifying as Muslim. The reasons for the growth of individuals identifying as Muslims centre around two factors: high birth rates among Muslim families, and migration (Gilliat-Ray 2012, Voas and Bruce 2019, Gilliat-Ray 2012, Voas and Bruce 2019, Bruce 2020). Moreover, Muslims are more likely than Anglicans to retain their religious affiliation into adulthood: 93% of those who are raised Muslim continue to identify as much as opposed to about half of Anglicans (The National Centre for Social Research, 2019).

The figure of 6.5% from the 2021 census aligns with the 2019 Social Attitudes Survey, which found that 6% of Britain are Muslims. Given that the same survey found that 12% of the population are Anglicans, this means that there is approximately a 2:1 ratio of Anglicans to Muslims in Britain overall. There are almost as many Muslims as Roman Catholics, who account for 7% of the population. In considering the demographics of Islam, it is especially important to consider regional variations. This is especially true in certain regions; for instance, in London, Muslims are 15% of the population. Significantly for the present study, the 2021 census found that 29.9% of the population of Birmingham identify as Muslim, a figure which is not far from the 34% of the population of Birmingham which identify as Christian.

While it is tempting given the nature of this project to focus on Anglican and Muslim identities, the data also show that non-religion must not be overlooked. 37.2% of the population identified as non-religious in 2021, up from 25.2% in 2011. Non-religion is not a neutral identity, nor does it mean any single thing: it could be anywhere on the spectrum of spiritual-but-not-religious to 'devout' atheism. The everyday lived experiences of Christians and Muslims are contoured by increasingly non-religious societies. As with any socio-cultural context, these societies and the lives of Christians and Muslims weave into one another and inform each other. Thus perhaps the most important takeaway from this data is not church decline — after all, that has been taking place since 1851 and Christianity was still the most common religious affiliation on the 2021 census. Instead, a focus is warranted on how the broader British societies perceive religion, both individually and corporately. In the same 2019 British Social Attitudes survey, 63% of people agreed with the statement "Looking around the world, religion brings more conflict than peace." While that question had a global scale when asked about confidence in various British institutions, 21% of those surveyed expressed "no confidence at all" in "Churches and religious organisations" — lower than courts, schools, businesses, and most strikingly, lower even than Parliament, which was then amid the Brexit process (The National Centre for Social Research, 2019).

The cynicism affects different religious communities in unequal measure. When the survey asked about respondents' "personal attitude" towards members of different religious groups, Christians received the most positive feedback — 51% of people were positive, 37% neither positive nor negative, and 4% negative. Muslims were the least popular social group — 17% negative, 42% neither positive nor negative, and 30% positive (The National Centre for Social Research, 2019). These figures indicate the varied experiences that Muslims and Christians may have. A qualitative overview of their experiences will give more insight.

Social Considerations: The Church of England and Establishment Influence

The demographic decline of the Church of England discussed above is not straightforwardly indicative of the decline of the Church's influence. It is salient to note that the Church of England functions as a national symbol that will have enduring importance even as the pews empty. The influence of the Church of England as a national symbol is highly visible at some times, such as its facilitation of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. At other times its influence might be less visible but nevertheless powerful. Here Engelke's idea of "ambient faith" is useful: the idea that religion can be meaningfully present and influential in the background of everyday life. Ambience "is akin to what anthropologists have often called "context" but it "conveys a more distinct sense of what is in the background, especially in acoustical terms" (Engelke 2012, 158)[22] The character of ambient religion varies based on context. Engelke gives the example of ambience as a violin playing during a romantic candlelit dinner. In England, would ambient religion take on the 'sounds' of the Church of England? Religious ambience is not neutral: it has influence and takes on the character and biases of the dominant religious framework from which it emerges. Crucially, the establishment status of the Church of England lends itself to having both a visible and an ambient influence in England.

The establishment status of the Church of England is an important aspect of this study and I will return to it often. As a result, my discussion on establishment here will be brief, with an overview of the 'privileges' of English established religion and their reception by other religions. The two major 'privileges' concerning the Church of England's relationship to the state are the connections to Parliament and the Monarchy. Twenty-six senior bishops, known as the 'Lords Spiritual,' sit by right in the House of Lords. These include the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, who are considered first among equals of England's bishops.

[22] Similarly, theologian and social theorist Chris Baker proposed a very similar metaphor for religion as "urban white noise": that religious "beliefs are actors… in the course of being lived out day-to-day, [beliefs] have as much influence on the way that the sense of ethos of an urban locality is shaped and expressed as material actors such as buildings and road layouts" (Baker 2017, 237).

In the language currently employed by the Church of England, the Lords Spiritual make "a major contribution to Parliament's work."[23] In addition to this enshrined place in Parliament, the Church has an inextricable connection with the British Monarch, who holds the position of Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Crown is formally responsible, through the government, for the appointment of bishops, archbishops, and deans of Cathedrals within the Church of England. Furthermore, pursuant to the British governmental structure as a constitutional monarchy — and the fact that twenty-six of the bishops will have a place in the House of Lords — it is the Prime Minister who advises the Monarch on who the appointment should be.[24]

These 'privileges' are ambiguous. Some have complained that they restrict the rights of the Church, and there have been campaigns, albeit unsuccessful, from within the Church to disestablish. Indeed, several archbishops including the sometime Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams have written in support of disestablishment (Grimley 2011; Chapman 2010; Clements and Spencer 2014). Notably, however, there is a general silence from religious bodies outside the Church of England about disestablishment. Modood and Meer explain; "...there is no evidence that the Anglican establishment actually alienates British Muslims… there is no record of any criticism by a Muslim group in relation to the religious establishment. However, many Muslims *do* complain that Britain is too unreligious and anti-religious, too hedonistic, consumerist and materialist" (2015, 536). Likewise, Matthew Grimley notes: "It is striking that demands for disestablishment did not come from non-Christian religions. While it is true that Muslims demanded, and gained, an extension of some of the traditional privileges of the

[23] "Leadership and Governance," The Church of England, ChurchofEngland.org, accessed January 2023.

[24] This process has been reformed over the years, with the two largest and most recent reforms being as follows: in 1974 the Church of England passed a motion in General Synod that "the decisive voice in the appointment of diocesan bishops should be that of the Church." As a result, a committee was established to pass on names to the Prime Minister, who then would pass them on to the Monarch. In 2007, Prime Minister Gordon Brown's government published a paper indicating that "the Prime Minister should not play an active role in the selection of individual candidates." The process now is that the Church will pass on one name along with a reserve to the Prime Minister, who conveys them to the Monarch.

Church of England (for example in the provision of state-aided Muslim schooling and the replacement of the old blasphemy law with the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act covering all religions), they showed no interest in disestablishment" (2011, 54). My interviews among clergy in Birmingham, discussed in Part 2 of this dissertation, found that some of the Church's priests were aware of the social influence granted by belonging to established Church and made use of the influence to help local Muslim communities in various ways, including funding applications. Establishment, then, remains ambiguous: accepted by some but not all within and outside the church.

Social Considerations: Islam in England

Muslims in England encounter a paradox; as an 'imagined' group they are hyper-visible (Bonino 2015), due to constant media scrutiny and the 'securitisation' (Brown 2008; Abbas and Siddique 2012) of their everyday lives and places of worship. Yet at the same time, they are often rendered invisible when it comes to the broader public's understanding of who they are as individuals, or as communities with characteristics not recognized by the media. Compounding this issue is the discourse of 'integration' in contemporary England; while for some, pluralism or multiculturalism signals people of diverse ethnic, national, and religious identities living alongside one another, for others, sometimes including the English government, this is not enough and the onus is on people from minority backgrounds to 'integrate' into to the framework of a white, culturally Christian, England (Phillips 2006; Abbas 2007; Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017).

Before proceeding to analyse the above issues, some anthropological prolegomena are necessary. For El-Zein, the anthropology of Islam involves the essentialization of Islam, linked to the broader issue of treating 'religions' as universal, ahistorical and atemporal entities. He proposes abolishing Islam as an analytical category altogether (1977). Most others are sympathetic to the issue of essentialism but seek to reconcile it with the reality of needing an

analytical framework; Islam can be critically analysed as a heterogenous 'tradition' (Asad 1986) or productively analysed with a focus on 'local contexts' (Eickelman 1982). Modood points to the futility of anti-essentialist discourse as often reinforcing that which it seeks to criticize (Modood 1998). McLoughlin takes a middle path, convincingly arguing contra El-Zein that "there is in fact a certain 'unity in diversity' about 'Muslim voices'; they do actually share 'fundamental' symbols in common, such as the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, it is these symbols that have facilitated an imagined continuity of experience amongst Muslims through time and across space for nearly fourteen hundred years" (McLoughlin 2000, 193).

Ultimately in the above debate, I side with Asad, whose 'discursive tradition' approach incorporates El-Zein's concern for essentialism while providing a sound analytical, historically rooted approach to studying Muslims. A particular strength of Asad's approach is its recognition of Islam as temporal; identifying continuities and discontinuities with historical doctrine and practice elucidates the behaviours of present-day Islamic communities. So for Asad, "Islam is neither a distinctive social structure not a heterogenous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition…A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice, that precisely because it is established, has a history" (1986, 20) . This leaves an important matter at stake: the issue of representation: who gets to decide what is, and is not, Islam(ic)? This issue is a particular concern in the study of Islam today, especially in England where the scholar risks reinforcing the 'othering' of Muslims by identifying them as subjects for study, or risks silencing some Muslims by prioritizing others. In this matter, I align myself with those who argue that Islam is best conceived of as whatever people who identify as Muslims say it is; that no "form of Islam may be excluded from the anthropologist's interest on the grounds that it is not the true Islam" (Gilsenan paraphrased in Asad 1988). Though this is an approach

severely critiqued by Asad for its ambiguity, it is my contention that it is the best way forward. Deciding who is and is not a Muslim is a theological issue best left to Muslims themselves. This approach gives the most recognition to different Muslim communities and allows for an exploration of the diverse meanings of what it means to be a Muslim.

Muslims in England: A Short History

The 19th century saw the first notable wave of Muslim people settling in England. By 1855, there were somewhere between 10,000 to 12,000 Muslim people settling in English coastal cities (Ansari 2007, 550). These early settlers were overwhelmingly male. Most of them were seafarers, otherwise known as lascars, who were employed working on ships. A much less studied group of migrants were the female *ayahs*, nursemaids who were often abandoned, and for whom a house in London was established (Ahmed et al. 2015). These lascars and *ayahs* came from what is now Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Some of the early communities were transient, but others developed into permanent communities whose legacies are visible still today. The most common early regions of settlement include Manchester, Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, Glasgow, and London's East End (Ansari 2007).

The removal of religious entry requirements to Oxford and Cambridge in 1871 prompted further migration, albeit temporary for some, for educational purposes (Naylor and Ryan 2002, 43). It was also education that prompted Britain's first purpose-built mosque. The Shah Jahan Mosque in Woking, Surrey was established in 1889 by an Orientalist scholar who saw the construction of a mosque as helpful in attracting students to his Oriental Institute (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 184). The first 'officially designated'— but not purpose-built — mosque opened two years earlier in Liverpool, an initiative of a British convert to Islam,[25] William Henry Quilliam. This Liverpool Mosque and Institute was not simply for prayers, but also

[25] Some adherents of Islam prefer 'revert' over 'convert,' to reflect the Islamic belief that everyone is born a Muslim.

provided community services as an orphanage and school (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 184). That Muslim communities were putting down roots in the tangible formation of mosques is significant; Werbner writes, “In sacralising spaces, Muslims…root their identities qua Muslims in a new locality and embody the moral right of their communities to be "in" this new environment.” (Werbner 1996a, 311). This early wave of migration was prompted by the British Empire and the Commonwealth, as was the second major wave, which occurred post-World War Two and the end of British rule of India, involving migrants primarily from Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which restricted immigration, was not brought into effect until 1962 (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 47).

In addition to political factors, this second wave was motivated by economic opportunity; wages for labour in the 1960s were over 30 times compared to similar jobs in Pakistan (Shaw 1988, 9). In the 1960s and in the 1970s, many of these men were joined by their wives and children from the diasporas, who made up 66% of all migrants from Pakistan in 1964, and 93% by 1966. (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 47-48). Later in the twentieth century, diffuse socio-economic factors brought migrants from Africa, in particular Somalia, Turkey, and the Middle East. However, they did not match the number of migrants from South Asia. The changing character of the labour undertaken by migrants – from seafaring work to manufacturing and service — meant that cities such as Birmingham and Bradford became populated with Muslims. The mid-to-late twentieth century saw these communities putting down roots through the establishment of mosques, Islamic schools, and community networks (Dwyer and Meyer 1995; Werbner 1996a; Knott 1998).

From the first major wave of immigration of Muslim peoples in the 19th century, Muslim communities were, comparatively, not under a great deal of scrutiny; they were a “silent, apparently compliant and quiescent law-abiding minority” (Werbner 2004b, 905). All of that changed with the Rushdie affair in 1989. The Rushdie affair brought Muslims into the

broader British consciousness in an unprecedented, and inordinate (Asad 1993) manner (Werbner 2004a, 2009; McLoughlin 2000). McLoughlin sees the January 1989 burning of *The Satanic Verses* by the Bradford Council of Mosques as an "attempt to communicate Muslim powerlessness to wider society" after failed attempts to utilize the blasphemy laws that protected Christianity, the Public Order Act, and the Race Relations Act (McLoughlin 2002, 44). In any case, the controversy branded England's Muslims as inherently politicised, a mark that has not since left, and that has been further impacted by global terror events. This politicised Islam is problematic for the British government, as British politicians "demand a non-politicised religion, which they label 'culture'" (Werbner 2009). Muslims then find themselves in a deeply unfair position where they, unlike other British citizens, cannot mobilize toward political aims without being the subject of suspicion and accusations of isolationism and non-integration; and those without any political involvement are still branded with those same accusations by virtue of their religion, and arguably their ethnicity.

Sectarianism

The question of what it means to be a Muslim in England may have as many answers as there are Muslims in England, but there are broad patterns that can be drawn. Religious affiliation is drawn across ethnic, national and sectarian lines, with divisions residing primarily in the first two (Werbner 2004b). In fact, some ethnographers of Muslim communities have noted that sectarian affiliations, compared to ethnic and national ones, are not especially pronounced, especially compared to Christian denominationalism (Prideaux 2009b). It is difficult to estimate whether the great number of mosques is due to sectarian divisions or the need for space. For instance, as of 2005, Bradford had forty-four mosques in only five square miles, which might appear exorbitant until one considers that these mosques serve 75,000 Muslims who live in those same five miles (McLoughlin 2005, 1047). It is also difficult to establish quantitative estimates of belonging to Muslim sectarian groups. In her comprehensive

book *Muslims in Britain*, Gilliat-Ray identifies that "no definitive research has been undertaken which accurately measures the prevalence of different 'schools of thought' in Britain." (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 94). Estimates appear to be drawn from available information about mosques and their attendance.

Nevertheless, a brief consideration of the major demographics, to the extent that they can be traced, is worthwhile, especially consideration of their origins. The majority of Muslims in Britain fit into a Sufi framework, and about half hold beliefs and practices consistent with the *Barelwi* 'worldview' (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 94). This includes a devotion toward Muhammed and an emphasis on *pirs*, religious leaders or 'saints' whose graves are often pilgrimage sites. There are several reform movements that are opposed to some of the *Barelwi* practices, including devotion to *pirs*. They are also opposed to the intercessions that are sometimes associated with *pirs* and Sufi practice (Werbner 1996b, 106).

The most prominent reform group is the *Deobandi* movement, which was founded in Deoband, India, in 1867 (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 85). The *Deobandis* have a focus on rational reasoning and Islamic law. They have established seventeen of the twenty-six *dar ul-Uloom*, or seminaries, in Britain (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 87-88). The *Tablighi Jama'at* movement grew out of the *Deobandi* tradition. It is theocratic, rejecting non-Islamic politics (Pieri 2015). It is also known for its missionary activity and focus on salvation. A major preaching tour in Britain in the early 1960s involving Muslim preachers sent from the *Tablighi Jama'at* headquarters in Delhi resulted in the founding of several mosques (Gilliat-Ray 2010, 90). This reflected fears that wealth and external British influence might corrupt the younger generation. However, the missionary activities of the movement are not simply aimed at reviving the religiosity of Muslims. Door-to-door preaching, public parades, and the founding of *Tablighi Jama'at* centres in Britain are designed to share the message of Islam (Werbner 1996a; Pieri 2015).

The missionary element found in the *Tablighi Jama'at* movement, and in other Islamic sects in Britain is often, frustratingly, mentioned without elaboration by scholars. This is true of institutional missionary activities and interpersonal conversations that anthropologists have with their informants. Many ethnographers mention that their informants try to convert them to Islam or bring up the topic of the day of judgement. An example, not unique but representative, is an interaction that Pnina Werbner had with a Sufi *pir* in Birmingham. He warned her:

> In the Qur'an God says, "Islam is my religion." If that is the word of God, should you not accept it? When you come before God on the Day of Judgement he will ask you, "Did anyone tell you about Islam?" And you will have to say yes. He will ask, "Why did you not become a Muslim?" You will have no answer. (Werbner 1996a, 323)

Werbner offers little comment on the significance of this interaction. The missional element of Islam is overlooked in scholarly studies; mentioned, but only in passing. There are perhaps politically sensitive reasons for this; scholars do not wish to suggest that Muslims have an agenda. Yet in an individualistic culture context whose unofficial motto may well be, 'live and let live,' it is important to seek to understand what it means to defy this. To overlook the passion with which many Muslim communities pursue the sharing of Islam would be to do them a disservice — *especially* given the questions Muslims believe will be asked on the day of judgement and the moral obligation they perceive in preparing others for that day. Acknowledging this is part of seeing Muslims as they are rather than moulding them into ideal subjects. In a rare exception to the silence on Muslim proselytizing, Barton writes "The researcher who succeeds in coming close to his informants will inevitably be presented with an invitation to Islam…unless the call is heard and its urgent sincerity felt, any claim to have entered into another's world is void" (Barton 1986, 17).

Mosques

Most mosques in England are not purpose-built but are converted townhomes, warehouses, factories, schools, and churches (McLoughlin 2005). The Church of England and

the Presbyterian Church enjoy established status in England and Scotland respectively, and the material benefits that accompany it. With no centralised legal framework to operate within, Muslim communities often register with the Charity Commission, which reduces the taxation they must pay; however, this is not legally required. Legal negotiation occurs in the realm of planning law. There is a requirement to gain planning permission for proposed mosques, even those that simply involve renovating existing buildings, such as terraced houses. (McLoughlin 2005, 1047). This process is often fraught with tension and legal barricades presented by authorities; a 2001 Home Office survey found that over half of Muslim organizations reported experiencing 'unfair treatment by planners' or 'unfairness in planning policy and practice' (Gale 2005).

The difficulty of establishing mosques varies by context. For instance, in Birmingham, proposed townhouse conversions are the source of much planning tension, as documented by Gale (2005). Local Muslim communities wanted mosques within walking distance of residential areas, hence the preference to convert townhouses rather than built a larger purpose-built mosque further away from the neighbourhood. Planners failed to understand this, rejecting several applications on the grounds of issues such as lack of parking and potential noise violations; issues that the local community were not concerned with. For interviewees, this came out of a fundamental misunderstanding between the non-Muslim planner and the Muslims. One wondered if the planner was looking for reasons to reject the application (Gale 2005).

Conversely, in Bradford, "The size and concentration of a newly urbanised Pakistani population in Bradford has allowed this constituency to exert levels of political pressure, and achieve levels of political mobilization, rarely seen amongst South Asian communities elsewhere in Britain" (McLoughlin 2005, 1054). Benefits also come from partnering with those outside the ethnic and religious commonalities. The York Road Mosque in Bradford occupies

a former Anglican church hall. While the President of the future mosque purchased the building in 1989, he had a pre-existing relationship with the vicar of the church; they were neighbours, and several years earlier, the vicar had offered up the church hall for the religious instruction of Muslim children (McLoughlin 1998). The relationship behind the York Road Mosque aligns with interreligious, ground-level relationships that have been occurring for decades. Nathanial Mayer Rothschild sat on the board of the original London mosque. Wives of early London Mosque imams used kosher butchers in the absence of halal butchers, and Christian groups publicly supported the construction of minarets in the Jamme Masjid in London in the 1970s and early 1980s (N. Ahmed et al. 2015, 71).

A study of opposition to a proposed mega-mosque in Dudley as expressed on Facebook, unsurprisingly identified Islamophobia, which the author defines as that which "has to be understood both singularly and variously in terms systems of thought, belief, and action that seek to actively reinforce Islam and Muslims as the 'other'" (Allen 2014, 10). The findings were complicated by comments that were not so clearly delineated as Islamophobic and could be conceived as a broader opposition to 'public forms of religion.' An example would be a respondent who wrote: "I don't want to see any new religious buildings being built when the money and land could be used to build something more needed and productive for the whole community." (Allen 2014, 6). Such sentiments "seemed to reflect the shift away from public religiosity in today's Britain more so than anything that was specifically anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic" (Allen 2014, 6). While this remains a fascinating point, further clarification is needed to delineate what 'public religiosity' means, especially if the same opposition would be found to a 'public' expression of Christianity, and if *some* public religiosities are more troublesome than others.

Concepts such as multiculturalism also prove difficult. Villis and Hebing's study of debates over the new mosque in Cambridge found that the notion of 'multiculturalism' was

used in debates both in support of and opposing, the mosque. For those using it in a positive way, it referred broadly to a "specific fusion of Islam and Englishness…an identity in itself." (Villis and Hebing 2014, 425). In this sense, multiculturalism is a reality of contemporary British society rather than those of other cultures being conceived of as apart from 'true' Britishness. This is complicated by those mobilizing multiculturalism against the mosque; one person wrote that the mosque would "frighten away non muslims [sic]," while another wrote, "The area must remain truly mixed, for the whole community." Villis and Hebing note that these responses are distinct from a third use of multiculturalism, in which 'Britishness' is the opposite of multiculturalism. As in Allen's study, the question arises of whether the issue is about religion in general, with one respondent identifying that his or her response would be the same if it were a proposed church.

Not all mosques are so visible. Dafydd Jones' study of Muslims in the Welsh countryside convincingly testifies to the need to look beyond the 'officially sacred'; a term popularized by social geographer Lily Kong (Dafydd Jones 2010; 2012; Kong 2001). In rural Wales, the absence of purpose-built mosques means that Muslim communities worship in places such as school gyms. In this sense, the rural Muslims are visually absent; without a numerous Muslim population and an 'Eastern' looking building, "Islam is not present in a symbolic sense, but it is in a lived, everyday sense. It is through unspectacular buildings that Muslims in west Wales practise their faith. These buildings are not merely a contingent space for worship: they function as a home for counterpublic mobilization, allowing local Muslims to have a presence in other ways" (Dafydd Jones 2010). While for his informants, "the way that space is used is more important than the visual manifestation of the community in aesthetical terms," (Dafydd Jones 2010, 765) an issue arises when Muslims are "written out of rural space" (Dafydd Jones 2012, 336).

What Dafydd Jones has identified points to a related issue; scholarship tends to cluster more on what happens *outside* the mosque, *about* the mosque, than within it. This renders Muslim practice invisible. Without a 'visible,' i.e. 'Islamic-looking' mosque to draw attention to, the community is overlooked. When a mosque is there, the building is the focus. A dissertation published only five years ago claims to be the first-ever ethnography of a mosque community in Britain (Ahmed 2016). While opposition to mosques and non-Muslim opinions on mosques are helpful in understanding the non-Muslim British public, scholarship about the role of mosques in the lives of Muslims, prioritizing a Muslim point of view rather than giving more voice to non-Muslims, is missing, an issue that must be remedied if Muslims are to be understood on their own terms.

Muslims in England and Gender: Women

The experiences of Muslims in England are gendered and do not end with the mosque. Nazneed Ahmed makes the point that "…to map mosques as the exclusive spaces of faith and diasporic identity would silence a considerable proportion of Muslim women's own articulation of diasporic belonging and faith…" (Ahmed et al. 2015, 75). This is because many mosques do not have space for women, and if they do, they have a smaller space for women than men. For many Muslim women, religious practice takes place within the home. When Muslim women arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, it shifted religious practice. These women, often wives and other family members of the men already living in England, enabled community development both inside and outside the home. As Kim Knott (1998) has identified, the women who came to British cities in the 1960s and 1970s developed domestic religious practices that were new to all-male households. These included traditions inherited from mothers and mothers-in-law such as "food preparation, feasting and fasting, the religious nurture of children the conducting of rituals and prayers, and the keeping of holy days" (Werbner 1990; Knott and Khokher 1993; Knott 1998). A more recent study of Muslim geographies of university

campuses found that campuses are overall tolerant, positive spaces both in terms of gender and Muslim/non-Muslim relations, but that Muslim women's needs can still be overlooked; one campus' mosque in an isolated, not sufficiently lit area of the campus meant that some women felt unsafe attending events in the evening (Hopkins 2011).

Although it is difficult to ascertain, it appears that mosques remain overwhelmingly male spaces today. The Muslim Council of Britain estimated in 2006 that 40% of mosques in Britain have no provision for women (Brown 2008, 474). Katherine Brown has explored efforts by various Muslim groups to 'reform' mosques and allow greater access for women, and how such movements are complicated by the government's 'securitization' of Muslim space. She writes, "Official policies reiterate the insecurity of the mosque and suggest that women's participation will operate as an antidote," having the effect of "relegating Muslim women's political activism to a sideshow" (Brown 2008, 481). Muslim women are thus caught up in expectations coming from both their male counterparts and from the government, about what it is to be 'good Muslim women.'

Giulia Liberatore's work on Somali Muslim women in London inhabits a void in the scholarship of non-South Asian British Muslims (Liberatore 2013; 2016a; 2017). She looks at the self as engaged with a 'dynamic relational matrix,' in which "Relations are interdependent and co-constitutive; they are formative of the subject, but also something upon which the subject can reflect and subsequently transform" and through which they "reconfigure their relations to kin, friends, and imagined notion of the British public, and God" (2016, 787-788). This lens allows for the examination of women as very much entangled in the expectations of others, but also able to reimagine their relationships in a framework of their choosing. This occurs in the 'everyday.' In one study, Liberatore specifically looks at how marriage can be a site of imaginative aspiration for Muslim women, who creatively engage with their ethical

imaginations to align their religious, cultural, and social aspirations through imagining their ideal future and belonging.

Through interview-based studies such as Liberatore's, Muslim women's aspirations, concerns, and passions are identified and voiced by Muslim women themselves. This does much to counter the invisibility issue as identified by Brown, wherein Muslim women have difficulty asserting themselves over and against pressures from both the government and fellow Muslims. This highlights the importance of an anthropological approach grounded in a keen desire to represent the concerns of informants as accurately as possible. The work on Muslim women also points to the value of anthropologists coming from different positionalities; Liberatore's study, involving years spent with Somali women sometimes in intimate situations, likely could not have been conducted by a male anthropologist. The reverse also may prove true; getting access to all-male services in a mosque would likely prove difficult for a female anthropologist.

Muslim Masculinities

Concerns about British men being demonised and viewed as potential terrorists run throughout studies on Muslim masculinities. However, the extent to which this is an issue depends on context; for instance, Bonino (2015) found that Muslim men in Scotland generally have few concerns about safety or relationships with non-Muslims with the exception of situations involving the police or security officers, especially at the airport. Such a consideration highlights the importance of considering institutional discrimination and its ties to power as related to, but independent from, everyday cases of discrimination. The perception that 'Scottishness' is less tied to ethnicity than 'Englishness,' coupled with the broader distinction of 'Scottishness' as separate from 'Englishness' has aided in the development of positive relations between Muslim and non-Muslim Scots (Bonino 2015).

In Britain more generally, the focus on religion as a social signifier has affected Muslim men in distinct ways, largely due to the perceived connection between terror and Islam, and the more implicit accompanying connection between Islamic terror and men (Abbas 2007). The sensationalization of Muslims in Britain is such that Muslims cannot be individuals, but are all representatives of a broader 'community,' a problematic term, often construed in broad terms, and inextricably linked to race (Alexander 1998). In a study based in Bradford and Slough, Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera identified that young Muslim men are especially susceptible to alienation, with media representations portraying of young Muslim men as "deviant, criminal, and a threat to social order" (Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera 2008). Their work on 'Muslim masculinities' is worth considering in detail, as it points to the many ways that gender can intersect with religion. In an effort to break down a homogenous idea of young Muslim men, they identified four types of British Pakistani Muslim masculinities at the intersection of age, ethnicity, class, gender and religion, while acknowledging that the four are not comprehensive, or mutually exclusive. While the study did not focus on the religious identities of the four categories, a discussion of what can be gathered from the descriptions will be useful in determining the role of religion in these men's lives.

These four masculinities are 'religious,' 'middle-class,' 'rebellious,' and 'ambivalent.' The first category consists of young men who prioritized a religious identity, including attending the mosque, wearing 'Islamic' dress, and fasting. Those who displayed 'middle-class' masculinities focused on education and social mobility; while all of them identified as Muslim, they described Islam as more of a philosophy than a doctrine or practice. 'Rebellious' young men were largely under-educated and unemployed, and some were involved in crime and expressed issues with authority. Of all the informants in the study, these men were most concerned about racism around South Asians, and Islamophobia. The men in this 'highly performative' category of 'rebellious masculinity' highlighted their identification as Muslim

and some connected to the idea of the *umma*, while acknowledging that Muslim values were not guiding their current choices. Still, they expressed aspirations future, such as an informant who said he was "hoping to become a better Muslim in the future, practising more of my Islam…" (Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera 2008). Finally, those with 'ambivalent' masculinities share poor academic performance with the rebellious men, but do not clash with authority, and are actively working to advance their careers. This was often inspired by parents with high expectations for them, and the realization that they were to be the breadwinners of their families in the future. For these men, Islam did not play an active role in their lives but remained part of their broader identity. The study does well in highlighting the diverse ways that Muslims can engage with Islam and testifies to the fact that there are pluralities of meaning in what it means to be a Muslim man, as well as showing the impact of different factors such as class and family.

The home, commonly associated with women, is also a crucial site for understanding Muslim men. Charsley and Liversage argue that the UK has used the discourse of women being forced into marriage as a reason for immigration restrictions (2015). The discourse represents Muslim men as patriarchal figures who abuse power and reproduces the orientalist discourse of "saving brown women from brown men," as first phrased by Spivak (1988 quoted in Charsley and Liversage 2015, 500). As a result, the ability of men to voice their problems and vulnerabilities is limited; they cease to be understood as affective individuals. This is compounded by the fact that male British Pakistani migrants, the subjects of her study, often suffer from downward mobility and are forced to take on jobs below their training. Furthermore, in the present day as opposed to in earlier waves of migration, many transnational marriages involve the male moving into his bride's household, where she is already settled with her parents. This situation is in stark contrast to the patrilineal structure in Pakistan and affords the man little power to express any discontent (Charsley 2005; Charsley and Liversage 2013;

Charsley and Wray 2015; Charsley and Liversage 2015; Charsley, Bolognani, and Spencer 2017).

Concluding Thoughts on Islam in England

While the climate of Prevent has meant that surveillance is an ever-present reality, the daily practices of Muslims are often ignored, misunderstood, or hidden from view. Mega-mosques have high visibility, yet many Muslims worship in converted townhouses, warehouses, or other buildings that are not demarcated as 'Islamic.' For some Muslim communities, this renders them 'subterranean' (Dafydd Jones 2012), or invisible. Furthermore, expectations of what it means to be a male or female Muslim overlay the actual experiences of male and female Muslims. This is where the anthropology of Islam can be helpful; rooted in everyday, contemporary experiences, it can highlight the aspirations (Liberatore 2016b) and experiences of British Muslims.

Furthermore, Islam in England should be situated alongside England's other religions rather than being studied in artificial isolation. Mosques exist alongside churches, synagogues, and temples, as Muslims live alongside Christians, Jews, and many others. How these religious lives are expressed against a pluralist, perhaps (post)secular backdrop can best be understood in dialogue with one another. While Muslims in England have, problematically, been expected to account for themselves using a 'Protestant template' of religion (Knott 1998, 768), Islam can now be seen on its own terms, but it remains in contact with other religions. Finally, Muslims must be considered not as a homogenous group, but in terms of ethnicity, race, class, and gender; only then can they be as individuals with intersecting identities, and diverse aims, concerns, and daily experiences. Until this is understood, Muslims in England will in some ways be 'invisible.' That this has not yet been accomplished is in contradiction to the demographic fact that Islam is the fastest-growing religion in England.

Space and Place

When investigating interreligious relations for this thesis, space and place emerged as consistent themes. My interlocutors would frequently use spatial imagery and metaphors to describe their experiences. A women's interreligious group was "a good space to be in," or belonging to the established Church was "a place of great privilege." A Presence and Engagement report stated that "the wider world of other Faiths has arrived on our doorstep" (2005, 21). In addition to these turns of phrase, there were key spaces and places that emerged as sites of significance. The nation as a conceptual space was invoked often by the national reports. The Anglican ecclesiology is replete with spaces from the parish, to the deanery, the diocese and so on. Bishops are rooted in place; one is not a bishop unless a bishop of *somewhere*, for instance, Birmingham. This is before the buildings are mentioned; the sites of worship such as churches, churchyards, chapels, shrines, minsters, abbeys, and cathedrals. When these sites are constructed, they are made sacrosanct through rituals of consecration; the ground becomes hallowed. If they are to be sold or used for another purpose, they are ritually deconsecrated.

There are also the offices where church business takes place such as diocesan offices; Church House in London which holds the General Synod; Lambeth Palace in London and Bishopthorpe Palace in York which are the sites of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, respectively. There are also theological colleges such as Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, where I met with one informant. Moreover, in interreligious dialogue and evangelism, a frequent concern is the state of the salvation of one's interlocutor; will they 'go to' *heaven* or to *hell*, also imagined as destinations or places. Indeed, theologically this is fitting with a religion that holds to the Incarnation: that God "*was made flesh and dwelt among us*" as says the Gospel of John; that is to say, God walked the earth with human feet and touched the very materials that would later form the buildings mentioned above: wood, earth and clay, and

indeed did all this as the son of a carpenter. All of this is to say that a method which considers space is fitting for a study of Anglicanism. But what are 'space' and 'place'?

The Spatial Turn

Ralph Kingston has correctly identified that "To turn spatial, one is first required to come to terms with a lot of bewildering — and often elusive — texts" (2010, 112). In what follows I will briefly set out the major contributions to spatial theory in order to locate my own approach. The 'spatial turn' of the latter half of the twentieth century called attention to how human actions are embedded in and influenced by particular contexts including the built and natural environments. Spatial theorists disrupted the Cartesian understanding of space as a neutral or an empty container, instead highlighting the link between space and human knowledge, action, power, and politics. The 'spatial turn' began in geography and spread to other social sciences and the study of religions in an interdisciplinary ripple effect.

The analyses of these scholars varied on several key points: for instance, Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1974; trans. 1991) put forward a Marxist critique on how spaces are 'produced,' while Doreen Massey focused on the gendered elements of space (Massey 1994). Edward Soja's concept of 'thirdspace' (Soja 1996) attempted to transcend the dualist material-imagined understanding of space. Perhaps the most provocative is David Harvey, who departed from his interlocutors in arguing for a total lack of objectivity in the experience of space (Harvey 1990). While I do not share Lefebvre's Marxist aims, his notion of a spatial triad is influential in my thinking. Lefebvre proposed a three-fold understanding of spatial production: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practice, or perceived space, describes the social and material 'everyday' practices that take place in a given space. Lefebvre gives the example of "the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidised high-rise housing project" (1991, 38). Representations of space are how space is understood and signified through materials such as blueprints and maps. Finally,

representational spaces are the immaterial, imaginary associations that one associates with a given space. It is "space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols…the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' [which]…overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects." (1991, 39) 'Space' in this trialectic model is the sum of the relations between spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space, and cannot be understood without reference to all three. The spatial triad of Lefebvre remains useful for my approach insofar as it analyses space as socially constructed and consisting of multiple dimensions.

The Politics and Poetics of Space

Approaches to religion and space are often typologized as taking one of two forms: the political or the poetic (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Kong 2001; Knott 2005). These are sometimes presented as opposing approaches, but both will have utility in this project. The political allows for a critical analysis of how the Church's understandings of spaces such as churches, the parish, and the nation are mobilised to achieve their desired ends. This is the usual method for social-scientific studies of religion and space. The poetics of space allow for an understanding of the Church's theology which lies behind its actions, an aspect that an analysis simply driven by power dynamics would risk overlooking.

In *To Take Place*, Jonathan Z. Smith asked, "What if space were not the recipient but rather the creation of the human project? What if place were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?"(J. Z. Smith 1987). This is emblematic of the politics of space, which takes a social constructivist view. A political view of religious space takes up the task of analysing human action: it rejects non-human agency such as ideas of "the sacred" and focuses on human action and conflict with a view to "hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 17). A religious space in this sense is a human product and a human project, populated by the interplay of built space, imagination, and the movements and

perceptions of the body (Radermacher 2016). Likewise, the politics of space have a focus on negotiation and conflict. Since there is no timeless 'sacred' grounding spaces, they lack permanence. As such they are dynamic and subject to changes in ownership and identity. Doreen Massey, while not writing about religious spaces, is helpful to this end. For Massey, a place is an instantiation of a network of social networks embedded in a particular moment in time. Accordingly, "all attempts to institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places" are "attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time" (Massey 1994, 5). The meaning of the given site is up for constant negotiation. This is an important concept in my analysis of the parish, which is understood differently by my interlocutors in Birmingham and between the national and the local.

In contrast, the poetic approach to space *typically* involves the presence of a transcendent principle or entity such as Otto's 'numinous' or Eliade's 'sacred.' The poetic approach is associated with the phenomenology of religion and as such, it has historically investigated the interaction between humans and 'the sacred' in space, and how locations are made sacred not just through human action but through the intervention of 'the sacred.' For Eliade, whose work *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959) is perhaps the most famous work in the poetics school, the sacred or the "real" irrupts into space-time. This approach is substantial and essentialist; in seeking the essence of a space, it equally seeks to describe the substance of the 'sacred.'

The poetic approach has been widely and rightfully critiqued. Eliade's scholarship was once lambasted as being "bad history…bad ethnography…bad method…bad psychology" by the anthropologist Edmund Leach (1966). From this, two questions arise: is it worth even discussing poetics, and is it possible to divorce poetics from the pitfalls of Eliade's method? I argue in the affirmative. While the 'sacred' of Eliade can be rejected as a critical lens, it remains crucial to understand the worldview of those we study, including their theological,

philosophical, and ethical ideas. A consideration of poetics is important, but it has historically been rooted in the wrong location, namely the theology of the scholar rather than the community being studied. To understand the actions of a given community, especially how they create and sustain spaces, attention must be given to the poetic elements of their life: their theologies, symbols, and rituals. It is these elements that can explain the *why* and the *what* of their actions. Without poetics, there might be no politics to speak of, and to assume that religious communities are driven simply by aims of power and economics ('politics' alone) is to assert a level of cynicism that risks overlooking worlds of social dynamics based on a community's religious commitments and practices (poetics). Poetics and politics must be considered together, and my analysis aims to consider both.

Another crucial consideration is the link between space and identity. The nation as an imagined space is contested, as are localised spaces such as the parish. In their volume on the spatial turn, editors Warf and Arias tell us that "Space is a social construction relevant to the understanding of the different histories of human subjects and to the production of cultural phenomena…Geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen." In other words, space and identity are mutually informative. In the words of Bourdieu, "Symbolic orderings of space and time provide a framework for experience through which we learn who or what we are in society. The reason why submission to the collective rhythms is so rigorously demanded is that the temporal forms or the spatial structures structure not only the group's representation of the world but the group itself, which orders itself in accordance with this representation" (1977, 163). Space and place are useful analytics to measure how the Church of England makes use of its resources — social, political, theological, financial — in building relationships with Muslim communities in local space and in theorising about its own place in multireligious England.

PART 1: THE NATIONAL

CHAPTER 2

Presence and Engagement: A New Era of Interreligious Relations in the Church of England

The manner in which the Church of England responds to the growing presence of other religious communities is of paramount importance in understanding interreligious relationships writ large in England today. No other religious body in England has the institutional unification and funds of the Church of England, and thus the concentrated power to influence the religious life of the nation. This is bolstered by the Church's connection to the English state and national identity. This chapter and the next will look at a programme launched by the Church of England in 2005 called 'Presence and Engagement,' a term redolent with socio-theological implications, as will be discussed below. In the words of the Church, the Presence and Engagement programme was developed to "encourage the Church of England to think about the reality of religious diversity and how it might shape mission and ministry."[26]

In 2005,2005, the Church of England released a report entitled *Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi Faith society*.[27] This report, detailing the launch of the 'Presence and Engagement' programme, marked the emergence of a new era of the Church's approach to relations with people of other religions in England. The successors to the 2005 report are *Staying present and engaging faithfully: A report to General Synod* (2009); *Generous Love for All Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium*: *A Report from the Presence and Engagement Task Group* (2011); and *The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society: A report on the recent work and future vision of the Presence and Engagement programme* (2017).[28] A fifth report, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010) emerged out of a Private Member's motion at General Synod but is related thematically to the Presence and Engagement reports. These have yet to be analysed in depth by scholars and they are of much importance. The reports are documentary evidence of the Church's

[26] "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023.
[27] "Churches'" in the title refers to individual congregations, hence the spelling. The titles of the reports are not consistent in their style and capitalization. I have presented them as the written by the Church of England.
[28] For purposes of abbreviation, these reports will be referred to by their General Synod filing numbers as indicated in the list of abbreviations after the Table of Contents.

ongoing attempts to understand — and actively construct — its place in light of the increasing presence of other religions in England. They cover a wide range of topics, such as the meaning of establishment, soteriology, evangelism, and the role of parishes and church buildings. The reflections on these topics are put into action through the work of the Presence and Engagement programme. The programme aims to provide resources and guidance for how the Church might best interact with people of other religions. It does this through its reports as presented to General Synod, as indicated above, and through physical 'hubs' in several dioceses which provide spaces for workshops and meetings. These are facilitated by "interfaith advisors," a role which is now held in most dioceses. The programme also produces resources on specific issues that priests might encounter in their ministry, such as requests for interreligious weddings, or the rental of church halls for non-Christian worship.

I take the Presence and Engagement programme to be representative of the Church of England's approach to interreligious relations at the *national* level. Though Presence and Engagement has local instantiations, it is a national initiative structurally.[29] The programme is subsumed under the Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Church of England, which belongs to the Archbishop's Council, one of the seven National Church Institutions. Indeed, in its augural report, the authors note that "The mandate for this [interreligious] work lies **firstly** at the level of the Church and in particular through the Inter Faith Consultative Group, the Mission and Public Affairs Council and the Archbishops' Council. At a **second** level, its justification lies in the record that it offers of the actual experiences of local churches… (2005, 5, emphasis mine). The use of the word "Church" to refer exclusively to the national level of the Church of England, as contrasted to the "local churches," is indicative of the positionality and priorities of its authors. The chief Presence and Engagement staff include a National Interreligious Affairs Advisor, who works at Lambeth Palace and reports to the Archbishop of

[29] I will discuss the work of Presence and Engagement in Birmingham in Part 2 of this thesis.

Canterbury, a Presence and Engagement National Programme Coordinator, who works at Church House, the administrative centre of the Church of England adjacent to Westminster Abbey. Their roles are bound to the national church rather than a diocese. With all of the above considered, it is with a view to Presence and Engagement as national that my analysis proceeds.

The term 'Presence and Engagement' has become significant for the Church. Since 2005 it has been used for a variety of entities over and above the 2005 report and the main programme. For instance, parishes in which more than 10 per cent of the population are members of non-Christian religions are dubbed "Presence and Engagement *parishes*." The 2005 report refers to the "Presence and Engagement *process*," by which the authors are referencing the qualitative and quantitative data-gathering undertaken in launching the programme. The term is also employed in the reports to describe an outlook or theological stance. When this occurs the justification for the terminology becomes clearer and gives insight into the Church's self-understanding and priorities. For instance, the introduction to the 2005 report states that "the word 'presence' points to our incarnational theology and the word 'engagement' to our pentecostal theology…" (2005, 5) A few pages later, it proceeds to assert:

> To speak of Presence and Engagement is to speak of locality and context. We exist always in relation to others around us who impact upon us and condition the context in which we live and work and have our being. Human beings are always present somewhere, in some relationship with place and therefore with others who occupy the same spaces, whether at work, residentially or in leisure. Presence can be largely passive, a simple acceptance that this is where we are, without any meaningful recognition of the relationship between our presence, the presence of others and the real presence of Christ who seeks constantly to bring human beings into relationship with each other in love. But the Spirit of God is constantly seeking to move us on from the fact of presence to the action of engagement – engagement as a public sign of our commitment to the wellbeing of the world and to the discovery of the Kingdom in the midst of the places where we are present. **To be present and engaged is to be incarnated, to be present in particular time and space**, with the possibility of speaking particular words and taking a range of actions. Presence as incarnation is a gift of God, full of the possibility of abundant life; that is the purpose of incarnation – 'I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.' (2005, 8)

The Church's use of spatial language to explain its theological reasoning behind the term 'Presence and Engagement' is worth noting. The Church's spaces and places, from the church to the cathedral, are not neutral containers but living manifestations of the Church's identity. Just as spaces cannot be understood without the actors that engage in them, so the subjectivity of those actors can be understood through how they create, inhabit, and worship in space. This is a premise which guides my understanding of interreligious relations in Birmingham, where spatial entities such as the parish are highly valued by my interlocutors. It is also relevant here because space is consistently invoked by the Presence and Engagement reports in connection to the subjectivity of the Church as a national institution. The Bishop of Aston, the Rt Rev'd John Austin, in a speech to General Synod on the advent of P&E on Sunday 10 July 2005, said,

> Our self-understanding as the Church for the nation is evolving in the light of our relationships with these different faith communities and their leaders. We have to ask ourselves what is God requiring of us at this moment in our nation's history, when so many of our fellow citizens belong to communities of faith other than Christian. We are presented with a vocational question as the Church of England...[Presence and Engagement] is about the specific ways we are seeking to be still the Church for the nation. (The Archbishops' Council 2005)

The Bishop of Aston's words indicate a Church in search of its identity in a dialectic relationship with other religious and non-religious bodies around it. The Presence and Engagement reports act as textual representations of the emerging *subjectivity* of a Church in an unprecedentedly religiously diverse England. The concept of subjectivity is salient here in its sociological sense: "the self-conscious perspective of the person or subject," (Scott and Marshall 2009) is consistently in flux and in a dialectical relationship with the surrounding political sphere, cultures, and communities. Through the reports, we can understand *who* the established Church sees itself as, and what understanding of space is guiding its engagements with Muslim individuals and communities.

It is worth briefly emphasizing the importance of the Presence and Engagement documents, or: why do the Church of England's identity struggle and growing pains merit

academic discussion? The Church's decisions impact—either directly or indirectly—almost all religious people residing in England, and many non-religious people as well. There is a strong sense in the Presence and Engagement documents that by the Church's own admission, the increasing, visible presence of other religions in England has provoked self-reflection. This is especially true in regard to the growth of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities in England. How the Church, as a subject, responds to these communities is of paramount importance in understanding interreligious relationships in England today. How the Church understands itself and decides to allocate its thousands of buildings, billions of pounds in assets and political influence affects all other religious bodies. Anglicanism — which etymologically simply means 'Englishness' or 'of the English people'— is empowered by the Crown and the state to be England's religion. The fact that the Church of England is empowered by the state to have the "cure of all souls" means that they understand themselves to have a responsibility to all persons in England. This results in an indelible mark on the (inter)religious climate of the country.

To understand how Presence and Engagement operates, it is first necessary to consider the ecclesiological structure of the Church of England. Accordingly, this chapter will begin with a consideration of the organization of the Church. I begin this chapter with a pre-history of Presence and Engagement and proceed to analyse the inaugural Presence and Engagement report as presented to the General Synod of the Church of England in July 2005. I argue that the reports are evidence of the Church's emerging subjectivity as it considers its place in multireligious England. I highlight three elements of the Church's emerging subjectivity: a focus on Islam as the Church's main (inter)religious dialogue partner, the Church's choice to use 'faith' rather than 'religion' as terms, and hospitality and the dynamics of "host and guest" relationships between religions in England.

The Spatial Organization of the Church of England

The Church of England is organised so that it maintains "a Christian presence in every community," as the tagline under the logo on its website states. These presences in every community are organised from smaller into larger entities up to the national level. The Church's understanding of space is guided by its ecclesiology; in other words, its understanding of how God's Church on earth should be structured and led. An essential part of the ecclesiology is that the Church is episcopal and apostolic; each new priest is ordained by a bishop, who was once ordained by another bishop, such that there is a lineage that, according to the Church, goes back to the original apostles. The Archbishops of the Church ordain its bishops, who in turn ordain its priests.

The smallest unit of space in the Church of England is the parish. The parish represents the 'local' presence of the Church. Every parish contains a parish church with a priest — alternately called curate, vicar, or rector — who is responsible for leadership in that church and for all the people who live in the parish boundaries. Parishes are distinct and do not overlap. There are 12,500 parishes in the Church of England. Parishes are situated in dioceses, of which there are 42. Dioceses are each overseen by a bishop, or sometimes in large dioceses, multiple bishops. In turn, dioceses in England belong to one of two provinces: York or Canterbury. York and Canterbury each have an archbishop. The Archbishop of Canterbury is considered the 'first among equals' among all bishops in the Church of England, and indeed in the Anglican Communion worldwide. Although the Archbishop of Canterbury is the chief religious figure of the Church of England, the monarch holds the role of Supreme Governor and as such, is the head of the Church.

The parish is the most important spatial unit in the Church of England for the purposes of this thesis. It is frequently invoked in both the Presence and Engagement reports and by my interlocutors, albeit in different ways. The significance of the parish crosses party divisions in the Church. While party divisions inform differing liturgical styles, differing theologies of

salvation, and differing reasons for engaging with people of other religions, the parish is a common motif because all members of the Church of England have a part in it. In fact, in the understanding of the Church of England, *all* people in England have a part in the parish. Fr Adrian, one of my interlocutors, told me: "every person belongs to the parish, whether they like it or not!" While not everyone would phrase the issue in such terms, it is true that the parish system is mapped onto all of England; there is not a house, meadow, or tube station that is not situated in a Church of England parish, however oblivious most of the English population may be to this fact.

The mapping of the parishes onto England is associated with the notion of the "cure of souls," which in the Church's understanding means that every member of the English population falls under the care of his or her parish priest.[30] The priest has the cure of souls of *all* people within the parish: not just those who attend the church, but everyone who lives in the parish boundaries whether they are Christians, people of other religions or people with no religious affiliation. This means that in theory, anyone who lives in England has a priest praying for them, and who is responsible for facilitating key life events at the behest of the parishioner. As part of the Church-State settlement, all people in England are entitled to baptism, marriage,[31] and a funeral in their parish church.[32]

The Church of England uses the parish as a site of engagement with people of other religions. The Presence and Engagement programme was developed specifically based on the parish model, as will become apparent in considering its first report from 2005. The word 'parish' and its variants occur 220 times in the 2005 report. 'Diocese' occurs 138 times, and 'province' none. Likewise, my interlocutors in Birmingham found the parish to be important in their ministries and interreligious work, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. It is crucial

[30] The cure of souls given to a priest by the Bishop at his or her ordination.
[31] At the time of writing, the Church of England only performs opposite-sex marriages.
[32] 'Parishioners' are also entitled to burial in the parish churchyard, if existent.

to note that Presence and Engagement, as a nationally-driven programme, has a different vantage point on the parish compared to my interlocutors in Birmingham. The Presence and Engagement reports discuss the parish from the perspective of the national church looking down *to* the parish and *about* the parish, while my interlocutors speak *from* the parish. Nevertheless, it remains an important shared symbol between Anglican leaders in interreligious relations at all levels.

A Brief Pre-History of Presence and Engagement

Before considering the Presence and Engagement report in 2005 it is worth looking at the events and programmes which form its history. The Church of England had been engaging with Muslim communities long before the advent of the Presence and Engagement programme. Though this study focusses on the Church of England's relationships to Islam on English soil, the impact of both the British Empire and Anglican mission—often interrelated—cannot be overlooked. Anglicans and Muslims first interacted on a larger scale abroad than they did in England. The late 18th and early 19th centuries saw the founding of several missionary agencies, all Anglican, and with some overlapping agendas. Notable among them are the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the oldest Anglican missionary agency in the world formed in 1698 with aims to rejuvenate religious life within England, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), founded by a Royal Charter in 1701 as a missionary branch of the Church of England.[33] In 1842 the two agencies allied on a project to support indigenous Syriac-speaking churches in the Islamic world. One of the reasons for contact with these ancient churches was that "it was thought that a renewed and invigorated Eastern Christianity would be a very effective means of witnessing within Islamic contexts" (Nazir-Ali 2015, 600). Indeed, the aims of Anglican agencies in Islamic territories have been

[33] The SPG still exists as the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG).

dual: to support minority churches in those areas and to evangelise Muslims (Nazir-Ali 2015). Other projects within the missions included educational and medical initiatives. The Church Mission Society (CMS), founded in 1799, had its genesis in the East India Company. Later it also made connections with local churches and Muslim communities in Egypt and Iran in the 19th century.

As explained in the previous chapter, the first major wave of immigration of Muslim people to the UK occurred in the 19th century, with subsequent waves throughout the 20th century. The growing presence of Muslim people in England led the Church of England to further reflect on how they might engage with them. As with the missions abroad, approaches varied and there was neither a unilateral approach nor a unilateral theology. There was, however, a desire that the established church should be involved in welcoming the new arrivals. In their survey of Anglican relationships to other religions, Ipgrave and Amos identify that

> In relation to interfaith relations such a sense of structural untidiness is reflected in the fact that at diocesan, provincial, and international levels, Anglicans have never been quite sure where to 'locate' work with people of other faiths: is it an expression of mission and evangelism—and thus to be located in departments of Mission? Is it an extension of ecumenical involvement and therefore to be placed alongside relationships with other Christian churches in a department of Unity? Or is it (particularly in some demographic contexts) an aspect of involvement in wider society, and thus to be linked to a department of Church in Society? (2015, 428)

The approach of the Church of England in the 20th century appears to have broadly fallen in the latter category for relationships with Muslim communities *within* England. The 1970s and 1980s saw interreligious dialogue work become prominent in local spaces, coinciding with the second major wave of immigration from Muslim countries.[34]

[34] However, the work was not always conceived of as religious dialogue, but sometimes racial dialogue following how British perceptions of minorities shifted from 'colour' to 'race' to 'ethnicity' and finally to 'religion.' (Peach 2005). Or as Abbas identifies, "British popular discourse has expanded from seeing minorities as a homogenous entity, to discerning differences within and between these minority groups: separating ''blacks'' from Asians, differentiating between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis and distinguishing between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Religion has emerged as a major social signifier." (Abbas 2007, 288)

Among the earliest evidence that the Church of England was engaging in deep ways with other religions was a motion tabled at the 1966 Convocation of Canterbury, a precursor to General Synod. The Reverend E.G. Stride proposed "That this House views with concern the holding of multi-religious services in Christian Churches." Notably, his particular example was a wedding between a Christian and a Muslim. This prefigures how conversations about interreligious dialogue often focus on Islam. His motion was opposed by the Reverend Kenneth Cragg, who was a renowned scholar of Islam. Cragg's speech in opposition to the motion was then countered by a different priest, who supported the motion. The motion passed. (Lawton 2011). Notable from this brief example is the focus on Islam and the diversity in theologies, both of which remain in the Church of England's approach to the same issues in more current times.

In 1970, Anglicans in Bradford appointed a regional interfaith advisor (Lewis 2015), the first of what would become a common role across the Church of England. Every diocese has an inter-faith advisor; some are part-time while others are full-time, such as in Birmingham. It was also in the 1970s that "the Church of England's response to questions of inter-faith relations became increasingly formalized" (Loss 2020, 308). 1975 saw the first meeting of the 'Consultants to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York on Inter-faith Relations.' The group of consultants included an expert on each major religion; notably, however, all of them were Anglicans including Kenneth Cragg, the appointed expert on Islam. In the 1980s "it became apparent that the scale and importance of inter-faith relations might be better served through bodies more formally constituted through the Church's General Synod, rather than the small group that supported the archbishops on a more personal level" (Loss 2020, 311). The direct precursor to Presence and Engagement is the 'Inter Faith Consultative Group (IFCG)'

established in 1980.[35] Members from the IFCG formed the national steering group for the first Presence and Engagement report which was first created under the aegis of the IFCG. When the report was received successfully, the group became the Presence and Engagement task group, superseding the IFCG (Loss 2020).

Throughout the same years, there was also a preponderance of groups developed *outside* the Church. These groups had actual representation from different religions, though often they still had Anglican leadership. One such example is the Inner Cities Religious Council developed in 1991 by John Major's Conservative government. It included representation from five religions but all of its secretaries were Anglican clergymen. The relationship between the government and the Church will be discussed in relation to the Presence and Engagement reports. Another important group, still existent, is the 'Inter Faith Network UK,' created in 1987 by sixty founding member organizations.

Loss identifies that Archbishop Runcie in a 1990 speech to the IFN said that "British Muslims, above all, have forced the rest of us to recognize that the religious dimension of a community's identity must be recognized" (2020, 312), again prefiguring Presence and Engagement's implicit focus on Islam. Meanwhile, Philip Lewis locates the creation of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) in 1997 as a key moment; the MCB was one of the first large-scale 'umbrella' organizations for Muslims in Britain. In collaboration with the Church of England, it successfully lobbied the government to add a question about religion to the census (Lewis 2015).

This brief pre-history of Presence and Engagement demonstrates that there has been significant Anglican attention to interreligious matters, especially concerning Islamic communities, since at least the 1970s. General Synod debates around the theology of

35 The reports of the IFCG have been fruitfully analysed in a doctoral thesis by the Rev'd Theresa Lawton. I am grateful for her time discussing them with me.

interreligious dialogue (1984) and interreligious worship (1966;1992) prefigured conversations which would be prompted by the Presence and Engagement reports. Meanwhile, the development of diocesan interfaith advisors in religiously diverse cities such as Bradford became a role that is now in most dioceses, many full-time. From the beginning of the Church of England's attempts at interreligious relations there have been local and national, informal and institutional efforts. These themes carry on to the current day as evidenced in Presence and Engagement reports and local experiences alike.

Selected Clerical and Scholarly Figures of Note

In addition to this historical lineage of interreligious groups, it is worth noting several key figures whose impact would have been certainly felt by the Presence and Engagement task group. The chief among these figures is Kenneth Cragg, the Anglican bishop and Oxford-educated scholar (1913-2012). Cragg's seminal works *The Call of the Minaret* (1956) and *Sandals at the Mosque* (1959) among others, called for a Christian attentiveness to Islam rooted in a balance of truth and generosity, and with concern for the wider cultures in which Christian-Muslim encounters take place. Richard Sudworth has argued that Cragg is "a persistent and ever-influential interlocutor to the interfaith challenge for Anglicans" and has convincingly mapped his influence on the Lambeth Conferences of 1988, 1998, and 2008 as well as the report Generous Love, published by the Network for Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion (2008, 2015.)

Cragg's legacy is one of a marriage between theory and practice. For significant portions of his life, he lived in majority-Muslim countries, which in turn informed his erudite yet accessible scholarship on Muslim-Christian relations. It is precisely this marriage between theory and practice which the Presence and Engagement programme aims for: its national reports provide theoretical support for local encounters. Beyond this, while Cragg's influence is a near certainty, it is not possible to ascertain with any precision how this influence may have

been experienced. He is not named in any of the national Presence and Engagement reports? except in Annex 1 of Sharing the Gospel of Salvation, where The Call of the Minaret is listed as recommended reading. He was not mentioned in any of my interviews with my interlocutors in Birmingham. For this reason he does not feature more in this thesis, but his presence in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, and Anglican-Muslim relations in particular, is significant.

Other notable figures include the English theologian Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), who was bishop in the Church of South India, a non-Anglican Protestant denomination. Newbigin was a key figure in the Christian missionary endeavour in India and his notions of the finality of Christ and the dialectic relationship between cultural context and mission were widely received and influential in 20th century theology. Newbigin is favourably mentioned in a footnote in *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*. While the Presence and Engagement reports do not often engage directly with academic theology, the portion of *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* in which Newbigin is mentioned does briefly refer to John Milbank and Stanley Hauerwas to "reject the liberal idea that our common humanity, or universal understanding of rationality, must be privileged above the specifics of tradition" (The Church of England 2010, 12).

The British-Pakistani former Anglican bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is another figure worth mentioning. Nazir-Ali was a bishop in Pakistan in the 1980s and Bishop of Rochester in 1994-2009. With both Christian and Muslim heritage in his family, Nazir-Ali was heavily involved in Anglican-Muslim relations in the Church of England and authored several books including *The Unique and Universal Christ* (2008), which is also on the selected reading list in Annex 1 of *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*. Finally, it is important to note that Rowan Williams was the Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 through to the end of 2012. His influence as a cleric and theologian cannot be overstated. With John Sentamu, then the Archbishop of York, he wrote the forward to *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, which will be

discussed in Chapter 3. These figures are all worth considering in the context of Anglican-Muslim relations in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Presence and Engagement (2005): GS 1577

The Framework of the Report

The production of the ninety-page *Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi Faith society*, hereafter GS 1577, was overseen by an advisory group of seven clergy. The stated goal of the report is to: "identify what these [Presence and Engagement] parishes were doing and how they were responding to the changed context of their ministry and mission…[and] to identify where there is good practice and share that across the regions" (2005, 3). It consists of two main interwoven strands: data from nationwide quantitative and qualitative research carried out by the advisory group, and theological reflection on the data. The report begins with a reflection on the religious landscape of England and highlights the concerns of the Church as relates to other religions in England. It moves on to list twenty questions which came out of consulting parishes across the country: the questions "with which local churches in multi Faith neighbourhoods wrestle" (2005, 15).

These questions range from considering resources; "Are the current buildings the most appropriate to enable Christian engagement with local [faith] communities – and if so, how are they best used?" (2005, 16) to issues of ecclesiology; "What expectations of church growth are realistic in parishes where the majority of people identify themselves as belonging to other religions? (2005, 15)" There are also charts and tables indicating answers to questionnaires completed by clergy, with questions such as "What three things would make the biggest positive difference to your church in relation to its ministry amongst and alongside other Faith

communities?" (2005, 72). The questionnaire responses are accompanied by stories from 'Presence and Engagement' parishes about interreligious interactions.

The stories range vastly and encompass both positive encounters (from London: "The induction of the vicar this month was attended by Muslim, Hindu and Jewish friends in the community" (2005, 24) to ambiguous or negative (from Leicester: "Our neighbours are changing again…Older people are struggling to adapt to yet another immigrant group…"(2005, 23). The authors of the report provide theological reflections based on the issues raised in their consultations. These reflections offer approaches to encountering challenges raised in religiously diverse parishes, and broader comments on the role of the Church of England in such parishes, and in the nation as a whole.

Christian Unity and Islam as the 'Other'

GS 1577 was presented at the Church of England's General Synod on Sunday 10 July 2005. Notably, the '7/7' terror attacks had happened three days prior: a fact that was mentioned by the Bishop of Liverpool, the Rt Rev'd James Jones, who presented the report. However, the report itself had been written prior to 7/7 and had been disseminated among members prior to the meeting as is the standard at General Synod. Reports in General Synod are typically accompanied by motions which can then be debated before being put to a vote by the Chair.[36] The presentation of the report thus began with the motion as read by the then-Bishop of Liverpool:

> That this Synod:
> (a) re-affirm the Church of England's commitment in partnership with Christians of other traditions to resourcing ministry, witness and mission in multi Faith areas;
> (b) urge dioceses to review and develop their long-term strategies to equip and support clergy and congregations in multi Faith areas;
> (c) commend the report *Presence and Engagement* for study and action in dioceses and parishes; and

[36] The Chair of Synod at that meeting was the Bishop of Dover, the Right Reverend Stephen Venner.

(d) ask the Mission and Public Affairs Council to take forward the Presence and Engagement agenda and report back to Synod in the next quinquennium.
(Archbishops' Council 2005, 196)

The first item ("a") in the motion represents the delineation of boundaries across religious lines. From the perspective of the authors of the report and motion, 'Presence and Engagement' was a matter not merely of Anglicans and their relationships with other religious communities, but of Christians in England as a united body. This sentiment was affirmed by a speech by the Roman Catholic ecumenical representative who spoke shortly after in the debate: "We may occasionally want to point out that there are some differences between us but, nevertheless, we really should be recognized together as Christians. I sincerely hope that, as we seek to engage appropriately with those of other faiths, we can do that together" (2005, 203-204).[37] With consideration of the troubled history of Roman Catholics and Anglicans in England, such cooperation is notable. During my interviews among clergy in Birmingham, an interlocutor would tell me that in his previous parish in Southampton, 'interfaith' meant relationships between Roman Catholics and Anglicans. His words and the motion above indicate the contextual nature of social relationships and alliances. In the religious context of England at this moment, Catholics and Anglicans looked to their similarities as the religious 'other' became those of different religions entirely as opposed to other Christians.

The second and third items in the motion ("b" and "c") demonstrate the stratified ecclesiology of the Church of England. The report was being presented at the national assembly, having been written by members of the Mission and Public Affairs Council, but its intention was for the reports to be brought to the level of the diocese and the parish—most likely by bishops as they are the heads of the diocesan level of the Church. That it had to be made explicit that what occurs at Synod should affect the work of dioceses and parishes is

[37] A select number of representatives from various Christian denominations sit on General Synod as 'ecumenical observers.' They may give speeches in relation to motions and are sometimes called upon to speak for their respective communities.

perhaps an acknowledgement of fragmentation between the levels of the church: this would emerge as a central motif in my interviews with parish priests in Birmingham. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the aim of the Presence and Engagement programme, which was not to be an abstracted theological discussion about interreligious relations or soteriology but guidance to be practised and lived. The extent to which this aim was achieved in Birmingham will be considered in Part 2. Tellingly, the fourth item brought the focus back to the national level: the Mission and Public Affairs Council was to be the force that would advance Presence and Engagement and report back to Synod in the next quinquennium, meaning five years.

Bishop Jones proceeded to give a substantial speech in support of the report and the motion. Significantly, his first words after the motion were an acknowledgement of the terrorist attacks in London on the 7th of July, just three days prior to the meeting: "The tragic events of last Thursday bring into sharp focus the conflicts of the modern world and the clash of ideologies that affect us internationally and locally. They inevitably provide a context for our debate today, even though the report before you is part of the ongoing review of the mission of God in England" (2005, 196). His words on 7/7 are strikingly related to those in the report which states that 9/11 was an impetus for the development of Presence and Engagement. Though the overwhelming majority of Muslims would denounce the terror attacks, the fact that the terror attacks were committed in the name of Islam brings the religion as a whole to the forefront. It is the new religious 'other' that Roman Catholics and Anglicans are concerned about. This was confirmed in the seventeen speeches that followed Bishop Jones' presentation of the motion: an extraordinarily high number of speeches for a General Synod motion. The speeches affirmed the importance of interreligious relationships. Many of them focused on the speakers' stories of building relationships with Muslims. The motion was carried without any amendments. The final words on the matter were again from the Bishop of Liverpool. Anticipating the positive vote, he stated: "We feel that the Synod, subject to the way it votes in

a moment, is giving us a mandate as the Church of England to remain…a Church for the nation." These two themes, a focus on Islam and the process of discerning the vocation of the Church of England are salient in the report.

'Faith' and 'Religion'

The foreword of GS 1577, written by the Bishop of Aston, notes that the report began four years prior to its publication: 2001. At that time, members of the Inter Faith Consultative Group, the predecessor of Presence and Engagement, became "aware of the huge changes affecting the interfaith scene in the light of 9.11 and the key role many parish clergy played alongside with Faith Leaders generally in keeping their communities together (2005,1)." The impetus for Presence and Engagement was therefore a combination of the events of September 11 2001, and demographic changes, namely the increasing numbers of people in England who identify as Muslim. It is likely that the terrorist attacks brought the demographic changes, which had been occurring for decades, to the forefront of the minds of the English people.

It is no coincidence that concerns about the increased visibility of religious minorities are couched in the terminology of 'faith' rather than 'religion.' Recall the title of the report: "Presence and Engagement: The churches' task in a multi Faith society." Faith is the only capitalized word in the second half of the title; not even 'church' is given that privilege. Here 'faith' is linked with 'multi' to create the composite term 'multi Faith.' Why has the Church replaced 'religion with 'faith' in the title of this report? Malcolm Ruel's seminal "Christians as Believers" finds a focus on belief to be an untenable Christian imposition when considering other religions (1982). Faith, which has close connotations with belief, might reasonably be seen as an attempt to tame other religious communities. The manner in which the Church conceptualizes other religions undoubtedly influences how they engage with them.

Engaging with a community of 'Faith' might be different from engaging with a community of Ritual, or a community in which any other element of religion is privileged. If

Muslims are people of Faith rather than adherents to the religion of Islam, they are a group of people who *believe* certain things, with whom the Church can politely disagree over matters of doctrine. But if Muslims belong to a 'Religion,' the demands on the way they live might be more obvious, and importantly, might spill over into the public sphere – leaving work to pray, for instance, or in very rare, extreme cases (a pressing concern in the minds of those who see *all* Muslims as extremists) enacting violent *jihad*. While faith and practice are certainly not to be compartmentalised, there is an implication with the use of the term 'faith' that practice or ritual may not be included. It simply does not connote practice as much as it does belief.

Faith can easily be perceived as tame and safe in contrast to religion. Religion starts wars, can be found behind terror attacks, divides nations and families, and makes demands on people's lives as individuals and as communities that sometimes puts it ahead of the state. The Church of England, as the state Church, may well have a vested interest in keeping religion under control; in making religion a matter of cerebral 'faith' rather than practice. This comes through in the terminology that is used in this debut Presence and Engagement report.

The foreword to the report goes on to say:

> But we were also aware of the demographic changes that were having a profound effect on the ministry and mission of parishes in the inner areas of our major cities. We needed to offer some reflection to the Church on the implications of these changes for the **fundamental raison d'etre** [sic] of parishes serving in these areas. What did it mean for the parish church to be 'there' for all the people, when in some parishes, more than 50% of the people belonged to communities of faith other than Christian? As the Church of England, we needed to reflect more deeply on our ecclesiology. What in this context, is the distinctive call of God to us as the established Church of the land? (2005, 1, emphasis mine.)

I quote the foreword because it foreshadows several key themes that recur throughout the report. It is no small matter for a bishop of the Church to call for a re-evaluation of its *raison d'être*. Sensing demographic changes, and the increased visibility of religious minorities in England, the report indicates that the Church needed to decide whether a doctrine that emerged when Anglicanism was the only major religion in England — the 'cure of all souls'— applies

not only in a time when other religions are prevalent but whether it applies *to* people of other religions: what is the duty of care of the Church of England to non-Anglicans? However, this question led to a clear answer, without debate to the contrary: the cure of all souls remains, as applied to all people. This plays out in the host-guest dynamic as will be discussed below.

Spatialising Host and Guest Dynamics

Hospitality is a common motif in interreligious relations. To be hospitable, etymologically, is to act as *host*; to welcome another into one's space, whether it is one's land, home, or place of worship, and to provide comfort and nourishment. Likewise, being a generous and grateful guest enables hospitality on the other end. The Biblical commandment to love one's neighbour is often interpreted by Christians as welcoming guests, and in interreligious interactions, is often cited by Christians as an impetus to engage with people of other religions. However, hospitality tacitly relies on a system where it is clear who is the host and who is the guest. It also relies on a shared understanding of the parameters and ownership of the space in which the host/guest interaction is taking place.

The Presence and Engagement reports frequently use language consistent with host and guest dynamics. Notably, however, the dynamics discussed display an ambiguous and sometimes conflicting self-understanding of what it means for the Church of England to be the host religion, where this takes place, and whether it continues to be so. At times the reports display a confident notion that the established Church is the 'host religion' of all of England; in other words, as the historically rooted dominant religion, it has ownership and precedence above all other religions. This has the effect of implying that all other religions present in the country are guests. Conversely, at other times, there is clear anxiety about the changing status of the Church as it declines in membership and as the presence of other religions around it grows in numbers. When this anxiety surfaces, the Church sometimes insistently reasserts its role as host, but at other times, it indicates that it may be a guest in areas where other religions

are larger in number. The host/guest typology is helpful because it indicates the self-understood subjectivity of the Church, which in turn affects its interactions with, and understandings of, its religious dialogue partners. Its own sense of where it fits on a spectrum of host to guest is fluid.

Confident notions of the Church as host often occur in relation to the discussion of two entities: the state and the parish. Often these are intertwined. For example, in a section of the 2005 report concerning "Reflections on Presence and Engagement," the authors write:

> "…the Church of England has continued to understand itself to be called to be present corporately in all the localities of the country. At the heart of this self understanding [sic] is the parish church, a Christian community called to be present and to engage actively with all who live in the neighbourhood irrespective of their Faith or none. This comprehensive presence and duty of engagement with all via the shared charge of the 'cure of souls', has continued to be a foundational distinction of the Church of England **and an underpinning of its relationship with the State.**" (2005, 11, emphasis mine.)

The notion, as embedded in Canon Law, that the incumbent of a parish has the "cure of all souls" in that parish carries an implicit notion of hosting within the boundaries of the parish. This very notion is reinforced, and the boundaries of the hosting relationship extended nation-wide when the Church's close relationship with the State is invoked. The phrasing used by the Church indicates an ongoing understanding of Anglicanism as a component of English identity; an understanding which is consistent with the history of the Church and of the nation, and which would be entirely uncontroversial even fifty years ago. However, it is notable that this understanding has not broken down since the rise of religious diversity in the nation. For instance, in another section of the 2005 report, the authors state that: "the wider world of other Faiths has arrived on **our** doorstep and **Muslims, Sikhs and Hindu people are now parishioners**…" (2005, 21, emphasis mine.) An obvious sense of ownership is proffered through the use of "our." 'Doorstep' is most readily understood as England itself, the birthplace and inheritance of the established church. Just as salient regarding Church-as-host is the insistence that Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus are participants in the parochial system, a space

invented by Christians and sustained by the Church of England.[39] The fact that "power relations always underlie the social construction of space" (Low 2017, 69)is important here: through the invocation of this spatial system, the Church attempts to make other religions subjects in its own hierarchical divisions of space.

An anecdote from a parish priest quoted in the report supports the notion that the parish enables actors in the Church to have an attitude of ownership: "Yesterday at my local Sufi mosque we prayed together as usual. I am their priest. It is good" (2005, 58, emphasis in the report). The fact that the mosque fell within the parish boundaries of the priest prompted him or her to use possessive language: "my mosque." It also reinforced the priest's sense of identity in relation to the mosque: "I am "their" priest." The anecdote is enthusiastically listed under a section of the report called "Stories of creative engagement." That the Presence and Engagement felt that this was worth including is indicative of a host mentality in relation to the parochial system. The perspective of the mosque was not included in the report.

The Church's confidence in its status as host, or in continuing in previous ways of hosting, is not always as firm as the above quotes indicate. The authors of the 2005 report write:

> Rapid change in the surrounding context has been the norm for most parishes which are now in or moving towards a minority Faith position in the neighbourhood. In such situations anxiety and a loss of confidence can sap the ability of a congregation to remain people of outgoing hope and **hospitality** and turn them inwards. True confidence lies not in numbers or in power but in the way of the incarnation, the Cross and resurrection. The loss of status and position can be crucifying, but can also be the means for local churches to lead people **back to a confidence in God rather than in inherited structures and ways of doing things.** (Bolding my own, 2005, 17)

The invocation to remain "people of outgoing hope and hospitality" indicates that hospitality is a central duty for the Church, both in the past and going forward. These words of exhortation and encouragement might be addressed to those who worry about declining membership

[39] The parochial system originated with the Roman Catholic Church pre-Reformation and was carried forward in the modern instantiation of the Church of England.

alongside the growth of other religious communities. These traditional measures of judging the health of the church are perhaps not considered viable or the truest measures according to the Church, as the latter part of the paragraph testifies. The opposition between 'confidence in God' and 'inherited structures' is notable; the host religion is the host because of inherited structures and ways of doing things. Yet it is clear from the words above that there is still a desire to be hosts in an active and forward-looking sense rather than as an inheritance of history. From one vantage point then, placed alongside the other quotes above, it is clear that the Church desires to remain the 'host religion,' but on the other, there is amenability to the possibility of adapting what this role might look like.

The tone of encouragement in the above quote might be an attempt to address some of the experiences relayed to the Presence and Engagement task force in their gathering of stories from parishes around the country. One such story from Birmingham read:

> The Gurdwara has replaced the Church as the Established Church. It is they who have the processions and organise the street parties and they are superb. Our church used to fulfil this role 50 years ago. We are utterly irrelevant to their life – they would be ten times our size – but each Faith is well disposed to the other. (2005, 22)

In his seminal work on *The Symbolic Construction of Community,* anthropologist Anthony Cohen notes that community "both implies similarity and difference," since a community is relational as both a positive grouping of people with something in common and opposition to other social entities. In this sense, "the boundary marks the beginning and end of a community…the boundary encapsulates the identity of the community." Yet boundaries are not objective, even when marked by physical elements such as a sea or wall. Boundaries are symbolic in the sense that they are representative, and also because symbols "allow those who employ them to supply part of their meaning" (Cohen 1985, 14). It follows from this that community boundaries such as parishes may be perceived in different ways even by those within the community. For some, the presence of people from other religions in 'their' parish

is a positive opportunity, for others, a negative and a sign of the decline of Christianity in Britain. The onus lies with the task force of Presence and Engagement to determine how to address these varying attitudes toward change, and they have chosen to encourage an expansive view of parochial 'belonging' that maintains the status of host. As the initiators of the parochial system, they are able to supply not just some, but *all* of its meaning.

The overall tone is one of wishing to maintain status as a religious leader in the nation, the 'host religion' of the country. At the same time, the honest approach taken by Presence and Engagement in addressing interreligious issues indicates that this 'host religion' is acutely aware that it may mean something different to be a host than it has meant in the past. At times, it may mean acting as a guest, as the story from Birmingham indicates. This comes out through the local anecdotes included in the reports more than the theorising *around* the anecdotes. The Church of England as the national church is managing its identity and balancing the loss of demographic status with a desire to retain its influence. This is a theme which carries forward into the rest of the Presence and Engagement reports and will be considered in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3
Competing Visions for Presence and Engagement? The February 2009 General Synod and Beyond

After the July 2005 meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England, a Presence and Engagement task group was assembled as pursuant to the remit given to the authors of the first report. The task group consisted of twenty "practitioners and scholars," who considered the themes of the first report and created this second report, *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully*, hereafter GS 1720. In the intervening years those involved with Presence and Engagement also set up three groups in partnership with other Christian groups in Leicester, Bradford, and London.[40] The motion passed at the July 2005 General Synod meeting concluded with the following exhortation: "That this Synod… ask the Mission and Public Affairs Council to take forward the Presence and Engagement agenda and report back to Synod in the next quinquennium" (2005, 196). Quinquennium is a period of five years: the first Presence and Engagement report came out in 2005 and so the promised 'reporting back' would occur in 2009, before the start of the next quinquennium. However, the February 2009 meeting of the General Synod would prove to have more discussion of interreligious matters than the creators of Presence and Engagement might have anticipated.

Any member of the General Synod may propose a motion to be debated by its members. These are referred to as Private Members' Motions, or PMMs. If a PMM gathers one hundred or more expressions of interest it is brought to the attention of General Synod at an upcoming meeting.[41] Before the July 2008 meeting of the General Synod, a lay member named Mr Paul Eddy proposed a motion regarding the "uniqueness of Christ," specifically:

[40] The centre that was set up in Leicester is the St Philip's Centre, a notable place for interreligious activity in the region. The centres in Bradford and London do not remain today.

[41] According to the Church of England's webpage about General Synod: "Private Members' Motions (PMMs) are one of a number of ways debates can be brought to the attention of the General Synod…Any member of the General Synod can write and submit a PMM. In order to decide whether a PMM should be put on the General Synod's agenda the Business Committee requires a minimum of 100 expressions of interest in support for the motion to be debated in the form of signatures. By putting their name to particular motions, members are signalling that they think they should be debated. When putting together the agenda for the next meeting of the Synod, the Business Committee thinks about the number of signatures each motion has received. Generally there is only space for one or two PMMs to be debated in each meeting of the General Synod (group of sessions). While the motion with the most signatures is often the one selected there can be reasons for selecting another that has also attracted considerable support (it might, for example, be more time-critical). Once a motion has been open

> That this Synod request the House of Bishops to report to the Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society, and offer examples and commendations of good practice in sharing the gospel of salvation through Christ alone with people of other faiths and none. (Archbishops' Council 2009, 212)

The motion gathered more than the adequate amount of expressions of interest, though it was not debated until the February 2009 meeting, allegedly due to time constraints. Thus while the Presence and Engagement task group's report *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully,* GS 1720, was debated on Thursday 12 February 2009, it was pre-empted by a debate on Mr Eddy's motion the day before: Wednesday 11 February 2009. Mr Eddy's motion passed and resulted in a report written by the House of Bishops and subsequently published in 2010, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, hereafter GS Misc 956

Mr Eddy's PMM exists in direct relationship to the Presence and Engagement and was catalysed by his dissatisfaction with the direction that the programme was taking. In this chapter I will consider both Mr Eddy's motion and the ensuing 2010 report, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*/GS Misc 956 as well as the update from Presence and Engagement and its 2009 report, *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully*/GS 1720. I will introduce these two events in order of the publication dates of the reports. While the debate over Mr Eddy's motion predates the Presence and Engagement debate by one day, it is best contextualised by the ensuant report which was not published until 2010.

I argue that Mr Eddy's motion presents a competing vision for how the Church of England should conceptualise interreligious relationships. Presence and Engagement was meant to be representative of the Church's position of matters of interreligious relations but this did not prove to be realistic in such a broad church. *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010) possesses a notably different tone from *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* (2009). The axis on which the tension revolves is the putative incompatibility of community cohesion and

for signature for three groups of sessions, if it has not attracted 100 signatures, it expires." (Church of England n.d., "Private Members Motions," accessed 19 January 2023.)

evangelism. While not in antipodal distinction these factors represent different priorities. A focus on evangelism may risk polite relations while a focus on community cohesion can obscure real points of difference. Each has ramifications for how the Church understands its role: is its remit to convert individuals or to create harmony? Importantly, the Church's consideration of these factors is affected by the broader political climate. Despite the "we don't do God" statement from Tony Blair's advisor, both his and Gordon Brown's New Labour governments alike placed great emphasis — and pressure — on religious communities (Chapman 2005; 2008). The 2009 recession, which was the subject of its own report and debate, was discussed at the February 2009 meeting of the General Synod. Both reports mention the government and from their distinct vantage points, both raise concerns about the relationship between the Church of England and the government of the day. In what follows I will discuss each report and its features, both divergent and in common. They act as a lens into the subjectivity of the Church in those crucial years and the evolution of the Church's approach to interreligious matters. I end this chapter with a brief consideration of the final two Presence and Engagement reports from 2011 and 2017 respectively, which are much shorter than their predecessors, and offer reflections on the collection of reports as a whole.

Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully: A Report to General Synod (2009)

This is the second major Presence and Engagement report, presented at General Synod in 2009. Unlike the first report, there were no motions attached to the presentation of this 2009 report except "That the Synod do take note of this Report" (The Archbishops' Council 2009, 340).

The Bishop of Bradford, then David James, presented the report. The report was authored by the Presence and Engagement task group, which falls under the Church's Mission and Public Affairs Council. The clear delineation of the task group's place in the corporate structure of the Church is significant; the first report (2005) marked the creation of Presence and Engagement by members of the Inter Faith Consultative Group, a precursor to Presence and Engagement,

while this report confirms its role in the institution. Presence and Engagement became a task group of its own and replaced the Inter Faith Consultative Group. This shift is notable in the report itself, which focusses much more on the national level than the parish level, contrary to the 2005 report which says that the parish is "where the action is" (2005, 3).

The Framework of the Report

GS 1720 begins with a discussion of the Church's national-level strategies and initiatives concerning interreligious engagement since 1970. Strikingly, until the discussion reaches the year 2005, the focus is solely on the Church's initiatives to the exclusion of national and international events and contexts, even to the exclusion of the events of September 11, 2001. The authors make a marked shift in their tone when they reach their review of the year 2005, commenting: "The Synod debate in July 2005 coincided with the terrorist bombings in London on 7th July" (2009, 4). Here it is worth remembering that the previous report was completed before the acts of terror on July 7, 2005. This is the first Presence and Engagement report since then. This striking sentence is followed by:

> The impact of the bombings on the environment in which Presence and Engagement programme developed, has been profound. The increasing anxieties underlying public perceptions of 'Faith communities', the severe impact of security concerns on the government's Cohesion and Faiths agenda and a complex set of developments between the Faith communities, - all these have created new and unfamiliar challenges for local churches, chaplaincies and Christian organisations. The complexity and unfamiliarity of these developments have substantially increased levels of anxiety across all sectors of society about religion, including about the place of Christianity in general and the Church of England in particular in our national life (2009, 4).

Following those remarks, the tone of the report changes conspicuously. The authors move to a discussion of the national context and the government, delaying a discussion of developments in Presence and Engagement, though an update on Presence and Engagement was part of the motion in 2005. The word 'anxiety' appears frequently, in reference to a sentiment experienced by Christians and non-Christians alike. In the regard of the Church, the events of 7 July 2005 marked a watershed moment in the religious climate of England. Following the broaching of

the topic of the 2005 bombings, the authors of the report discuss the government with a clear tone of unease. The discussion of the government is paired with concerns over how the Church is perceived by the government and wider public, and how factors external to the Church might be influencing its subjectivity. One such example is the New Labour government's agenda for social cohesion which had a prescriptive vision for the role of religious communities in Britain. The report ends with a summary of the work of Presence and Engagement, and presents three commendations to Synod, to be discussed in what follows.

While I have attempted to describe the structure of the report with clarity, it is important to note that the report lacks internal clarity. The authors frequently present ambiguous statements which are either not clarified or expounded upon or are only explained by further comments found later in the report. An example of this is found in the quote above, which references "a complex set of developments between the Faith communities" without explaining what those developments are until two pages later, and without much detail there. Compounding the confusion, there are statements which contradict previous claims that the Church has made, some of which are factually incorrect. I will discuss this below using the example of the question of whether Britain is a 'multi-faith' society.

There are multiple explanations for the complexity and ambiguity of GS 1720. The strongest explanation is that the report represents a dual process of *realizing* and *resisting* the Church's declining influence over the religious management of England. Following the terrorist bombings in July 2005, the government involved itself in religious affairs at a heightened level. The Church's influence in the national religious context was diminished and put into the hands of the government due to the necessity for a government response to the actions of the self-identified Muslims who committed the bombings in 2005. The fact that the bombings came from an ideology associated with religion tainted all religions in a negative light, and so the response came from a 'secular' body in the form of the government. The

structure of the report testifies to a sense of loss of control: the Presence and Engagement task force cannot discuss their own developments before a lengthy discussion of the national context, terror, and the government. Another crucial point is that Presence and Engagement, in response to all of the above, becomes even more about dialogue with Islam—though they do not explicitly state this. In discussing this report, I will be focussing on how it reveals the self-understood identity of the Church in a time of national transition and concern about religion.

A 'Multi faith' Society?

Page 6 of the report contains a peculiar claim that is worth dwelling on, as it exemplifies the tensions around religion at the time of its writing. The Presence and Engagement authors claim that

> There is also a too ready assumption, understandable perhaps, given the pace of change in recent decades, that Britain can be categorised as a 'multi-faith' society. The statistical reality is that only 5-6% of the population are of all other Faiths together" (Church of England 2009, 6)

The authors do not provide a citation for this statistic. Furthermore, it is odd that the Church of *England* would use a statistic from all of Britain when England has a different, *higher* profile of religious diversity overall compared to Wales, Northern Ireland, and many parts of Scotland. The 2011 Census for England and Wales, published only two years after this report, indicates that Muslims alone made up at least 5% of the population of England and Wales — not quite the same as only 5-6% of the population being of 'other Faiths' altogether (Office for National Statistics 2011). The Office for National Statistics Integrated Household Survey carried out from 2009-2010, found that 8.9% of the population of the United Kingdom identified with a religion other than Christianity (Office for National Statistics 2010).

Perhaps the oddest part about this claim is that the first and only other major Presence and Engagement report was titled *Presence and Engagement: the churches' task in a multi Faith society* (2005) with the clear implication that the 'multi Faith society' in the title referred

to England. The discomfort over calling England ‘multi Faith’ exemplifies a severe discontinuity between this report and its predecessor. Terms which Presence and Engagement previously used without much consideration, such as ‘multi Faith,’— and simply ‘Faith,’ as will be discussed below — were put under scrutiny by the very same task group.

The reticence of the Church to acknowledge religious diversity to the same extent that it once did could be explained by the outside pressures following the 2005 bombings when religious communities were put under scrutiny by the government and the public. The question remains as to why the authors of the report would choose to underrepresent the religious diversity in England. There are two factors which might explain this, both of which align with broader themes within this era of Presence and Engagement. The first is that the events of July 2005 resulted in a moral panic around religion with the particular fear that the population of non-Christians, specifically Muslims, were growing at an inordinately rapid pace in England. The second is that the Church perceives itself as having a historical role and current role in guiding the religious affairs of the country. Therefore, the claim that Britain is not as exaggeratedly religiously diverse as *some* might think — a correct sentiment, albeit with incorrect numbers — may have been an effort on the part of the Church to inform Christians and the broader public alike that there was no need for concern. This can be taken equally as reassurance or an expression of dominance. Another explanation is that the Church is resisting the characterization of England as ‘multi faith’ to maintain that England is still Christian in character. Both explanations are supported by a related claim in the same section as the quote above:

> In the context of anxiety, misunderstandings about actual facts and the mistaken attribution of motivations are constant features. The misunderstandings about facts can be easily seen in the common perception that there are hundreds, even thousands of schools in the maintained sector of Islamic religious ethos, whereas in fact there are just 12, by comparison with 3,700 Church of England maintained schools. (2009, 6)

This quote serves both to allay anxiety around 'Islamic religious ethos' schools and to indicate the vast number of Church of England schools, thereby emphasizing the influence of the Church and resisting suggestions of any loss of that influence. By emphasizing its own importance, the Church continues to see itself in the role of host.

Hospitality

Despite ambiguous and at times erroneous claims, the report in other places contains clear expressions of how the Church perceives its interreligious work — expressions that are clearer than the 2005 report. For instance, the authors set out a definition for 'Inter Faith relations': "the Church's responsibility under God and in the service of the people of this country, to lead in the work of enabling mutual understanding and peaceable relationships for the common good of the neighbourhoods of this country"[42] (2009, 7). Indeed, a major recurring theme from the previous report is the motif of hospitality. Despite a putative loss of influence, the authors of the report still present the Church as a 'host' and advocate of other religions. Take, alongside the above, the following:

> "Practising the embassy and hospitality of God: we believe that there need to be two poles in our relationship with people of other faiths, a movement 'going out' and a presence 'welcoming in', that these are indivisible and mutually complementary, and that our mission practice must include both." (9)

The continuation of a host mentality is significant considering — in the words of the authors of the report — "…a growing reluctance to acknowledge that the historic and established roles of the Church of England remain relevant" (2009, 14). The authors do not specify *who* is responsible for the "growing reluctance," which gives a sense that they consider it to be coming from multiple parties, likely the government, non-religious people, and perhaps even people of other religions. The persistence of identifying as host shows the centrality of hospitality in the

[42] In addition to providing some clarity, this statement also alludes to a continuation of themes from the previous report, where the Church understands itself to be in the service of all of England.

Church's sense of itself and the resistance to giving up that essential feature of being the established Church.

The most straightforward explanation is that the Church is trying to assert its remaining power by using the language of being host and in considering itself an important actor in the national context. This is undoubtedly true. However, the sincerely held theology and vocational understandings of the Church's identity, which guide the actions of the Church must also be understood. These factors are not distinct from power— one must not be naïve—but they also cannot be excluded in favour of cynicism. The Church understands 'presence' as a vocational calling, hence the name Presence and Engagement.[43] This is expressed in both GS 1577 and GS 1720(2009). One of three main conclusions of GS 1720 summarizes the balance between this theological calling and the practical necessity of maintaining respect:

> The witness of the local churches, chaplaincies and schools in remaining present and engaged in multi religious contexts will be a key test of the Church of England's commitment to and support of an authentic universal ministry and that this will be a most important element in retaining the respect and goodwill of wider society and of other religions. (2009, 27)

In addition to the articulation of a sense of Christian duty, there is also a great deal of confidence in the Church's capabilities in this report, as in the previous one. There is clear confidence that the Church's presence, paired with its initiatives, benefits the nation—including, if not especially, other religions. An iteration of this sentiment is found when the authors state: "…other religions can be reassured that the Church of England is still there to provide a Christian presence in every community, available to people of all Faiths and none" (6). The explanation as to how the Church of England's presence is seen as "reassuring" to other religions comes later in the report:

[43] See also page 7: "The Church's calling is to be "present and engaged" in all communities and no less in those where there are significant communities of people of other Faiths" and page 15: "Remaining present in the midst of the religious 'other' is both an incarnational witness of the greatest importance, and also enables the church to speak with integrity into the complexities of the close encounter of religions in our neighbourhoods. Moving from simple presence – valuable as that is – to a mode of engagement which is rooted in the gospel gives strength and content to presence."

> The Church of England has played a leading role in the past two decades in openness and hospitality to other religions, in convening religious leadership, particularly through the Bishops' Faith Leaders' groups, in facilitating Faith forums and councils, in initiating and sustaining dialogue bilateral and multilateral structures and in the positive roles played by the Archbishops. The Church cannot rest on these laurels. **But neither should it undersell the role it is playing.** (Emphasis mine. 2009, 15)

I have quoted the above to demonstrate how the previous roles that the Church performed have bolstered its confidence in continuing to be a leader in interreligious relations. Here it becomes apparent that the report oscillates between tones of anxiety and confidence. This results in a somewhat confounding reading experience, representing the turbulent changes at the time of its writing.

In any case, as I go forward to discuss the anxiety in the report, it is worth clarifying how anxiety and confidence can coexist, both so potently. As alluded to in the introduction to this report, I contend that the anxiety is the realization of the declining status of the Church, and consequently the declining opportunities for the Church to lead in interreligious relations. That a non-religious body, the government, is leading something meant to be 'inter-', or between religions, where the Church has historically performed the role, is a cause for concern for the Church. This is what I have termed as resistance to declining influence. Consequently, the Church's anxiety as expressed in this document is toward the government. Presence and Engagement here is not so anxious about other religions, but about the loss of preferential status of the Church of England and the loss of the historic weight of its political engagement.

Anxiety, Identity, and the Government

GS 1720begins with a passage from 1 Peter: "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (2009,1). It is typical that a report concerning interreligious relations would begin with an exhortation to reverence and witness. However, it is notable that a passage was chosen which

invokes the presence of fear. It is notable still that the passage is chosen from 1 Peter, a letter addressed to persecuted minority Christians, or in the words of the Revised Standard Version: "to the exiles of the dispersion."

One might wonder what the 21st-century established Church of England knows of being a persecuted religious minority. Indeed, this marks a point of departure from the previous tone of Presence and Engagement. The relationship between the Church and the state was asserted with confidence in GS 1577 (2005). That inaugural report framed Anglicanism as an important component of English identity. As such, the relationship between Church and the English state, and by extension, the government, did not seem to be strained. In fact, the government was seldom mentioned in the report. There was no sense that the Church's plans for Presence and Engagement would be affected by the government, only that the Church was aiding the nation in doing this work. However, in GS 1720, there is a clear concern over the role of the government. The beginning of the report notes:

> Much has moved on since 2005 in the wider contexts of inter Faith relations. Concerns about diversity, cohesion and security have led to a vast range of new inter Faith and multi Faith organisations, to many new government policies and structures and to complex shifts in the underlying cultural attitudes to religion and society. This has also led to anxieties about the ways in which consciously or unconsciously, churches and other Faith communities are being moulded and shaped by these factors. (2009, 4)

There are many ways in which this expression of concern could be understood, especially around the 'anxieties' about churches and Faith communities being moulded by the government. Regrettably, there is little explanation given to the particulars of the concerns until later in the report, which only serves to increase the atmosphere of tension. Then, as the report unfolds, concerns come to the fore.

These expressions of concern, again, are best understood in light of the changing powers of influence that the Church holds. In the 2005 report, the Church understood that it was declining in membership, but it also understood itself to hold influence in negotiating the

role of religion in England, including other religions. It set out to develop its own comprehensive programme of religious interaction (Presence and Engagement) and at that time, the number of interreligious organizations was far less than there were at the writing of this report. However, by the year 2009, the increase in governmental initiatives could be perceived to have taken away some of the influence of the Church in moulding England's religious landscape. What once was primarily the Church's job — the management of religious affairs in England — equally became the government's domain. The Church warns: "The development of a deep knowledge and understanding of the religions, the different traditions and organizations within each of them and the position of individual leaders and scholars is of great importance **and across the Church of England there is the greatest bank of such knowledge and understanding in the country**, built on study and scholarship and on personal encounter and friendship" (2009, 11, emphasis my own).

Concerns about declining influence also play out in the field of language. Whereas GS 1577 (2005) used the term 'faith' without much explanation or reflection, GS 1720 questions its appropriateness as a term after seeing its use by the government:

> 'Faith' is now the standard language for referring to virtually any religious identity or affiliation…in public sector terminology it is being used without differentiation to refer as much to Pagans, Mormons and the Unification Church as it does to Christians, Muslims, or Sikhs. Faith language risks becoming the indiscriminate portmanteau into which so much is packed that much loses its particular identity and all become associated with concepts and issues that are specific to one or other. (2009, 9).

Reading further down, it manifests that the Church is specifically concerned about bodies which they would not label as a 'Faith' being labelled as such by the government. For instance:

> The Church holds to a clear distinction between Christianity and the eight other world religions practised in this country on the one hand,[44] and New Religious Movements (NRM) and Alternative Spiritualities on the other… It is however a distinction which is under pressure in a public sector culture which often simplistically applies concepts of inclusivity and exclusivity to this domain; which is mesmerised by indiscriminate

[44] The authors list the eight "world religions" as: Bahai, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism.

> understandings of plurality and diversity; and which is anxious about the issue of religion in general" (2009, 9-10).

The favouring of the "eight world religions" over other forms of spirituality is fitting when the Church's historical relations have been solely with those world religions. These "world religions" also have a degree of regional and national cohesion in their English iterations, making them more suitable 'dialogue' partners. The Church had power in discerning whom to treat as dialogue partners and as fellow 'Faiths'. While they retain this power in their area of control, it is challenged by another system of classification: one with the backing of the national importance that they once enjoyed. Ultimately, the anxiety here exemplifies resistance to being treated without (positive) distinction from other religions by the government and the public.

Presence and Engagement from 2005 to 2009

After much discussion of the government and public life in England, the report provides updates about the Presence and Engagement programme. These updates mostly concern the creation of resources for the Church at its various level to engage with people of other religions. For instance, a Presence and Engagement website was created for this purpose. Three 'Presence and Engagement'-related Centres in Bradford, Leicester, and London were also launched, the centres in Bradford and Leicester being ecumenical initiatives. This is reminiscent of the first aspect of the motion accompanying the 2005 report, "That this Synod re-affirm the Church of England's commitment in partnership with Christians of other traditions to resourcing ministry, witness and mission in multi Faith areas…"

The adherence to this motion and the furthering of Christian ecumenical partnerships may have been inspired by the Church's desire to maintain its ability to deliver interreligious programmes with a declining influence and membership, coupled with an increased sense of the importance of all Christian influence in England. This sentiment is expressed in the form

of both a compliment to the ecumenical centres and in the form of a concern as to how Christianity, not just the Church of England, is perceived:

> "… the apparent reluctance of the public sector to acknowledge openly the vastly greater scale of the contributions of the Church of England and other Christian Churches, quite apart from their particular place in the cultural, legal and political underpinnings of our society, remains a matter of concern" (2009, 13).

Despite these concerns, however, Presence and Engagement continued to expand its programme to develop learning resources in the form of educational models for Church leaders. They also created a programme of 'scriptural reflection' to "resource the local church for ministry and mission" (2009, 25). Though a much shorter report than GS 1577 (2005), GS1720 (2009) is an important document for understanding the Church's identity at a time of transition in the religious climate of England. It Is a report that does not conceal the concerns of the Church, nor does it hold back in the areas where it is confident. The dual process of realization or coming to terms with a changed England wherein the Church does not enjoy as much social and political clout, and resistance to that process marks a struggle that will continue through to the current work of Presence and Engagement. The report concludes with a bullet-point list of commendations to General Synod: matters expressed as important, but not to be voted on.

- The mission of God shown in the unique life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ encompasses both dialogue and evangelism in a seamless whole and is the eternal source of hope for the world.
- The witness of the local churches, chaplaincies and schools in remaining present and engaged in multi religious contexts will be a key test of the Church of England's commitment to and support of an authentic universal ministry and that this will be a most important element in retaining the respect and goodwill of wider society and of other religions.
- The resourcing of the local churches through the Presence and Engagement programme and its further development remains a priority for the Church.
  (2009, 27)

The first commendation is a theological affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ. It is a reassertion of what the Church of England already believes and perhaps a nod to Mr Eddy's PMM which had been made a year prior and was to be discussed at the same Synod where this

report was presented. The second represents some of the anxieties expressed in this report as discussed above. It is made explicit that there must be efforts made to retain respect from those outside the Church. The final commendation points to the future. Presence and Engagement is not simply to be an institutional-level task group but a nationwide effort with local instantiations. The next two Presence and Engagement reports which come in 2011 and 2017 are significantly shorter. This is a reflection of the diminishing role of the national task group which may be accounted for by a commitment to the local but is more likely to be related to other more pressing issues which emerged, namely female bishops and same-sex marriage. Those two reports will be discussed in the conclusion of Part 1 of this thesis. First, it is necessary to consider Mr Eddy's motion, its debate, and the ensuing report.

A General Synod Motion (2008/2009) *and Sharing the Gospel of Salvation* (2010)

The Motion

Sharing the Gospel of Salvation, hereafter GS Misc 956, is a 43-page report which came out in 2010, but whose genesis is in a General Synod motion from February 2009, the same Synod at which *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully/*GS 1720 was presented. The report gives "a brief overview of the Church of England's mission activity among those of other religions, showing that such activity has always been a feature of the life of the English Church" and "…looks at the social and religious context for mission and evangelism today and sets out some guidance for 'good practice' in sharing the gospel of salvation through Christ" (2010, 1-2). As such, the report has similar, but not identical goals to the Presence and Engagement programme. However, unlike the reports I discuss before this one, GS Misc 956is not authored by the Presence and Engagement task group, but by a cohort of bishops in the Church, as requested by a Private Members' Motion debated and passed in the February 2009 General Synod. Mr Paul Eddy, who was training for the priesthood at the time of the motion, moved:

> That this Synod request the House of Bishops to report to the Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society and offer examples and commendations of good practice in sharing the gospel of salvation through Christ alone with people of other faiths and none. (2009, 212)

After the motion was announced, Mr Eddy elaborated on his choice of wording, voicing his concern that clergy spend less than a day discussing interreligious issues in their three-year-long training process, and that there were not sufficient models to take guidance from. Significantly, he noted his support of the Presence and Engagement programme but expressed concern about a difficult relationship between its emphasis on community cohesion and evangelism. In his experience, "evangelism could be in danger of being lost among the overall desire of people of all faiths to work together to build greater community coherence" and "in many dioceses, inter-faith issues were the preserve of a few, quite rightly focused on community cohesion, but that presenting the claims of Christ were not always at the top of the agenda."

Mr Eddy's motion indeed identified an area of tension in interreligious relations not fully addressed by Presence and Engagement: can evangelism coexist with community cohesion, and how do Christians decide which to prioritize? The potential for community disruption due to evangelism and its potential outcome of conversion quickly emerged in the debate. Synod members shared stories of the difficulties and estrangements that occurred in their lives and the lives of others when they became Christian. In one particularly dramatic case, a convert to Christianity shared that her life was under threat by her former religious community.

In addition to familial and community tension, evangelism may represent a source of friction between the Church and the government. When the Church encourages community cohesion, it is aligning its goals – or at least sharing a common goal – with the government. However, when evangelism is prioritized, and when evangelism leads to community rupture,

the goals of the Church and government diverge. This is complicated by the fact that during the debate around Mr Eddy's motion it became apparent that several — but not all — members of Synod do not have faith in the government's support for them as Christians. This was forcefully expressed by Mr Eddy, who said: "What we are witnessing on a monthly basis here in the UK is a strategic, highly politicized marginalization of Christianity in the public arena." The perceived lack of support from the government complicates the State-Church relationship. Moreover, the ambiguity in the Church-State relationship is further compounded by the fact that the Church of England is the State's established Church and perceives itself to have a special responsibility by virtue of that identity. The question in both the Presence and Engagement reports and in the February 2009 debate was never *if* the Church has a special responsibility, but what character and content of the responsibility. Mr Eddy, in announcing his motion, said:

> As the State Church it is both our privilege and responsibility to share the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ with all our parishes of all faiths and none, yet in this vitally important area of ministry and mission there appears to be a huge gap in the practical resources available. At the heart of my motion is a fundamental question: **if the Church of England, which values its parish system as a unique mission opportunity, does not actively seek to offer Christ to people of other faiths, could we ourselves be creating no-go areas for the gospel by a sin of omission?** (2009, emphasis mine)

For Mr Eddy and his like-minded colleagues, mission — even with the risk of community disruption — is essential, not contrary, to being the State Church. Perhaps anticipating pushback from colleagues who are not like-minded, Mr Eddy also stressed that the Church being authentic in its beliefs and sharing its convictions is the will of non-Christians:

> An imam friend of mine once told me the origins of chicken tikka masala. He said, 'It is not in any way an authentic Indian dish but one that we created to suit the British appetite at the time. **The problem with you Anglicans is that you too have created something: you have created the gospel tikka masala; it is not authentic but one designed to suit the British appetite.**' I would argue strongly that we would be failing in our duty as Christians and as the State Church if we did not offer to people of other faiths the claims of Jesus Christ and salvation through him again. We must not allow

> the arguments for diplomacy and social cohesion to detract from our primary calling to be Christ's disciples and evangelists. (2009, Emphasis mine)

The quotes above are all from Mr Eddy's opening remarks. The debate ensuing as a result saw over fifteen members of Synod speak: more than is usual. No one took issue with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, though there were several issues raised. The first issue was procedural. Was Mr Eddy's motion too similar to the work of Presence and Engagement to be separated from it, and why was it not being discussed the following day when Presence and Engagement would be presenting their report *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully*/GS 1720? The second major area of debate was why the motion called for an affirmation from bishops to the exclusion of the rest of the Church. Thirdly, though without much support, some expressed concerns about the focus on other religions when there are people who identify as Christians who do not attend church. All in all, the debate showed the passion that people have for the issue, and this was reflected by Synod Member Andrew Gow from the House of Clergy, who suggested that the motion be taken electronically due to "tenor of debate" to send "clear and accurate signal," which means that votes are counted precisely rather than through the usual voting system of a show of hands. The Rev'd Mr Gow also made the only successful amendment to the motion, in suggesting that credit be given to the paper which inspired it: an academic paper called "The witness of Scripture, the Fathers and the historic formularies to the uniqueness of Christ" written by a lay theologian. The motion passed with 283 in favour, 8 against, and 10 recorded abstentions. One year later, GS Misc 956 was shared with General Synod in fulfilment of the motion.

> 'That this Synod warmly welcome Dr Martin Davie's background paper The witness of Scripture, the Fathers and the historic formularies to the uniqueness of Christ, attached to GS Misc 905B and request the House of Bishops to report to the Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society, and offer examples and commendations of good practice in sharing the gospel of salvation through Christ alone with people of other faiths and none."

Islam and Media Attention

Mr Eddy's motion was first proposed before the July 2008 Synod, though it was not debated until the February 2009 Synod, allegedly due to pressure on the timetable. The initial motion, its delayed debate, the successful passing of the motion, and even the content of the report GS Misc 956 all gathered media attention. There are two facets of the media attention worth considering: firstly, how the media represented the motion and its debate, and secondly, why the English public took interest in the matter. The presence of Muslims in England, which was growing both demographically and in public attention, figures significantly. Even though Mr Eddy's motion referred to "people of other faiths and none," the media coverage frequently invoked Islam. In part, this is due to Mr Eddy singling out Islam in several comments given to the media, which will be listed below. However, the media took this a step further through the use of inflammatory language, using phrases such as a "convert motion," (BBC News, 25 May 2008) a "debate on evangelising Muslims," (The Times, 7 June 2008) and a "controversial debate about Islam" (The Telegraph, 4 June 2008).

The first coverage of Mr Eddy's motion from a major news outlet was a BBC article from May 2008, cited above, titled "Church to debate convert motion" with the by-line "A traditionalist Anglican has said he will continue with a campaign for the Church of England to work explicitly to convert Muslims to Christianity," quoting Mr Eddy as saying that "Most Muslims that I've talked to say, 'I really wish that Christians would stop watering down their faith and expecting us to do the same'…Until we start really saying what we really believe in our faith, there will be no respect." The focus on Islam continued throughout the media coverage. When the debate was delayed to the following Synod, Martin Beckford for the Telegraph published an article called "Church of England accused of censoring motion on Islam" beginning with "A meeting of the Church's 'parliament' was due to discuss whether clergy should be doing more to convert British Muslims to Christianity." It quoted Mr Eddy accusing the Church of "censoring" the motion "on theological grounds…" (The Telegraph, 4

June 2008). The BBC in February 2009 just before Synod, again highlighted Islam: “Church to debate conversion rules.” The first line of the article states that “Critics of the plan say raising the issue will simply serve to damage the Church's relations with members of other religions, including Muslims” (Pigott 2009).

When the motion was passed, Ruth Gledhill writing for the Times published a particularly incendiary article: “Church backs controversial mission to win converts from other religions” (2009). It is worth quoting to give an idea of the invidious language used, and claims that are difficult to justify:

> Anglicans were commanded to "go forth and evangelise" yesterday in a dramatic assertion of missionary fervour that could jeopardise carefully built-up relations with Muslims, Jews and other faiths. The established Church of England put decades of liberal-inspired political correctness behind it in a move that led one bishop to condemn in anger the “evangelistic rants.” For Muslims, to convert to another religion is condemned as apostasy…The move echoes 19th-century missions to Britain's overseas colonies, with the difference being that modern-day evangelicals want to be mandated to carry out these missions on home turf. (Gledhill for The Times, 12 February 2009)

Mr Eddy’s motion played into the English national pastime of scrutinising the more controversial movements of the Church of England. While some of the media articles were more hostile than others, and some more ignorant than others of the nuances of Christian theology and ecclesiology, there were several uniting principles. The most significant is that while Islam was mentioned in every article, Muslim voices did not seem to matter. Several articles made use of the rhetoric from the quote above, implying or outright claiming that Anglican evangelism would destroy Christian-Muslim relations, but none of them had quotes from Muslims to reinforce their claims. In fact, only one article quoted a Muslim and his quote worked against the narrative that evangelism is problematic. Imam Abu Eesa of Cheadle Mosque told the BBC that Muslims also seek converts, and “Any religion that believes it's

going to bring tangible benefits - peace, satisfaction and understanding in this life and the next - would like to share that" (Pigott for BBC News, 11 February 2009).

It is worth considering why the media covered Mr Eddy's motion and *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*. While the Church was working through its identity, the nation was working out its own identity in relation to the Church. Given how historically intertwined the Church of England has been with the identity of England, in a period of demographic transition the English public might be expected to look to the Church for guidance, and if not for guidance, for a reminder of the continued existence of one of the oldest institutions in the country — or failing that, perhaps merely for a source of entertainment and derision. However, Presence and Engagement had not attracted media attention, which perhaps is evidence of Mr Eddy's assertion that its focus is on community cohesion and thus aligns with the government—something relatively uncontroversial which would not attract the attention of the public. The themes of evangelism and conversion, however, fall outside the government's cohesion agenda and much of the tone of the 2005 report. When one becomes a Christian, it is always a community-altering event for the Church, which has gained a member, and often a community-altering event for the new Christian's family and social network, especially if he or she previously belonged to a different religious group. It was bold of the Church to discuss evangelism and have its bishops publish a report on the topic, and it is no surprise that it piqued the interest of the broader public.

The Report

As mentioned, GS Misc 956 has different authorship than the Presence and Engagement report: it is written only by bishops (with some anecdotes from parish priests), as opposed to the

Presence and Engagement task group comprised of lay people, clergy, and bishops.[46] Despite this difference, the report is highlighted on the Presence and Engagement webpage alongside only four other reports, all of which are by the task group. Accordingly, while GS Misc 956 cannot be considered a direct descendent of the Presence and Engagement reports, it is institutionally linked to the work of the programme.

GS Misc 956 begins with a Foreword written by Archbishops Rowan Williams (Canterbury) and John Sentamu (York). The report has four main sections:

1. "The Unique Significance of Jesus Christ"
2. "The history of the English Church's missionary activity amongst those of other religions"
3. "The Social Context of Mission and Evangelism Today"
4. "Good Practice Guidance."

Though GS Misc 956 was published only a year after *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully/*GS 1720, it diverges from its predecessor in several ways. Most notably, its tone is far more confident: though it acknowledges the difficulties of a religiously diverse society, it does not display much anxiety in the face of such challenges. Whereas GS 1720 tries to downplay the religious diversity in England,[47] GS Misc 956 addresses it as a reality on the very first page of the foreword: "The stronger sense of difference and diversity — including religious diversity — in Britain today has challenged us to become a more generous culture. Sadly, it has also made many nervous of publicly espousing a vision of the common good for all people. Yet, if the Good News of God in Christ is good for us, how can we refrain from commending it as good for others too?" (2010, i) In addition to projecting confidence, this

[46] This commentary refers to the first edition of *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, released in 2010 with a Foreword by Archbishops John Sentamu and Rowan Williams. A second edition was released in 2019 with a new foreword by Archbishop Justin Welby.

[47] As a reminder, *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully* contains claims such as: "There is also a too ready assumption, understandable perhaps, given the pace of change in recent decades, that Britain can be categorised as a 'multi-faith' society. The statistical reality is that only 5-6% of the population are of all other Faiths together. Of course some communities tend to concentrations in particular neighbourhoods and the age profile can be comparatively young, but the perception is well ahead of the reality and is enhanced by simplistic 'multi- faith' rhetoric." *(*2006 p.6)

statement also takes a firm stance on a sensitive topic: evangelism. The whole report, being in fulfilment of a motion to share "good practice in sharing the gospel" had as its purpose to address evangelism and the foreword does so without obfuscation or avoidance of the topic. The report is not of the same calibre of directness, but nevertheless manages to fulfil its purpose, and for the most part, it shares the confidence of the foreword. It is these two themes: the focus on Islam, and evangelism, that I will draw out in what follows.

A Turn Towards Islam and Evangelism

The report, much like its Presence and Engagement equivalents, is ostensibly about engagement with all other religions. The motion behind this report was for "other faiths and none." However, it becomes apparent that the Church's core imagined interlocutor is Islam, as the media coverage makes explicit.

There is no section of the report where the authors indicate that they are prioritising Islam, but the use of language in the report testifies to a focus on Islam, or more particularly, Muslims. In a 43-page report,[48] the words "Islam" and "Islamic" are used a total of 19 times, while "Muslim" and "Muslims" are used a total of 75 times. When these figures are combined, there is a total of 94 references to Islam or to Muslims, working out to an average of twice per page. For the purpose of comparison, "Judaism" and its cognates are used a total of 30 times, mostly in reference to historical rather than present relations, while "Hinduism" and its cognates are used 26 times, "Sikhism" and its cognates 23 times, and finally "Buddhism" and its cognates 14 times. Islam and Muslims, then, are mentioned more than three times as many times as the next most frequently referenced religion.[49]

GS Misc 956 demonstrates a greater focus on the local than GS 1577 and GS 1720. The frequency of the use of "Muslim(s)" (75) over "Islam" (19) is significant in understanding

[48] The main body of the report is 37 pages. There is a 3 page introduction and a 6 page annex section.
[49] This excludes Christianity, which as one might expect is referenced over 200 times.

whom the Church perceives as its dialogue partner. It indicates a greater understanding that at the level of the parish, the Church is engaging with individual people and communities rather than Islam as an abstracted whole. As the Foreword written by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York states:

> A large part of this report is drawn from the work of parishes, clergy and laypeople living out their discipleship, many in areas where, as in the early days of the Church, Christians live as citizens alongside large numbers of people of other faiths. The report places each example in its social context and goes on to show what real churches and real Christians are doing to proclaim Christ **among their neighbours**. (2010, ii, emphasis my own.)

The prioritization of the local is demonstrated in the very structure of the report, which has two brief sections on the large scale and then a much longer series of sections which are locally focused. These are complemented by larger-scale perspectives in the first two sections, "The Unique Significance of Jesus Christ" and "The history of the English Church's missionary activity amongst those of other religions." These provide theological and historical contextualization necessary to ground the local Church's approaches. It is useful to consider these two sections in light of how they contribute both to the overall report and the specific themes of evangelism and Islam.

"The Unique Significance of Jesus Christ"

The report begins with a section entitled "The Unique Significance of Jesus Christ," as befits the report's duty to fulfil the mandate that the "House of Bishops…report to the Synod on their understanding of the uniqueness of Christ in Britain's multi-faith society." The section makes clear that the Church understands its own identity and mission in relation to the figure of Christ. As stated in the conjoining section, "The history of the English Church's missionary activity amongst those of other religions," it is "Because those who have belonged to the Church of England have believed in the unique significance of Jesus Christ in the context of the

Trinitarian understanding of God…a consistent feature of the life of the Church of England has been the desire to share faith in Christ with those of other religions." (2010, 4)

The authors of the report affirm and restate the historic beliefs that the Church holds about Christ and the Trinity using references to the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the Church of England's canons. The authors affirm that the "one God of Israel exists as the Father, the Son who had become incarnate in Jesus and as the Holy Spirit." The section ends with a statement as to how the beliefs about God influence engagement with non-Christians:

> It is its faith in this God that is also the basis for the Church of England's engagement with people of all religions and none. It believes that the God it confesses is the source of salvation which is offered to all people everywhere (whether they are yet aware of the fact or not), and the ultimate source of the values that it shares in common with them. But it also holds that, in obedience to the commission given by Jesus to his disciples (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8), all Christians are called to act as God's instruments in bringing people to explicit faith in Jesus Christ and to membership of his Church through baptism. (2010, 4)

Thus, the report begins with a scriptural and theological basis for engagement with people of other religions. The position expressed here is one of the most clearly exclusivist expressions of religion across all of the reports considered here. In my conversations with interlocutors in Birmingham, many took issue with the exclusivist stance on religion: indeed, the Church of England is theologically diverse and the exclusivist stance is held along a spectrum of soteriology. The fact that Mr Eddy's motion prompted the Church of England to (re)assert a definitive stance such as the above demonstrates the power behind his motion, and behind the conservative evangelical wing of the Church as a whole.

The scriptural and theological appeals in favour of evangelism in the first section are bolstered by the following section "The history of the English Church's missionary activity amongst those of other religions" which provides a history of the Church's missionary activities back to Roman Britain. The purpose of the section is made explicit in its penultimate paragraph:

> What this brief historical survey shows is that there is nothing new or abnormal about members of the Church of England bearing witness to members of other religions in

> the hope that this will lead them to come to faith and be baptised. On the contrary, it is something which Christians in this country have sought to do throughout the history of the Church in England. What would be abnormal would be for members of the Church of England to stop seeking to share their faith in this way. (2010, 6)

While the section succeeds in naming examples from a long history of Christian witness, it is characterized by brevity. The section in total is three pages, leaving a lack of nuance where a longer consideration of the topic might otherwise be expected: for instance, a seemingly important statement such as "at times there has been an unhealthy connection between mission and colonialism" (2010, 6) is left unexplained. The authors also consider the long-enduring effects of historical conflicts and their present-day ramifications. In reference to Islam, the authors write:

> During the Middle Ages Christians from England were also involved in the Crusades. The Crusades were not examples of mission in that they were never intended to convert the Muslim world and the motives of those who took part in them were often secular as well as religious. Nevertheless, the significance of the Crusades for Christian mission needs to be acknowledged since the fear and mistrust between Christians and Muslims that were a legacy of the Crusades have continued to overshadow Christian-Muslim relations and Christian mission among Muslim people to the present day. (2010, 5)

Islam is one of only two religions explicitly named in the historical survey and the remainder of the report focusses heavily on Islam.[50] In doing so, the authors continue the emphasis on local interactions with Muslims. In contradistinction to the Presence and Engagement reports, however, here there is an explicit emphasis on evangelism. Where the Presence and Engagement reports focused on community cohesion, GS Misc 956 prioritizes "The challenge…to express the overflowing love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for all human beings as expressed in the life, death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, freely offered to all." (2010, 37) These words, which are the final words of the report, characterize the

[50] The other religion explicitly discussed in the historical survey is Judaism, which it is rarely mentioned thereafter. Regrettably, it is not within the scope of this thesis to consider the reasons for this, but it is notable.

Church's source of identity at this point in time and the call to action perceived to spring forth from that identity.

A Discursive Shift?

Much like the Presence & Engagement reports, GS Misc 956 is replete with spatial metaphors: phrases indicating how people and individuals relate to one another in localised space. A core instance of this is the recurring frequency of the host/guest dynamic, which I have discussed at length as regards the previous reports. Significantly, in *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation,* the host/guest dynamic is simultaneously reproduced and challenged. This is a departure from the Presence and Engagement reports, where the 'host' role was prioritized. This can be fruitfully understood when considering that the Church is balancing two truths: the first is that as the nation's Church, they perceive themselves as being called to be ambassadors, i.e., hosts. Then there is the reality 'on the ground' in today's England, where in the context of a secularising and multireligious Britain, church-going Anglicans are demographically a minority or 'guests.' GS Misc 956 demonstrates all of these perspectives. On page 15, the authors write about the importance of both 'embassy' and 'hospitality':

> …embassy, as the necessary consequence of the outward moving nature of the love of God expressed most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and in the work of the Holy Spirit; and hospitality as the welcome and openness that is at the heart of the God who is love. Both those movements should be observable in the life of Christian communities as they relate to those amongst whom they live, not as means to an end, but as a natural outworking of lives oriented to the gospel. (2010, 15)

When the authors use the host/guest language, they emphasize Christians holding both roles. However, they are not the sole contributors to the report. Much like the Presence and Engagement reports, a significant section is devoted to sharing anecdotes and guidance from parish priests. In the anecdotes from parish priests, there is a noticeable and sometimes explicit rejection of the host/guest language, as distinct from the portion authored by the bishops. One anecdote written by a parish priest states:

> Part of our experience of being a minority community as Christians in our particular context is an increased confidence that if our motivation is genuinely loving, and we are careful to be ethical in the way we evangelise, we don't need to be apologetic about sharing who we are and what we have discovered in Christ. Our religious context increasingly feels like a 'level playing field' with the different faith communities rooted and confident in themselves and **a clearer sense that we can all relate to each other as co-citizens rather than as 'hosts' or 'guests'**. (2010, 18, emphasis mine)

This explicit rejection of the host/guest binary suggests the use of 'co-citizens' rather than 'host' or 'guest.' The emphasis on 'co-citizen' places the nation as the source of commonality between different communities. It may also reflect a position that it is easier to forego a host/guest dynamic than to accept being a guest. Another approach is described by a different parish leader, who wrote:

> When a large new mosque was built close to one of our churches, and right in our view of the centre of the city, we arranged a visit. The parish priest was invited to the opening and took a guest from the church who lived very close. We welcomed the world leader of this sect of Islam to our city in the name of Jesus Christ. **Either we could see this community as an intrusion, or as neighbours for whom Christ died.** (2010, 34-35, Emphasis mine.)

Here, the priest has chosen to use the term 'neighbour' and by doing so, emphasizes how the members of the new mosque share civic space with the church. There are remnants still of an ambiguous host/guest dynamic. The priest mentions taking a "guest" from the church but there are tones of a host mentality in 'we welcomed the world leader…'. This demonstrates the complex ambiguity and the powerful currency that the host/guest language carries, even when it is being resisted or challenged. The discrepancy between the language used by the bishops and the language used by local parish leaders, and moreover the different choices between parish leaders, exemplifies the diversity of perspectives within the Church of England. These different perspectives emerge from holding different roles—the daily life of a parish priest is distinct from that of a bishop—and from different localities. There is also the matter of the diversity of theology within the Church, which led to the spirited debate of Mr Eddy's motion.

Toward the end of the report, buried halfway down a page almost without context, is a line that is paradigmatic in understanding Mr Eddy's motion and GS Misc 956: "It has been said that most churches either obey the great commandment to love our neighbour or the great commandment to make disciples. They rarely manage to do both" (2010, 35). Mr Eddy's concern was that the Church and Presence and Engagement were too biased toward the former. In either case, that which was implicit in previous reports was made explicit in 2008 with his motion. It is true that evangelism was not a focus in the Presence and Engagement reports, but it was often implied. Likewise, there was a focus on engaging with Islam which continues in GS Misc 956, and it was made clearer than ever. It is helpful, then, to consider that this motion and report do not mark a total departure from previous reports on the subject of interreligious relations: instead, they bring to fruition themes which were already present.

Conclusion

Sharing the Gospel of Salvation/GS Misc 956 is listed on the Presence and Engagement webpage of the Church of England as one of the main Presence and Engagement reports. Its incorporation into the Presence and Engagement brand may be perceived as a magnanimous acceptance of Mr Eddy's criticisms which prompted the report, or a realistic acknowledgement that the Church of England is incredibly theologically diverse and that this must be accounted for. It is the last piece of substantial writing associated with the Presence and Engagement programme. *Staying Present and Engaging Faithfully*/GS 1720 and *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*/GS Misc 956 are both representations of the Church of England determining its identity in the time of transition. The shared theme of host/guest dynamics and the effort to turn to the local demonstrates the centrality of the Church's efforts to root its interreligious efforts on solid ground.

Presence and Engagement Post-2010

Presence and Engagement in 2011 and 2017

The two major Presence and Engagement reports discussed so far are GS 1577, (2005) and GS 1720 (2009). Those reports are 90 and 27 pages respectively. GS Misc 956 (2010), which came out of Mr Eddy's PMM, is 46 pages. The trend of medium-to-long reports is not continued with the two latest Presence and Engagement reports. *Generous Love for All: Presence and Engagement for the New Quinquennium: A Report from the Presence and Engagement Task Group*/GS 1838 (2011) is 6 pages, and *The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society: A report on the recent work and future vision of the Presence and Engagement programme/*GS 2063(2017) is 8 pages. As the full titles indicate, the main purpose of these reports is to provide General Synod with an update on the work of the Presence and Engagement programme. This purpose differs from the first two Presence and Engagement reports, which were didactic and exploratory in addition to being updates, considering the situation of religion and the Church in England and containing qualitative and quantitative data.

The tone of *Generous Love for All*/GS 1838 is confident, and from the beginning, the authors note that "The Church of England has played an important role in…Building good relations with faith leaders, witnessing to the Gospel in religiously diverse contexts and helping people to understand the changing dynamics of faith in our society" (2011, 1). The confidence is a marked change from the previous Presence and Engagement report, which offered a tone of unease. It is no coincidence that in the intervening time, the government gave the Church of England control over the funding of the 'Near Neighbours' programme, thus fulfilling the Church's aspirations to gain more influence in interreligious relations in England. Near Neighbours is described as having "the aim of bringing people together in some of the most religiously diverse and deprived areas of the country through the Church of England's ministry in partnership with others" (2011, 3). It was developed in relation to David Cameron's Big

Society agenda. The grant given to the Church by the government was interpreted as "partly in recognition of the Church's track record," exemplifying a more positive relationship between the Church and the government than the mistrust that characterised the previous Presence and Engagement report.

Another significant area of change is a greater focus on evangelism and mission as inspired by GS Misc 956, the report that came out of Mr Eddy's PMM. The authors note:

> Mission is central to the Church's task, and the Presence and Engagement programme offers theological and practical resources for the Church's witness in multi faith contexts. The report, *Sharing the Gospel of Salvation*, (GS Misc 956) that was presented to General Synod in July 2010 came out of the Presence and Engagement process and needs to be built on in the coming quinquennium. (2011, 4)

It is unclear how GS Misc 956 "came out of the Presence and Engagement process" since it was the fulfilment of a Private Member's Motion, but in any case, it is clear that the Presence and Engagement task force chose to treat it and its central theme, mission, as important for the future of the programme. Indeed, mission is mentioned with frequency throughout *Generous Love for All*/GS 1838, and the authors propose a "programme of research to understand in more detail how parishes are engaging in Christian witness in multi faith contexts" building on GS Misc 956 as one of the next priorities for the programme.

The Church of England's Mission and Ministry in a Multi-Religious Society/GS 2063 (2017), more than any other Presence and Engagement report, draws out a connection between international events and the local context. In fact, there are several significant events and global patterns named — Brexit, migration, and anti-Semitism — but as the report is only 8 pages, these themes are not expanded upon in any depth. On the first page, the authors consider recent events:

> In 2016 the Casey Review raised concerns about links between religion and integration while the Community Security Trust reported record levels of antisemitism. The EU Referendum prompted discussion about the UK's identity and the place of different communities. Concern about international religious freedom and religiously-motivated violence, expressed in the desire to show solidarity with co-religionists abroad, impacts interfaith relationships at home. **This connection between global and local is keenly**

> **felt in P&E parishes.** Meanwhile the government promotes 'British Values' as a unifying code for people of all faiths. (2017, 1, Emphasis mine)

The authors note the work of clergy in anti-hate crime initiatives, and in helping migrants: particularly the work of one parish which has "welcomed and baptised over 200 Iranians in the past five years" (2017, 5). As evidenced by this anecdote, the focus on mission stated in the previous report did not waver. However, several challenges are named: Presence and Engagement parishes are "fragile ecosystems…easily disrupted" (2017, 6). Moreover, Presence and Engagement parishes suffer from a lack of applications, and ordinands feel underqualified to help those of other faiths who want to explore Christianity. The report concludes that "P&E is committed to continuing to explore what Anglican mission and ministry looks like in our multi-religious society…our work with other faiths is rooted in the Church's identity, informed by context yet not dictated by trends. It flows from our place in the local community — loving, serving and witnessing to people of all faiths in the name of Christ, and being enriched and renewed in our own faith by doing so" (2017, 8).

Recent years

The Presence and Engagement programme has not made a formal announcement in General Synod or elsewhere as to why there has not been a report since 2017. It is also telling that the 2011 and 2017 reports are both short. It is likely that other global events and theological issues have gathered the attention of the Church and resources have been directed in other places. There are three major issues worth mentioning for context. In 2014 the Church of England's General Synod voted to allow women to be consecrated to the episcopate. In 2015 the Church of England's first female bishop was consecrated. This was, and remains, controversial. It resulted in a logistically complex partial restructuring of the Church to allow for accommodations for parishes which disagreed with the Church's decision to continue to receive the ministry of male bishops. In 2016, the Brexit referendum caused controversy and dissension within Synod and within parish communities across the country. There were

accusations that the Church of England's bishops were out of touch with their congregations when it was found that the bishops were overwhelmingly 'Remain' while many congregants voted 'Leave' (G. Smith and Woodhead 2018). Finally, the topics of sexuality and same-sex marriage which have been incendiary for some time are coming to the fore with the 'Living in Love and Faith' process. The Church is expected to vote on the issue in 2023. With these issues and the coronavirus pandemic, the Presence and Engagement programme has not had as much visibility within General Synod or the media. Nevertheless, it still has a national programme director and an interfaith advisor to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

I have argued that the five Presence and Engagement reports considered in this section give insight into the Church of England's process of discerning its identity in multireligious England. While there is not a uniformity of theologies across the Church, there are themes which emerge across the reports. The first is a focus on Islam. The demographic growth of Islam in England and its increased visibility in some parishes, especially in Bradford, Leicester, and Birmingham, has prompted the Church to think about how it might relate to this other religious body. While the reports indicate that Islam is the main dialogue partner of the Church, it bears remembering that the Presence and Engagement reports are an internal Church of England process. As such, they are not the practice of dialogue with any religious others, but rather theorizing *about* dialogue. The main dialogue partner of the Church is itself on the topic of Islam, not Muslims. It would be difficult to carry out meaningful dialogue or engagement on any other level given that there is no analogue or equivalent of a diocese, province, or national body of Muslims in Britain like there is for Anglicans in England. However, at the local level, the parish church can function as an analogue to a mosque. Both hold weekly, and most often daily, prayer services and bring in members of the community. The Presence and Engagement reports are indicative of a concern with Islam but not of engagement at the level of the national, because this is not possible.

The second theme that emerges consistently across the Presence and Engagement reports is the language of host and guest dynamics, or hospitality. When the Church discusses its relationship to the state and its status as the established Church, it rigorously asserts an identity as host. However, when the reports consider anecdotes from areas where Anglicans are a demographic minority, host language often ceases and sometimes the language of 'guest' is used, indicating that there is a tension between establishment as a political fact and decline as a demographic fact. Finally, evangelism and mission are consistently present but are not engaged in the same way each time they are mentioned. At times the Church asserts an exclusivist theology that demands evangelism, while at other times it emphasizes social cohesion over mission. There is a process of grappling with the fact that the Church is meant to be for all people alongside the question of whether this identity should be encouraged if it is not voluntarily chosen, or if someone has a competing identity, such as being a Muslim. As a collection, the reports demonstrate that the Church of England's identity was in flux and that the visible and growing presence of other religions caused it to consider its own role. The national Presence and Engagement programme is also telling because the Church has invested in a national apparatus that does not *do* dialogue but writes about it. This means that it considered the theorising worth its time and that it hoped to have a trickle-down effect. Whether this was achieved is a question that will be considered in the next chapter

PART 2: THE LOCAL

CHAPTER 4
Levels of Locality: Birmingham and Relationships to the National Church

My interviews with parish priests in the Diocese of Birmingham revealed a consistent prioritization of the 'local.' This was held in conjunction with a suspicion of national-level reports and General Synod. At times this suspicion was expressed in humour: "I was good and didn't pull a face when you told me that you've been reading Synod reports." At other times my interviewees spoke at length and with eloquence in describing their reasoning for not engaging in national Church of England activities. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that parish priests are themselves part of the Church of England and bound to its every level; the Church is not merely their employer in a secular sense, but a broader structure in which they were ordained to the priesthood and from which they derive their authority. Moreover, parish priests are the representative presence of the Church of England to their communities: it is through parish priests' ministry that people come into the fold of not just the national Church, but the universal church of *all* Christians which the Church of England considers itself to belong to.[51] A further complication is the established status of the Church of England, which grants special privileges to the Church. Accordingly, while parish priests might disassociate themselves from the national context, they are still indelibly marked with a membership stamp of establishment.

In this chapter, I return to the Presence and Engagement reports which formed the first part of this thesis. However, rather than discussing their composition by national task group or their reception in General Synod, I examine how they are received in the Diocese of Birmingham by parish priests. I find that they are broadly ignored and in some cases even

[51] In *The Church and Churches*, G.R. Evans expresses the difficulty about the various layers of 'Church' and how this applies specifically in Anglicanism: "The kinds of difficulty about what we mean by a 'local' or individual church which we have met so far are greatly compounded by the fact that we are dealing almost everywhere not with a bipolar structure (local-universal), but with a structure in which there stands, between single congregations and the universal church, a wide range of ecclesial entities which are also known as 'churches.' Some of these understand themselves to be provinces of the Church. Some of them understand themselves to be national churches. Some understand themselves to be churches in a denominational or confessional sense. The potential for confusion is apparent in Anglican practice. It is possible to speak of 'the Anglican Church' although Anglicanism is really a communion of autonomous provincially based churches. 'The Church of England' is a national church made up of the two provinces of Canterbury and York" (Evans, 1994, pp. 77–78).

treated with contempt. The most common reaction, however, is one of disinterest. The reports are not simply being rejected but rejected in favour of an alternative. This alternative is best referred to as 'the local,' a term which arose frequently in my interviews. It may be tempting to see the 'local' as an abstract ideal—and it may exist as such in some minds. However, I found that prioritization of the local is an assertion. It is an assertion that place matters. The national is not a real 'place,' so it cannot matter. One might rightly identify that 'the local' is also not a place, but I find that when priests speak of the local they are speaking specifically about their churches and their neighbourhoods, their parishes: all 'places' that they inhabit and see on a daily basis.

While the 'local' in the Church of England is distinct from 'the national,' the two remain structurally connected. The Church of England is a coherent system with interconnectedness at all levels. Accordingly, the question emerges as to what it means for the priests to belong to the local and to minister in the local, while also belonging to the broader apparatus of the Church of England. Establishment emerges as a central theme and guides the second part of this chapter. I find that the priests, while rejecting national interference, nevertheless are keenly aware of the responsibilities and weight that come with belonging to the national church. They recognise especially the place of establishment and the recognition and respect that it entails. This authority does descend to the local level, and parish priests whom I interviewed found that they have influence with local authorities that other religious groups do not. The priests then use this privilege as a method to help other religious groups.

With all this considered, in this chapter, I argue that the priests in the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham focus on the local because of the contextual basis of ministry. Moreover, they are resistant to top-down approaches and guidance and prefer to draw instead from their everyday lives and relationships with others. However, they are aware that they are a member of a national body which holds power and privilege, and they use this to

further their localized interactions with others, especially people of other religions. I begin by providing an overview of Birmingham as a field site. I proceed by discussing reactions to Presence and Engagement reports and two case studies based on especially poignant responses to my questions about the reports. I then move to the theme of establishment, first by giving an overview of what it means, and then exploring its impact in Birmingham with two further case studies.

The Diocese of Birmingham

Part 2 of this dissertation, of which this chapter is the first, makes use of the Diocese of Birmingham as a case study. Birmingham was a fruitful place to carry out ethnographic interviews as it has an active Church of England presence including a full-time interfaith advisor. It is also a religiously diverse city with a 29.9% Muslim population and a 34% Christian population (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The Diocese of Birmingham is not coterminous with the city of Birmingham. The diocesan boundaries go beyond Birmingham across the West Midlands. The Diocese's boundaries are set by the Church of England's own ecclesiastical division of space. As an anthropological method, it was helpful to immerse myself into the spatial understanding of my interlocutors and make the Diocese a self-imposed "bounded" field site (Candea 2007). The Diocese of Birmingham covers an area of 290 square miles. This makes it the second-smallest diocese by area, but as it is densely populated, the number of people living within its boundaries —1,592,000 in 2020 — is the same or larger than geographically larger dioceses. The Diocese of Birmingham has 149 parishes (Eames for Church of England Data Services 2022, 16).

I have detailed my methodology in the Introduction of this dissertation, but it is worth rehearsing the central details. The data in this section of my dissertation were collected through interviews with twenty-five Anglican religious leaders in Birmingham, the majority of whom were parish priests. I also interviewed area deans, a churchwarden at a parish without a priest,

the dean of the Cathedral, and the bishop.[52] At the beginning of March 2020, I was set to begin fieldwork in Birmingham. However, the emergence of the Coronavirus forced an alternate method of study. I conducted interviews online and joined the Birmingham Conversations, an online interreligious dialogue series facilitated by the Anglican interfaith director, Canon Dr Andrew Smith. I have given pseudonyms to the people, parishes, and neighbourhoods discussed in what follows.[53] The interviews allowed me to virtually travel across parishes spanning the Diocese of Birmingham, immersing myself in the understanding of my interlocutors. I completed the interviews after my analysis of the Presence and Engagement reports. As such, I was curious how the reports were received in Birmingham. It is that question which I explore below.

Attitudes to Presence and Engagement Reports

As the first section of this thesis indicates, the Presence and Engagement task force for the Church of England was founded in 2005 "to encourage the Church of England to think about the reality of religious diversity and how it might shape mission and ministry."[54] Each report was presented to the members of the General Synod, the Church's national legislative assembly, and discussed by the members of the Synod during their meetings, then made public to all. Their intended audience was not limited to Synod, however; the foreword of the inaugural report states that "We [the task force] wanted to identify where there was good practice and share that across the regions" (2005, 3). The regions in question are the 'Presence and Engagement' parishes, the title given to parishes where more than 10% of the population

[52] The Rt Rev'd David Urquhart was the bishop of Birmingham at the time of my fieldwork. He has since retired.
[53] The exceptions are Canon Dr Andrew Smith and Rt Rev'd David Urquhart, who waived anonymity as their roles as interfaith advisor and bishop make them identifiable.
[54] "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023. "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023. "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023. "About Presence and Engagement," The Church of England, Church of England.org, Accessed January 2023.

identify with a religion other than Christianity. Yet the anticipated audience of the report was even broader than the Presence and Engagement parishes:

> All of us involved in producing this report hope it will assist **the Church as a whole, not only those in the Presence and Engagement parishes**, to be open, generous, and welcoming to our sisters and brothers from Faith communities other then [sic] Christian. Within the providence of God there is nothing to fear. There is only enrichment as the responses to our questionnaire reveal. We hope too everyone will be encouraged by the stories we tell, particularly those living in P&E parishes. There is some marvellous engagement going on. In addition we hope the report will be a resource to those parishes and that Advisers in both Ministry and inter Faith will build on the networks of P&E parishes at diocesan and regional level that have now been established. But above all we hope that confidence in God will grow as we gain deeper insights into the distinctive contribution the Church of England has to make to these communities of faith **with whom we now share our national life** and seek to develop with them a shared hope in a common future. (2005, 3, emphasis my own.)

The intended audience is broad: "the Church as a whole." The authors of the report not only intend the report to be read by parishes which need guidance on interreligious matters, but by the whole Church. The ambitious proposed readership did not come to fruition among my interlocutors. My interviews with priests in Birmingham — both in 'Presence and Engagement' parishes and non-Presence and Engagement parishes — found that these reports were seldom read by the priests. This is notable because Birmingham is the precise context that those involved in Presence and Engagement have in mind. The Diocese of Birmingham's website refers to it as a "super diverse region, with all the world's faiths represented here."[55] Birmingham is teeming with interreligious matters; the Bishop of Birmingham has a full-time Director of Interfaith Relations whose role is to form connections between Birmingham's various religious groups, and the Bishop hosts an annual Ramadan iftar at his home.

In my interviews, I asked: "Do the proceedings of the Church of England's General Synod and reports from Presence and Engagement have an impact on you at the local level?" A representative sample of the responses is as follows:

[55] "Interfaith, The Church of England Birmingham, CofEBirmingham.com, accessed January 2023.

- *Embarrassed laughter*. "I'm slightly embarrassed to say I don't really take that much notice of what happens at General Synod, I really should."
- *Sarcastic laughter.* "I'd like to know what the debates are!"
- "I'm so excited and so genuinely thrilled to be part of all the stuff that goes on locally, that I haven't really got time for it."
- "I don't really read them [the reports]."
- "Probably not directly in terms of what we [the parish church] do. I would have an interest in those things myself. But I don't know how much of an impact they have on the work we're doing."
- "I'm not particularly interested in operating at that level. You know, there's enough to do just on this local level, really."

No one stated that they had read the reports. The apathy toward the Presence and Engagement reports and their accompanying discussion at General Synod represents a significant stance, one that indicates a positive stance toward 'the local.' One might conclude otherwise: that the unread reports represent nothing more than the choice to avoid (perceived) boredom. I reject such an interpretation because my informants' answers indicate that many of them perceive a contrast between the Presence and Engagement national programme and their local context. The above are not excuses for ignoring reports. They can be taken as genuine reflections of priests' sentiments about what should be prioritised. The element of the reports that are being rejected is that priests can be told what to do by someone who does not understand their locality. It is what the reports represent that is being rejected: external top-down bureaucracy from removed locations, i.e. London.

The Presence and Engagement reports, then, are being overlooked so that the attention of the priests can be focussed on their local contexts.[56] While the reports do draw upon examples from local contexts, the fact weighs heavily in the minds of my interlocutors that they were compiled and analysed by a group external to those contexts with a vision to provide nationally applicable guidance. It is evident from the foundation of the programme that the

[56] This is true more broadly about theological works in general, not just the P&E reports. While some of my interlocutors indicated that 'interfaith' units from seminary, namely Birmingham's Queens Foundation, were helpful, no one emphasized any particular textual that were helpful in their ministries. This is not to say that the priests do not read theological works, but that they did not deem them worth mentioning or emphasizing in an interview about their interreligious experiences.

reports are framed in the national context and the authors of the report emphasize sharing a national life rather than a parish with people of other faiths. In what follows I will share two longer responses to the question "Do the proceedings of the Church of England's General Synod and reports from Presence and Engagement have an impact on you at the local level?" These responses illustrate why two parish priests do not see the national output as helpful.

The Reverend John and St Mary's

The Reverend John is the vicar of St Mary's, a parish in central Birmingham. John spoke with special consideration about why the Presence and Engagement reports were not useful to him. Before coming to his comments, some background on his ministry context will provide a useful framework for understanding his perspective. John describes St Mary's as an open evangelical church "on the more relaxed end of the spectrum" with a mixture of contemporary and traditional forms of worship. It is not the liturgical tradition which defines St Mary's but its outlook; John emphasizes that it has "quite a relational stance of actually being there for the public, being there for people." He explains that due to its urban location, "there is very rarely a day when you won't find a group of alcoholics or maybe drug users sort of sitting around outside chatting, and, and being present sometimes in the building as well. And that's just part of our community."

Since St Mary's is in central Birmingham, it attracts a lot of visitors. John estimates that 200 to 300 people come through the doors of the church on a given Saturday when it opens for people to visit and see the inside. On days when it opens for visitors, members of the congregation volunteer as greeters and members of the clergy are often present. Most of the encounters between the members of St Mary's and people of other religions are informal rather than formal, such as when Muslims come into the church to see it when it is open to visitors. John explains:

> We do get quite a lot of families of other faiths who come in quite deliberately to show their children what a church is like. So you might get a Muslim family going about their

> shopping, and they say, “Well, let's go and have a look.” And then you might get one of the parents saying to us, “Not all the children have been to a church before, would you mind just explaining a few things…is it okay?” A classic example would be a couple of young Muslim women studying in college who were outside taking pictures, and one of my colleagues said, “Are you okay, can we help you?” I think they thought he was going to tell them off. So they sort of began to apologize. He said, “No, it's fine, it's fine! Do you want to take some pictures inside?” And they looked and said, “Oh, are we allowed?” “Yeah, absolutely. And I'll come and show you some good things to take photos of.” For those two young Muslim women, their assumption was that as Muslim women, they would not be allowed to come into the church. Now, those are preconceived ideas. Wherever they come from, they are there. So, in an informal way, we often can be quite a good bridge between the church and people of other faiths, because we have this tradition of quite an informal relaxed welcome into the building. That's quite a powerful bridge.

Throughout our conversation, it becomes apparent that relationships are at the heart of the ministry of St Mary’s. John speaks to me of the bonds formed through a mental health programme that the church offers, and how the church connects people in need to the appropriate community resources. In addition to being open for visitors, St Mary’s offers tours for schools. Often the schoolteachers will tell John that most of their class have never been in a church before; sometimes 80 or even 90 per cent. For John, the visiting times and the school tours present opportunities to tell people of other religions about Christianity and to engage with other religions, a task that he is passionate about. Ostensibly, the demographics of St Mary’s parish — over 12% Muslim — and John’s interest in interfaith relations should make the reports of direct relevance to John. Yet when I ask him “Do the Presence and Engagement reports from the national Presence and engagement task group and the debates that go on at the Church of England's General Synod affect you?” John says:

> I mean, I *guess* they do at some level, but it's not immediate and obvious and apparent. I think for most of us, we're there at the coalface doing what we do. Up on the surface, there may be those who are planning and strategizing about how we can dig through the coal better. But sometimes, like in any big organization, there seems to be a big gap between the two. So it will ultimately affect us because decisions will be made and things will be encouraged and advice given and that may be very good stuff. I'm not criticizing any of it. I just think sometimes it can feel quite distant and not always that relevant to the particular. So at the end of the day, if I have a Muslim chap who decides to bring his three children into the church, the conversation that has happened at a national level is pretty irrelevant to that. It's my attitude to that man and his children and their experience of [St. Mary’s], and what they go home having experienced and

> what they've heard, and what's happened to them that day, that is *really* significant. Because those kids will go home and that will be their experience as a Christian. And so therefore, if it was friendly and nice, and 'I like that man, that man of the church was really friendly, and he talked to me and he learned my name, and he got down and was talking to me and asking me about my school.' And, you know, that's what that child will remember, not policymaking decisions at a higher level. Now, that's not to say those things are wrong or bad, or even irrelevant, but they are distant.

John's considered response to my question expressed several themes. The first is a sense of balance. He recognized that the national work does have some effect before saying that it is not directly pertinent to his work in central Birmingham. Many of my other interlocutors were also careful not to be disdainful about the national context or reports while recognizing that they were not pertinent to their own contexts. There was not a resentment of the reports but an acknowledgement that they have their place, and their place is not a Birmingham parish. This leads directly to the other major theme, which is the usage of spatialised language to describe the utility of the Presence and Engagement reports. For John, the Presence and Engagement reports and General Synod are *distant.* They exist in a different place and the echoes of the activities from that place do not reach Birmingham in a direct way. Elsewhere in our conversation, John tells me that he is a "context person, a locality person." National approaches also do not represent *the particular*, which suggests that John's context is one part of something broader, and while his part can speak to the broader church, the broader church cannot speak to his part. The particular for John is the relationships: the enduring memories of a child who encountered a church and maybe even a Christian priest for the first time. It is this that motivates John. The reports could be thought of as an upward-downward trajectory whereas he is interested in relationships that are looking and reaching outward.

The Reverend Theresa and the Brookfield Benefice

When I ask the Reverend Theresa about the Presence and Engagement reports and General Synod, she muses that she *might* find a summarised version of a report useful. As she continues her response, however, she arrives at a realization:

> I guess I'm not particularly interested in operating at that level. You know, there's enough to do just on this local level, really. And I really believe in the kind of calling to be a bit downwardly mobile, to come and live in this place, which, you know, it's not really the sort of place that most people would want to or choose to live. I feel really called to be here, you know, I felt I had a very, very specific sense of call to come and be here. Even though it doesn't really make any sense from a worldly point of view, you know, I was in [redacted place] before, it was like a super nice, kind of middle-class place. And now I'm living in a place where there are drug dealers outside our house every night. So I have to trust that God is here in his fullness and wants me to be here. That's really important to me. And that feels quite local.

What are the factors that would lead Theresa to live in a place where there are drug dealers outside the vicarage and why does the local matter to her so much to the extent that national reports are perceived as an entirely different level? Brookfield is a part of Birmingham slightly outside the city centre. It is an economically deprived area: on a scale of all of the Church of England parishes where 12,307 is the least deprived and 1 is the most deprived, Brookfield is ranked 206th (Church of England Research and Statistics Unit 2022). According to the 2011 census, 63.1 % of the population identify as Muslim and 22.8% as Christian. The Reverend Theresa estimates that the demographic makeup is closer to 75% Muslim now, many of whom are from Pakistan. At times, she says, "it feels like you're in Pakistan on a lot of the shopping streets and so on." Theresa was installed as vicar of the Brookfield benefice during the coronavirus pandemic. Both of those challenges — ministering in an economically deprived area and arriving during the Coronavirus pandemic — do not sway Theresa from her sense of call to Brookfield. She describes her first impressions of the parish as challenging but rewarding:

> This one on paper looked like the totally undoable job, the really hard job, but also 'Wow, it's in a really kind of interesting place.' It's sort of exciting, but also really challenging…it does feel a bit like stepping into the undoable and unknowable, I'm out of my depth…It's like a jigsaw puzzle, the sense of calling, but I do feel like that sense of calling has been affirmed in lots of different ways. And that feels quite important because it does feel quite challenging in a whole load of different ways at the moment. And I think it's going to feel really challenging for quite a while. I'll go up for an hour and hang out on the allotments. And I talk to, you know, Afghanis and Pakistani people and Zambian ladies and I have all these conversations, and I just think, 'I love it.' I love this.

Theresa describes herself as an “evangelical, but with lots of caveats... not in a conservative place, probably more influenced by the charismatic tradition.” She is wary of labels, especially given her appreciation for diverse aspects of Christian practice. Her open-minded perspective coupled with a charismatic sense of calling lent itself to moving to the Brookfield context. She had previously lived in what she describes as a “middle-class” parish in a different county. The move to Brookfield was an intentional one, driven by a sense that God meant for her to be in Brookfield. Theresa has experience in regions where Christians are a minority, having “encountered God in a living way for the first time” while living in China as a young person. Nevertheless, Theresa is candid about the challenges experienced in the area, especially the excessive amount of garbage littering the streets and the lack of harmonious relations between the various ethnic groups, especially the Pakistanis, Romanians, and Roma people, the latter two often being conflated by others. She describes the congregation in the benefice as “tiny and ageing.” There is a local community centre that some of the congregation members are involved with, but most of the congregation members live outside of Brookfield. Many moved away from the area over the years, thinking “we want to live in a nicer place,” and only return for Sunday mornings. This has motivated Theresa to emphasize a local approach, one of “helping people to think in a more holistic way about finding common ground as we address this issue of litter…and working together with other people to say, you know, God's given us this beautiful world to live in. How could we work together to improve the space that we live in?” Admittedly, notes Theresa, the outward-looking approach is one that runs counter to the standard Anglican practice of thinking “people should come to church, people should come to us.” She would instead encourage a perspective emphasizing “How are we serving our community?... What are we called to be and to do in this place?”

At this point in the conversation Theresa explains something that has been on her mind: "I might get drawn into being a prophetic voice." I tell her that sounds like a powerful statement — could she tell me more?

> So I've never been massively involved in politics. But…it would mean that if I was aware of a local issue, being in touch with my local MP, and knowing who my counsellors are. I'm conscious that in the society here all those stakeholders, like your local police and your local councils those people are much more available and around than I've ever experienced before because you're in a city with a lot of need. And I think just join in with those conversations and speaking up for the marginalized… I've already had tons and tons of meetings that I'd never had before…becoming a connected person for the sake of the people that you serve in your neighbourhood. So I think that's what I mean…I have privilege, you know, I have all the privileges of my position, but also my background. And I have to use that in the right way to speak up for people who maybe don't have as much of a voice or can't speak up for themselves.

For Theresa, bearing the mantle of being a "prophetic voice" first involves the identification of immediate and local concerns in Brookfield: "One of the things I did, especially when we were in full lockdown, was just walking the streets and doing a lot of praying, 'Lord, make me attentive to what's here and what's springing up, and where you're at work.'" The common thread weaving together Theresa's description of her prayer walks, involvement with the stakeholders, conversations on the allotments, and prophetic approach is her commitment to fully understanding Brookfield. She even ceased her usual foregoing of wearing her clerical collar once she recognised that it "represents something to people of other faiths" in Brookfield. Brookfield is a challenging and unique context, one that for Theresa, national Presence and Engagement reports cannot address in its particularity. When she speaks of her privilege, however, she recognises that an aspect of it is derived from the Church and especially its place as the established religion of England. "I have lots of questions about whether the established Church is a helpful thing but…at the moment, while we still have the cure of souls, and I have a parish and all of that, I think it's just about taking the circumstances in which you find yourself and sort of say and thinking, 'Okay, how can I do this in the most helpful way possible?'" It is

the topic of establishment to which I will now turn, with two further case studies rooted in the Diocese of Birmingham.

Establishment in Birmingham

Establishment is a national reality that affects Anglican-Muslim relations in Birmingham at a local level. In Chapter 1, I discussed the idea of 'ambient' religion and how England's religious identity is shaped by the Church of England as tied to its status as the established church. There is a history of the Church of England using its establishment to help other religions. As early as 1970, Anglicans in Bradford had appointed a regional interfaith advisor (Lewis 2015). Throughout the 1970s and beyond, conferences were organized between Christians and Muslims in Bradford and beyond to educate non-Muslims about Islam and to identify the needs of South Asian immigrant communities. A benefit of the structure of the Institutional Church is that the local – or parochial, as it were – is easily connected with the institutional level. This allows for issues noted at the local level, such as supporting immigration, to be elevated to the powers that be, including the Bishops in the House of Lords. Some bishops have "frequently deployed their position in the city and, nationally in the House of Lords, to affect the temper and challenge the terms in which issues were discussed, whether the dismissal of Muslims as 'fundamentalists' or homogenizing them with Sikhs and Hindus within the category 'Asian'" (Lewis 2015, 191). Others have argued that many bishops in the House of Lords see themselves as defenders of *faiths* plural, which "leads to a paradoxical situation in which religious tolerance may be advanced via a religio-political institution that owes its traction to traditions of Christian privilege" (Guest, Olson, and Wolffe 2012, 68). Without glossing over negative interactions, these examples indicate cooperation, or at least the potential for cooperation, between the established church and other religions that have benefitted all parties. Considering the history of establishment coming to the aid of other religions in England, it is perhaps unsurprising that my interlocutors find it to be an advantage,

albeit an uncomfortable one. The following section will discuss the motif of establishment as it is experienced in Birmingham alongside a continued discussion of how the Presence and Engagement reports were received.

The Reverend Kenneth and Parkmont Benefice

When I ask the Reverend Kenneth, vicar of Parkmont Benefice about whether the discussions that occur at the Church of England's General Synod and the reports that are produced by the National Presence and Engagement have an impact on his ministry, he calmly but firmly says, "No." I pause for a moment to see if he will expand on this one-word response, the shortest of all the responses I received over the course of my interviews. Finally, I repeated his answer, in the form of a question: "No?" He says,

> Perhaps they should have. I think that's one of the tensions of being in the National Church. There are national institutions that undertake great pieces of work nationally and publish national papers. But that's looking through the window the wrong way. I want to look at interfaith through the window of [Parkmont], not through the window of Westminster or Lambeth.

Kenneth's use of imagery conjures in my mind an image of a stained-glass window in particular. From the inside of a church with the sun shining outside, the vibrant colours of stained glass illuminate powerfully. From the outside of a church, stained glass is murkier, its figures unclear. For Kenneth, Parkmont is the window through which to look at interfaith; the window inside the church which, at the right moments, illuminates the church. But trying to look into Parkmont churches from the outside, through a window of Westminster of Lambeth, does not provide a clear view. There is a dual statement being made. The first is that the local is the superior perspective. The second is a negative statement about trying to view the local from afar, one that he ends up tying into a much broader discussion about the Church of England, establishment, and the future of religion in England. In recognition of Kenneth's valuing of Parkmont, it will be considered first.

Parkmont is a suburb about five kilometres outside Birmingham city. Despite its proximity to Birmingham and other suburbs, it has its own distinctive character. Kenneth describes the region as having the atmosphere of a village with its own market and shops and "a really strong sense of community and identity that sets it apart from the surrounding suburbs." The Benefice consists of two churches, each with its own congregation, which recently amalgamated into a single parish. According to Kenneth, the churches, especially the older and larger church, St Gregory's, are a central part of life in Parkmont. The smaller church, St Hilda's, also has its place in Parkmont due to having a modern parish hall which can be used for local events. Kenneth shares, "There are a whole heap of community groups and many of them have church people on their leadership committees. So the crossover between the two is quite strong. And the church feels embedded in the local community and the local community feels a sense of ownership over its parish church, even though they may not visit it often." St Gregory's and St Hilda's mark their place in the life of Parkmont at key stages in the Christian calendar. On Palm Sunday a large procession takes place through Parkmont from one church to the other with a sixteen-foot tall cross, a portable sound system for projecting readings and hymns, and sometimes even a live donkey. The cross remains at a traffic junction in central Parkmont until Pentecost "and is never messed with."

Like John, Kenneth is passionate about interfaith relations and the opportunities that are presented by living in the region of a diverse city such as Birmingham. Kenneth previously ministered in Hampshire and joked to me "Interfaith in Hampshire meant talking to Catholics. And up here, it's a whole different game." According to the 2011 census data, Parkmont is 32.8% Christian and 28.1% Muslim. Kenneth's approach to interreligious affairs is very much rooted in Parkmont and Birmingham. At one point in our conversation, Kenneth mentions that he considers England to be post-Christian and post-modern. In response, I ask him how he would like to see the Church of England adapt to those realities. He says:

> I think almost the answer is different in every parish because Anglican ministry is so contextual. Expressions of being church, speak to the context in which parish churches find themselves. So for us, it is maintaining an openness to interfaith dialogue. Recognizing that by 2050, Islam will be the majority faith in Birmingham. It is about embedding ourselves with openness and hospitality in the local community that sees links established and developed.

In this statement, Kenneth is expressing an openness to allowing the realities of Parkmont and Birmingham to guide his ministry rather than a predetermined ideal; perhaps the ideals that the reports deal in. The centrality of Islamic communities in the life of Birmingham provides him with the impetus to focus his interreligious efforts among the Muslims of Parkmont. However, Kenneth is not driven by demographics but by relationships and his commitment to sharing Christian life with others as well as the initiative of Muslims in Parkmont being curious about his churches. During his second Christmas in Parkmont, he received a phone call from a member of a nearby Shia mosque asking if Muslims were welcome to the Christmas Eve service. Kenneth explained in advance what the service would look like and its purpose in celebrating the birth of Christ, and said "It's a very special time for us, and you're welcome to come." That year he estimates that there were forty or fifty Muslim individuals and couples, some with babies in their arms, arriving at the 11 PM Christmas Eve service.

> …they were unfamiliar with the liturgy and what we were doing, but people were kind of helping them keep up in the service books with what was happening. We have a strict policy of no photos or videoing in church for safeguarding reasons, but they were just awestruck by the candles, the choreography of the liturgy, the vestments the clergy were wearing, the choir robed and singing. And during the *Agnus Dei*, you could see they were just transfixed by what was happening. You could see that they were experiencing a spiritual moment that they didn't quite know how to interpret. The next year, we had 200 turn up!

Following the local mosque's interest in the Christmas Eve service, Kenneth thought it might interest the local Muslim community to learn about other salient events in Christian life.

> Building on the success of that [the Christmas Eve service] we had a Confirmation service, here with Bishop David, with the diocesan Bishop coming to confirm. And I invited them to come to that service as a rite of passage for Christians. Making right their own baptismal vows for themselves as consenting adults and being welcomed into full membership of the Church with the Bishop present. And we had curry sent in

> from the Indian restaurant across the road from the church. So after the service, 150 people sitting in the pews, eating curry together, chatting, Muslims and Christians.

This is an especially powerful statement about the importance of the local. The bishop is the head of the local church: he presides over all the diocesan churches and he is the one who licenses clergy to perform their ministry in local churches. He is the chief pastor who shares the cure of souls with Kenneth. The Bishop is the pinnacle of the local church. Moreover, it should be noted that the above was an interfaith initiative guided by the organic interest in the church's events. This element was important to Kenneth. Directly after the above, he said:

> And for me, that's what interfaith is about. It was around something specific, there was meaning and purpose. We were sharing something of our faith, inviting their questions, talking about what it meant for us, asking them what similar things they might have in Islam. And saying that 'this is the Bishop who's over the whole family of churches of our style in Birmingham.' And just sharing in that.

It should be clear from this discussion that Parkmont is a place with its own clear identity as a suburb and with its ties to Birmingham. There was no need for external guidance because in the setting of Parkmont, there arose unique opportunities that might not be readily predicted by someone unfamiliar with the context. It is for this reason that Kenneth opposes national-level guidance: it simply does not know his context. What it means to 'be the church' in Parkmont alongside people of other religions may have some overlap with other areas but it cannot be generalised nationwide.

While the national-level reports and General Synod discussions were not relevant to Kenneth, there was one particular element of belonging to the national church that stood out to him: establishment. He explained to me,

> So though I cannot defend being the established Church, and would not fight for it to remain established, for as long as it does I will try and use every benefit I can from that, for the Kingdom of God. But once Charles accedes to the throne this will become a live issue. And he, I fear, will hasten the disestablishment of the Church of England. Although to what extent the monarch can do that, having been crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, just shows the incestual relationship of an established Church and the government. But then what other nation can exist for so long without a constitution? Yeah, we make it up as we go along...Nobody could have designed the way to run a country like the way the British

> run the UK. And nobody could have designed a Church to operate in the way the Church of England operates. But they both exist, and they are both alive. They both have a future. And it's about working out how we invest in that and make the best of it.

Although Kenneth would not advocate for the establishment of the church, it is clear from the above that he recognises that it comes with benefits, 'incestual relationship' or not. This emerged as a major theme across my interviews; an ethical uncertainty about establishment combined with the recognition that the Church of England holds clout, especially with local and national authorities, to a greater extent compared to any other religious body in the country, and furthermore, the recognition that this clout could be used to advance the interests of not just Anglicans but other religious bodies too; that establishment has to be considered when working through interreligious relations.

The Reverend Michael and St Edward the Confessor, Dunley

The Reverend Michael was one of my first contacts in Birmingham, having been recommended as a potentially good interview subject by Andrew Smith, the Diocesan Interfaith Advisor. From the beginning of the interview, it was clear why Andrew thought that Michael would be a good interlocutor. The first reason is that Michael ministers in Dunley, a town outside of Birmingham with both a large gurdwara and a large mosque, and he fosters relationships with both their communities. He is also gregarious and clearly engaged by his work. When I asked Michael about his thoughts on the Presence and Engagement reports, his answer was, "I'm so excited and so genuinely thrilled to be part of all the stuff that goes on locally, that I haven't really got time for it." For some, the use of 'excited' and 'thrilled' might sound overstated or even disingenuous, but Michael is sincere. This is not to say that Michael's tone was saccharine or uncritical: at times in our interview, he spoke harshly about the Church's actions both locally and nationally. The Church's current stance on same-sex marriage, for instance, was "idiocy" to Michael. At all times it was clear that he was speaking from a place not merely of experience

but of lifelong Christian conviction and reflection, which began when he became a Christian at a young age and even had a part in the Billy Graham movement.

When I began my interview with Michael, I asked him how the past year had been for him and his church, mindful of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic may have had on churches. His answer surprised me: “Fabulous. But that’s probably not what I’m supposed to say.” I told him that it was an unusual but refreshing answer, and he said:

> It’s a truthful answer. It's not some sort of hyped-up answer…this church has a very significant food bank operating out of it. So when the pandemic started, the food bank was serving about 170 households on each occasion twice a week. And I had a very simple decision to make as to whether we would close it as instructed, and I would not come into church, or whether I would ignore that. So I chose to ignore it… And just exploring, for example, on a theological level, you have three big bags of food. And I say, ‘This is for you. Enjoy’. What's the difference between that and communion? Well, none, is the place I've got to. If communion is an expression of love expressed through the church, then what's the difference?...And as a result, all those people have been fed something of the order of 170,000 meal equivalents.

Michael’s reflections above are representative of his approach to ministry. He weds pragmatism with social and theological reflections, seeing opportunities and making the best of what is at hand. It is this same approach that Michael takes to the reality of belonging to the established church. Establishment arose early in our conversation when I asked him, “What does being an Anglican mean to you?” He said:

> It means it's a greater place, a place of great privilege, which I've been invited to join. And that's not about modesty or not modesty, that's how I see being a part of the privileged establishment, all that stuff. I am not clearly by background part of that establishment. I've sort of been given a pass to be part of it. And I've always been conscious of being on the edge of that. What that means is that one has a *place* as an Anglican — I was offered when I was in a Pentecostal church to be ordained within the Pentecostal movement. I saw that as more of what I would rudely ‘ghetto Christianity,’ whereas I wanted to be part of the Christianity that was out and abroad in the wider community…it’s a very earthy sort of Anglicanism, but uses the privilege and the establishment place.

Here Michael is making use of a dual meaning of establishment. When Michael says that he is clearly not by background an establishment person, he is referring to the upper strata of society who form the powerful in notable establishments. Michael refers to his background as

"working class council" and told me that he was the second person in his extended family to go to higher education. At the same time, however, Michael associates the Church of England with the privileges that come with that general meaning of establishment through its place as the established church. Through that privilege, he perceives that the Church is able to exert a greater influence in the wider community. The two meanings of establishment are then a general sense of a privileged position within society and the formal recognition in the English state that the Church of England is the official religion. These are connected. A further point of importance is that Michael does not see the Church of England as privileged in an abstract sense but in a tangible sense that he participates in during his daily life. Michael, as a priest in that Church, is able to make use of the Church's power. He explains how this informed his actions upon becoming the parish priest in Dunley:

> So out of my understanding of Anglicanism, one of my first things was to invite all the local community groups to come to a conference, and using the Anglican levers, get the local chief of police and a few other so-called dignitaries to come and address it. And they [the congregation] couldn't believe that this non-existent church was pulling these people in. But that's the Anglican bit. So I've traded on that shamelessly. This used to be the civic church for [Dunley] in the days when [Dunley] was a very, very, very wealthy town. [An infamous politician] preached here, [a Prime Minister's] parents were married in this church, there were eleven live theatres in this town until the early 60s, such was the wealth of the place. And so, I translated that to make this the civic church of the borough. It took a certain amount of speaking nicely, but the local political elite have finally bought into it.

Michael's reference to 'Anglican levers' refers to a mechanism by which he can mobilize the privileges and recognition that come with being the established Church toward his desired goals. He found that by trading upon the historic role and cultural relevance of the Church of England he could form strategic connections with local authorities. Making St Edward the Confessor the *de facto* civic church of the area in the view of local dignitaries was a feat in and of itself, but Michael's aim was not status for status' sake. Rather, he envisions that the clout held by St Edward's may be used to help others. This is especially true on the topic of interreligious matters: there is a large mosque and a large gurdwara in close proximity to St

Edward's. Michael is friends with the local imam and has supported the imam's initiatives several times:

> If other faiths want to do something, they get the Anglicans on board first, and then the council will listen and others will listen. And just a tiny story, the local mosque where the imam's a great friend wanted to have a council grant for us at a community fun day a few summers ago, and they couldn't get the council grant. They declined them several times. So I put my name on the bottom there next to Nazir, as the co-chairman of this Muslim community fun day. We got the grant straightaway. Well, I wouldn't dream of making any connections!

Michael's sarcastic humour in the final sentence above indicates an awareness that the facts of the case might be interpreted differently in spite of his confidence in the influence of Anglicanism in the grant application. He has reason to believe that his name had influence. Anglican churches have come to the aid of Muslim communities in several cases before, both locally and in more high-profile instances. McLoughlin's 1998 study of the York Road Mosque in Bradford found that the community's purchase of what was previously an Anglican church hall was facilitated by a local vicar who had initially offered the use of the hall for religious instruction of Muslim children (McLoughlin 1998). Meanwhile, Christian groups lent their advocacy and support toward the controversial construction of minarets on the Jamme Masjid in London in the 1970s and 1980s (N. Ahmed et al. 2015).

I ask Michael if he thinks that people of other religions are aware of the power that the Church of England can hold. This had been a question which received mixed answers across my interviews. In some parishes, my interlocutors had the impression that the Church of England was widely revered as such, whereas in others it seemed that the parish church was appreciated for its role in the community, but members of the community were not aware of its denomination beyond being a Christian church, let alone the meaning of establishment. It is likely that the views on this topic were connected to the interlocutor's personal views about establishment. For those who had a strong view about what it meant to belong to the national church, it is possible that this became part of their interactions with the community and then may have informed the views of the community. It is equally possible that some of my

interlocutors overestimated the importance of the Church of England to those around them, or underestimated it if was not something that they cared about themselves. In any case, Michael provided a balanced response which did not rely on his views about establishment, but simply what he had experienced and how he had been asked by people of other religions to engage with them and to support them at times, as in the example above. He also showed a characteristic attention to locality and context. In his response to my question about the significance of the Church of England to non-Christians, he said:

> I would say it depends on which bit of the country you're in. So if you're in central Manchester, I would think the Methodist Church used to be quite significant. When I was traveling – though it's a long time ago now – I can think of towns in the north of England where the Baptist church would have been the most significant church. I think, recently, a lot of Church of England churches, either for need or choice have retreated under the radar. So it's no surprise that people don't understand what the relative situation is. But after the first wave of the pandemic, my friend [Mehdi] from the Yemeni Community Centre and Mosque, rang me up and said, "We've got a bit of a problem." Most of the mosques are too small to worship in with the two-meter rule, because they are in converted houses or something. He is chair of the local network of Muslim leaders. And so I said, "Well, any ideas?" He said, "Well, what about we use car parks or something to worship?" And I said, "Okay, yeah, that's fine." "But can we get a sort of official blanket policy rather than us just approaching on behalf of our congregation? Can we make an official approach?" So, a bit like the community fun day. He said, "What about if you and I put our names together? And then they'll listen"— 'they' being in this case public health and the council. "They'll listen if the Church of England name is on it." And sure enough, they gave a blanket agreement about the use of car parks and the open space next to this church. As it so happened, that didn't come to pass because of the next lot of COVID coming along. But again, it was clearly demonstrated. *He came to me.* All right, we're very good friends....But it was because he wanted us to make a joint approach.

In the instance of applying for the aid of the public health authority and the council for support toward worship services, the Church of England name was leveraged to support a request that would primarily benefit local Muslim communities: the churches are large enough and empty enough for social distance to be straightforward. Michael perceives, as evidently did his friend Mehdi, that the invocation of Anglican approval of the request was a central factor in the request being approved. He links this back to establishment and concomitant cultural clout held by the Church of England. Significantly, however, Michael's support for this approach is not

rooted in a fervent commitment to antidisestablishmentarianism but in a localised reality. It matters that the Church of England holds sway in Dunley. The impact of establishment in Manchester— or in the next town over—might be different, but that is immaterial to Michael's ministry and to his friend at the mosque. Michael does not state a stance for or against establishment during our interview; he simply explains how it has been expedient for obtaining his desired ends and the desired ends of his Muslim friends. In this sense, his commitment is very much to the local: to the relationships he finds himself in, and to his church. Establishment is a national reality, but it only matters because of its local impact. This is significant because it reveals how those who are committed to the local, such as Michael, and who would say that they do not read national-level reports, nevertheless do draw upon the advantages of being the Church of England that are derived from the national level.

For my interlocutors in Birmingham, the 'local' is the priority but there is a clear recognition that the national reality of establishment buttresses the Church's ministry in its local instantiations. For that reason, a hard division between the national and the local is not tenable. Apathy toward Church of England national reports is significant in that it indicates a localised vision, but it cannot be taken as a rejection of belonging to a broader structure, one that comes with privileges and authority. With some discomfort, my interlocutors have come to realize that establishment can be used to aid other religions and it has become an element of interreligious relations in Birmingham.

CHAPTER 5
The Parish in Birmingham: Spatial Dynamics in Interreligious Dialogue

This chapter is about the parochial system, a centuries-old ecclesiastical method of organising space which still holds its structure and clout today. While the English parish dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, it reached full development in the twelfth century when it was developed as a system of "administrative and spiritual control" (Cameron 2005, 25; Pounds 2000). These two aspects — the administrative and the spiritual — are both important and will guide the discussion of the parish throughout this chapter. The parochial system survived many upheavals in England's religious life, including the Reformation. While its endurance is a testament to its dynamic nature, in England today the status of the parish is increasingly under scrutiny along with the Church to which it belongs. Declining rates of church attendance have led to the closure of church buildings and proposals to reconsider the Church of England's claim to having a "Christian presence in every community." Alternative models such as 'Fresh Expressions' and 'People and Places' may represent a different future for how the Church organises its church buildings and resources. Nevertheless, the parish is an essential aspect of Anglican identity, "the most characteristic unit of Anglican church life" (Buchanan 2015, 463).

This chapter will examine both how the parish is understood in the Church of England's structures and how it is experienced by my interlocutors in the Diocese of Birmingham. This division informs the two main sections. The first section, 'Spatial Dynamics in the Church of England,' situates the parish system in the territorial structure of the Church of England and will provide a historical and theological overview of how Anglicanism is organised spatially. This includes a focus on the parish system as it pertains to the different strata of the spatial organization of the Church such as the diocese and the place of different individuals in this spatial system including laypeople, priests, and bishops. The second section, 'The Parish and Interfaith in Birmingham,' will further discuss the role of the parish in the lives of my interlocutors in Birmingham with a case study of two parishes. Overall, I seek to demonstrate

how the parish is not merely a division of space, but also a manner of enacting an Anglican theological vision about places and the people that inhabit them.

The parish featured in every single interview I conducted with leaders in the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham. This is in part because I had a question about it midway through the interview: "How important is the idea of the parish to your ministry?" Most often though, my interlocutors would raise the topic of the parish before I did. Often this would happen during the very first part of the interview, when I would ask my interlocutors about their religious backgrounds, and specifically: "What does being an Anglican mean to you?" The parish featured often here as the religious leaders would draw upon how the parish provided a model for their ministry in the Church of England, and how it provided a unique opportunity for Christian presence and witness. I also found that the significance of the parish crossed party divisions in the Church. While party divisions inform differing liturgical styles, differing theologies of salvation, and differing reasons for engaging with people of other religions, the parish is a common motif because all members of the Church of England have a part in it.

The agreement of my interlocutors on the importance of the parish should not be taken for unity in outlook on *why* the parish is significant. For some of my interlocutors, the parish was an evangelistic tool for bringing non-Christians into the religion. For others, the parish and the cure of souls were broadly interpreted as helping people to flourish regardless of their religious background. For instance, one parish priest described to me how she conceived her role in her parish as simply one of being an encouraging presence: "I believe that the kingdom of God is built by people of all faiths and none…So where there is peace and justice prevailing, whether it's coming from the Muslims or Sikhs or the Christians or the atheists, I want to encourage that." The parish system is not simply a geographical reality but a social one: it represents and sustains theological ideals through the material practices of its participants. As

I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, the content of the ideals varies. Accordingly, 'spatial imaginary' is an apt description to capture both the material and immaterial aspects of the parish as a socially constructed entity. Here I define spatial imaginaries as "stories and ways of talking about spaces and places that transcend language as embodied performances by people in the material world" (Watkins 2015, 509). The parish is a spatial imaginary in that it exerts influence over the ways that people live and interact with one another.

The Parish

The Church of England is a territorial church; its boundaries are largely coterminous with the English borders.[57] Likewise, it is spatially organised through parishes, deaneries, archdeaconries, and dioceses which reached fruition in the Middle Ages and are maintained to this day. The organization of the Church developed alongside temporal — that is to say, not strictly religious — factors. In the South of England, the parish and townships were originally coterminous. In the North, the parochial system developed along the lines of manors, as influenced by Danelaw. The Lord of a manor would build a parish church, and the manor became the boundaries of the parish (Gay 1971). Since the boundaries of the different organizational units of the Church of England are primarily geographical and only secondly theological or membership-based, it encompasses all people in the country in some manner. Because of this, the parochial system has ramifications that have the potential to affect communities beyond those which gather in Anglican churches. For instance, a diocese – the regional unit above the parish – is "in law, not a body of people who worship in Anglican churches or whose names appear in Anglican electoral rolls, but a geographical area…" (Podmore 2005). Accordingly, the parochial system assumes that everyone who lives in

[57] The exceptions to this are 'The Church of England abroad' (e.g., the Diocese of Europe), as well as a number of parishes in Wales that opted to remain in the Diocese of Hereford after the disestablishment of the Church of Wales.

England is a participant in the Church. This notion is reaffirmed in the Presence and Engagement reports, which refer to non-Anglicans and non-Christians as "parishioners."

My interlocutors had varying perspectives on this notion: for some, the notion of all people being parishioners was a sign of inclusivity, while for others it represented an uncomfortable paternalism. Another concern was that a broad understanding of belonging in the Church of England limits its unique claims: an example of this perspective was given to me by the Reverend Nathaniel, for whom there was significance in the Church of England being a confessional church. By this, Nathaniel meant that the Church of England holds to the Thirty-Nine Articles and that it has "specific doctrines that are common ground for its membership, which define the boundaries of belief and belonging...there is a doctrine that you would be expected to sign up to, to be Anglican." He contrasted this with those who say that being Anglican is just about attending Church of England services and furthermore said that:

> Some people even hold to the view that the Church of England consists of everyone who is English, which I find a strange notion because obviously, that would include everyone in my parish. And some of them would be surprised to find that they're part of the Church of England. The imam at the mosque might not want that.

Nathaniel's perspective was informed by a conservative evangelical view that to be a Christian is to hold to an exclusive set of doctrines which are then reinforced through church attendance and living a Christian life. For him, the notion that anyone who lives in England is an Anglican, or has a part in the Church of England, is problematic because it undermines the need for Anglicans to affirm confessional claims which form the boundaries of what is and is not Anglican.

Nathaniel's statement "the imam at the mosque might not want that" can be understood in two main ways. The first is a concern born of respect for not imposing religion on someone who does not wish to belong to it. The second is one of maintaining internal Christian boundaries so that the meaning of being a Christian is not reduced to being simply one who

lives in a country with a Christian national church. Though Nathaniel's perspective was not a common one among my interlocutors, I have drawn attention to it because it highlights the axiomatic element of the parish: boundary, and particularly "boundaries of belief and belonging," in Nathaniel's phrasing. The concepts of 'parish,' 'parishioner' 'Church of England' and 'Anglican' can be construed in a multitude of ways depending on one's theology, social ethic, and concept of the nation and what it means to be the national church. I will return to the different concepts of the parish including perspectives which directly contradict the Rev'd Nathaniel's perspective later in this chapter.

The boundaries are often not visible; in rare cases, they are clearly delineated by walls but in most places, they are not marked. The same is true of a community's social boundaries. Who belongs to a parish may be perceived in different ways. For some, the presence of people from other religions in 'their' parish is a positive opportunity. However, for others such as Nathaniel, to belong to a parish is to partake in the Church of England, which necessitates a Christian rather than a geographically based identity. From that perspective to belong is to assent to particular doctrines and practices and Christian identity is a boundary to be sustained and guarded.

As the parish is the most local form of belonging, it is also the most intimate. It is in parish churches where the sacraments are performed and where Anglicans build community. Relatedly, the notion of the 'cure of souls,' previously discussed, is central to the ministry of the parish priest. It also functions as a reminder of how the parish functions as a distinct space. As one of my interlocutors said:

> When the phone rings with an enquiry for baptism, marriage or a funeral, the immediate response is "where do you live" i.e. are you one of my sheep or somebody else's? Place is important.

For many of my interlocutors, the 'cure of souls' as tied to the parish provides a model for interreligious engagement for my interlocutors, as well as the "impetus to engage" with people

of other religions. For others however, such as one of the examples that I will give in the next section, it is unclear how it applies to people of other religions.

The parish system is not without its opponents; not every Church of England congregation has its own parish due to the growth of 'church plants' or 'Fresh Expression' churches that gather in pubs, schools, or homes, yet are still associated with the Church of England. Furthermore, initiatives in some dioceses seek to allocate resources in new ways that function differently than the traditional parish model. In Birmingham, an initiative called "People & Places" has not yet fully been implemented, but is envisioned as follows:

> The traditional model of every church led by a single 'vicar', is not solely sufficient to serve the people of our diverse, urban and rural region. Instead, every Christian community will have a trained leader, some of whom may be clergy people, who is the focus for a ministry team. This team encompasses the range of required roles, as identified by expression of church. *Leadership and resources are no longer allocated by parish boundaries.* The new framework enables them to be shared more fairly across all our worshipping communities and form a supporting network.[58] (Italics mine)

As alluded to above, the primary distinction between People & Places and the traditional parish model is that leadership will not be limited to one priest per parish church but will make use of different sorts of leaders; lay leaders and deacons will be able to fulfil functions once solely in the purview of a parish priest. This may involve the breaking down of parish boundaries. It is no coincidence that such an initiative is happening in the diocese of Birmingham, where Anglican Christians are a minority in many parishes; in the eyes of the Church, creativity is needed for "a sustainable future to be built for all the people and places of Church of England Birmingham."[59]

Despite the advent of programmes such as "People & Places," the parish remains the norm for the majority of the Church of England. Any programmes that seek to innovate the ministry of the Church will be in reference to, not independent from, the normativity of the

[58] "People and Places," The Church of England Birmingham, CofEBirmingham.com, accessed January 2023.
[59] Ibid.

parish system. Novel initiatives are just that — novel —considering that the parish system has existed for centuries. And of course, one must not forget that the Church is established as *the* Church of England. Wesley Carr, sometime Dean of Westminster Abbey presents a useful way of understanding the relationship of the parish to the national, established Church in writing of 'earthed' and 'high' establishment. Carr argues that it is the parish or 'earthed' element of the Church that will ultimately sustain its status as established; "Certainly any 'high' establishment of the church cannot for long survive without 'earthed' establishment. No amount of wisdom from bishops in the House of Lords will save them from extinction if they do not perform with their clergy and the people in the parishes of their dioceses" (Carr 1999, 5) . Nevertheless, the parish and its function remain an evergreen topic of conversation.

Case Studies of Three Parishes in Birmingham

How is the parish used to relate to people of other religions and the broader community? In what follows I will present three perspectives based on case studies. Each case study exemplifies a different perspective, and each will focus on one parish. The first, Fr Adrian and St Giles', demonstrates a creative usage of the church building and an expansive perspective on who is a parishioner. The second, the Reverend Justin and St Andrew's, shows a commitment to place but a struggle to assert Christian identity in the parish. These two cases are examples of the polarity of views about the parish: it is highly important for Fr Adrian's ministry with people of other religions and absent from the core of the Reverend Justin's ministry. A final case, Fr Mark and St Augustine's Church, mediates between the two.

Fr Adrian and St Giles', Hillcrest: 'Meeting People as People'

Fr Adrian has been in ministry for almost forty years. If one did not know this fact before speaking with him, it would quickly become apparent through his humorous cynicism— "I don't mind bishops being in the House of Lords, but I just wish we had bishops with brains because none of them are going to be in Mensa, are they?"— and his more serious thoughtful

words based on decades of experience. Fr Adrian's manner was warm, but he was unafraid to offend; sensing my Canadian accent, he told me that I "sounded like a colonial." This frank attitude and forthright manner of speaking reflected his tone throughout the interview and also was representative of his bold approach to ministry.

Adrian's parish, St Giles, is in Hillcrest, a suburb just outside central Birmingham. Hillcrest is a diverse area: Fr Adrian told me that when he walks around the parish in his clerical collar and cassock, he is "far by the least eccentric" as national dress is common. Fr Adrian's interest in sociology made it easy for me to learn about the demographics of his parochial area in Hillcrest. He described it as a diverse parish, both economically and religiously. Fr Adrian tells me that the parish is split demographically between "the lowest and the highest sections of society": some streets in the parish have up to 90% transience in a twelve-month period, whereas other parts of the parish contain the "massive" houses where the owners of jewellery firms in the jewellery quarter live. Christians are the largest religious demographic in Fr Adrian's parish at roughly 33%, and there are almost as many Muslims. Only a small percentage of the parish identifies as non-religious.

By Fr Adrian's estimation, there are over forty different nationalities represented in the worshipping community of St Giles', where around one hundred people worship on a given Sunday. Two members of the congregation are illiterate and six have doctorates. The youngest at the time of interviewing was three weeks old and the oldest was in his late nineties. When a lay reader asked Fr Adrian how to "pitch" his sermon to the St Giles congregation, he advised "If you try to pitch your sermons you'll miss. Just say what you want to say and say it as *you*." This is typical of Fr Adrian wisdom: no-nonsense and straightforward. Fr Adrian's no-nonsense attitude has moved St Giles' out of a period where it was not as comfortable with diversity. The church is Grade II listed, and according to Fr Adrian, it was the first building erected in Hillcrest and there has been a place of Christian worship on the site since the tenth century.

This came with a good deal of prestige which in turn led to some defensive and inhospitable attitudes from members of the congregation. He recalled how in the 1950s, before his time but in living memory of congregants when he arrived in 2005, St Giles' "was the sort of church that would say to immigrants from the Caribbean, '*wouldn't you be better placed at the mission church down the road, rather than coming to our parish?*'" Fr Adrian stressed to me: "I've buried all of those people now."

By the end of our conversation, it became apparent that he had not just buried the people but also attempted to bury the attitude that they represented, one of inward-looking privilege: "We have to look beyond ourselves. We can't just shut the door." This part of the history of St Giles' is "psychologically important," according to Fr Adrian. Our conversation revealed that it was also financially important. The church held those attitudes at a time when it was wealthy. "We are not rich anymore," stressed Fr Adrian, and this is due to him spending finances deliberately. Much of the church's wealth went toward heating under Fr Adrian. The heating was not merely a practicality but an incredibly symbolic gesture for Fr Adrian. He told me:

> I remember going on one of those conferences, you know, when you go and discuss 'how do you get people into church?' And the chap who was leading it gave us the start off task by asking 'What's the first thing you want somebody to do when they come into church?' And we got lots of stupid answers. But I remember one man said, *I want them to take their coat off*. That's always stuck with me. Because if you take your coat off, *you belong*. You've taken a layer of defence off…if you've taken your coat off you belong in a way that you don't if you keep your coat on. So that's why we've just spent a million and a half of dead people's money redoing the heating system so that I know that the church will be at least 20 degrees on a Sunday so that people come in and they want to take their coats off.

This is representative of Fr Adrian's broader approach: a commitment to welcoming all people and belonging. This commitment is rooted in the idea of the parish and it is lived out through Fr Adrian's insistence that the parish belongs to everyone. This was a departure from Fr Adrian's Baptist background. He converted to Anglicanism later in his life after serving as a Baptist minister. Part of his conversion was due to his affection for the parochial system. I asked Fr Adrian if there was anything significant to him in moving from the Baptist Church,

conventionally understood as 'non-conforming,' to England's established Church. He began by bemoaning some of the structural irritations with the Church of England, including his frustrations with the current Archbishop of Canterbury.

He compared being a priest in the Church of England to being a schoolteacher, another job that he once held. As a teacher, he had loved being in the classroom with his students but loathed anything to do with senior management. So it is with Fr Adrian and the national echelons of the Church of England: "The hierarchy has got very little to do with us." Fr Adrian became visibly animated when moving the conversation to the local level: "Being a parish priest is a bit like being a schoolteacher in your own classroom." Immediately after that statement, he drew upon the cure of souls:

> And the cure of souls, which is given to a parish priest is something that is really quite important. So that I can go into a gurdwara, or a mosque or any building…Or a pub! "I have come to visit as your parish priest." And they'll go, "oh I'm Sikh or whatever." "No, you are still within my cure of souls, I still have to look after you." And that's what everything is predicated on.

Fr Adrian's words about the cure of souls give context to his statement above about belonging. In Fr Adrian's conceptual framework, the parish is defined by the souls within it. Belonging does not necessitate a Christian identity. The language of souls came readily to Fr Adrian. When I asked him how large his parish was, with the intent to establish the geographical size, his response was "There are 20,000 souls in the parish." Each of those 20,000 souls is entitled to a share in parish life regardless of his or her religion. This sense of belonging meant that the idea of the purpose of the church building of St Giles' had to be redefined and then the definition of parishioner broadened from how the Sunday congregation of the church had previously understood it. Fr Adrian approached this task like a former schoolteacher would: by conceptualizing it as a process of teaching and education. The congregation needed to be taught that the church was not just theirs, and the broader community learned that they, too, had a part to play in the parish life of St Giles' Hillcrest. One of the first things that Fr Adrian did upon

becoming incumbent of St Giles' was to facilitate the welcome of hundreds of people who had never set foot in St Giles' before. This took place through a non-religious event: hustings for a local election.

> "…when I'd been here a month, we had a general election, I said, "I want to organize the hustings…We're having hustings." And they [the St Giles' congregation] said, "Oh, where are you having that? In the hall?" "No, I'm having it in the church." "Oh, we know, we've never done anything like that before!" And so we had people of all faiths and none, quite identifiable as such, who were coming into the church and some of the old guard found that really quite strange that we were using the building and its medieval sense of the nave belonging to the people and the sanctuary belonging to God. And so, yes, and hundreds came to that, it was a robust meeting. We probably had about four hundred people come to the hustings meeting, and for many, it was the first time they'd ever been inside the church.

The cure of souls for Fr Adrian can be understood in two core ways. Firstly, it encompasses everyone. He was at pains to emphasize that he had the cure of souls of everyone in his parish: "whatever they believe or think." The second is that it is exemplified through practical action. In his example above, he expanded upon the duty of a parish priest to marry his parishioners by ensuring that the Hindu couple could be married using language that they were comfortable with. "If somebody wants something, the answer is 'Yes'. And then we work out how it can be done." For Fr Adrian, the cure of souls is not simply a matter of church doctrine but a living, everyday tradition. This is essential because it guides his approach to interfaith relations.

Fr Adrian does not habitually participate in interfaith relations on a formal level, that is to say through structured programmes or dialogue series. While he acknowledged the role that such programmes have, he identified an issue: "…the formal things, yes, they have their place but I'm not quite certain they connect with real Christians or Muslims. They connect with the sort of rent-a-gob Christians." Never having heard this term before, I asked Fr Adrian to explain. "Rent-a-gob…to be gobby is to *speak*. So all those who want to be seen and be noticed, they would attend those sorts of things." Fr Adrian then contrasted that with daily lived actions. "If I said to my congregation, we're having a joint event with other faiths, it's not that they

wouldn’t want to come, but it just wouldn’t connect with them. You could instead knock on your neighbour’s door. That makes a connection.”

> The chap who just lives at the bottom of my garden comes with food for me as part of an iftar sharing, and I pop down with something at Christmas. And we recognize that we probably will never agree on what's behind it. But as people, we want to celebrate with each other. I suppose that's just where it becomes natural, rather than the big events. And that's where the cure of souls determines what you do, **because every person belongs to the parish, whether they like it or not.** So that the responsibility is still there to build the bridges to have those conversations to meet them as people.

How, then, did Fr Adrian connect with people in everyday life? He responded to external events that caused his neighbours to need care, for instance, especially local Muslims.

> When there was the New Zealand attack on the mosque, we took that as an opportunity to have a number of cards at the parish Eucharist, that the whole congregation signed, with just a message of solidarity. And we asked people to take them, and if they had a Muslim neighbour, to knock on the door, and say, 'This is from your parish church, we're with you in, in the sort of attack that is on Islam at the moment. And that actually was very good. With some of our neighbours, we knocked on their doors, and said, ‘This is from your parish.’ They were quite humbled that we haven't forgotten them. And when there were attacks on mosques in Birmingham, I was one of many that went and stood in cassock and all that sort of stuff outside the mosque, to sort of say, I'm here to pray for you, but then got invited in to pray with them. Which was quite a humbling experience.

Throughout the interview, one line came up several times: “We meet people as people.” Fr Adrian does not look at his parish and see Christians and Muslims first. He sees people first; people in need of his Christian cure of souls, but fundamentally people. It is because of this perspective that he is able to address people’s needs regardless of their religion, and to assert their belonging regardless of their religion. It also explains the pushback against formalized programmes. Dialogue programmes usually involve Christians and Muslims, for instance, meeting *on the basis* of their respective religion, as representatives or ambassadorial presences of those religions. By contrast, in the St Giles Hillcrest parish daily life, people go about their business, sometimes need welcoming or help, and are met with it. This does not mean that Fr Adrian does not believe in the uniqueness of Christian truth; he bemoaned how the Church of

England needs to have confidence in its own identity and in Christian truth. It is this confidence that allows him and others to care for those in their parishes:

> But until we get back to being confident in our own place, and making no apologies for the existence, only then do you have the ability to say, 'you are genuinely welcome, even though we profoundly disagree.' And yes, I'll be glad to have the argument with you if you want it, but you are still welcome here. And you don't have to change to be in your parish church.

In summation, for Fr Adrian, the parish is a place where people are first seen as people, not Christians or non-Christians. The language of 'parishioners' enables this because it is a common label under which *all* people in the area can be united. Fr Adrian's notion of the parish is rooted in the Church of England being the established Church, and he told me that non-Christians would be the first to fight against disestablishment, an assertion that is backed up by several studies (Grimley 2011; Modood 1994; Meer & Modood 2015).

In Fr Adrian's experience, the people of Hillcrest are receptive to the Anglican language of 'the parish' and 'parishioners,' especially when he exemplifies his care for them in practical ways, such as standing outside the mosque to protect Muslims from harassment or opening the church for local hustings. The fact that Christians are the largest religious group in Hillcrest likely contributes to the positive reception of Fr Adrian's inclusive theology of the parish and all people being parishioners. As Christians are the majority it gives them licence to shape the language in the area. This is significant because the same is not true in the example that follows in Carlington, where Christians are a minority. For Fr Adrian, the parish is integral to Anglican life. It is not just a framework or lens but a living reality and a tradition to be upheld and built upon. All people in St Giles', Hillcrest are parishioners in his view, regardless of their religious affiliation. There is thus a distinction between what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be a parishioner. In addition to being inclusive, Fr Adrian's notion of the parish is expansive: he wants it to grow in the sense that he wants parishioners to begin to see themselves as such, even if they hadn't before. Fr Adrian reinforces the parish as a social norm

in Hillcrest through tangible, material practices such as his twice-daily walks around Hillcrest Park, wearing his cassock and his clerical collar, and stopping to speak with parishioners. His actions map themselves onto Hillcrest, reinforcing the space as a parish.

The Reverend Justin and St Andrew's, Carlington

St Andrew's is a parish church in Carlington, a suburban ward southeast of the Birmingham city centre. Its vicar Justin describes St Andrew's as a 'charismatic evangelical' church, though he told me that he is more comfortable with the latter label to describe himself: "I'm open to charismatic things, but it's not my natural territory. I'm much happier reading the Bible and doing things like that." The church traces its foundation to the early twenty-first century: a foundation stone indicates 1907. In the 1990s St Andrew's had a charismatic revival: a "very powerful and very enriching" experience prompted by the Toronto Blessing, in the words of Justin.[60] While Justin was not the vicar of St Andrew's at the time, there are still congregation members who will tell him about it. The Toronto Blessing is perhaps most famous for scenes of Christians falling to the floor, laughing, crying, or dancing, all claiming to be overcome by the Holy Spirit (Bowker 2003; Schouten 2003). However, at St Andrew's the experience of the Spirit in the Toronto Blessing ultimately prompted the congregation to ask themselves "how do we love our neighbours?" For Justin, the fact that the Toronto Blessing made the congregation look outwards as opposed to becoming self-centred is proof that God was genuinely present in the movement.

The looking outwards was connected to the fact that Carlington is a place that has experienced consistent waves of immigration. From the mid-twentieth century, it was a central location for immigration from Ireland, then the Caribbean, and in the 70s and 80s onwards it

[60]The Toronto Blessing was a charismatic Christian movement originating in a Vineyard church in Toronto, Canada who claimed to experience "a new and concentrated outpouring of the Spirit"(Bowker 2003). The movement spread to British churches who coined the term 'Toronto Blessing,' and resulted in renewed zeal among many evangelical churches worldwide.

experienced a wave of Pakistani immigrants. For Justin, this latter wave of immigrants was especially notable due to the fact that they were of an entirely different faith. When Muslims began coming in significant numbers, said Justin, the "sense of difference was heightened." Justin's parish is approximately two-thirds Muslim, and by Justin's estimation, 2 to 3 per cent "professing Christian."

When churches in nearby neighbourhoods experienced similar waves of immigration, Justin says that they chose to "pull up the drawbridge and say, 'we're not engaging, we're going to protect what we've got." But, says Justin, "I am so proud that some Christians didn't do that. And they just said, 'No, we are going to do our bit. We'll make mistakes, and we'll say the wrong things. And we'll blunder along. But actually, our motives are good, and we'll keep reaching out." St Andrew's had that perspective and they put it into action through the creation of a series of community programmes run by the church that eventually evolved into two main entities. The first is the Carlington Centre, a childcare centre funded by and supported by the local authority. The Carlington Centre has its own building, though it is attached to St Andrew's Church and many congregation members of St Andrew's are involved in the governance and running of the Centre. In addition to the Centre, there are groups run in St Andrew's church and primarily by church members, such as a group for babies and young children called Sprouts.

The Carlington Centre has its origins in Sprouts, as a 'play and stay' group for mothers and young children. Several young mothers had identified the need for a children's group and were insistent that it be open to the broader community, inspired by the outward-looking movement within the church prompted by the Toronto Blessing. When local mothers began participating in large numbers, it began to "snowball," leading the mothers to petition the Parochial Church Council for a family support worker to address the needs of the women who were coming. Justin emphasized that the petition to hire a support worker "was a perception of

need that *then* led to a response…which is the best way, isn't it? Rather than saying 'we know what you need,' they actually did listen, which I think was really good." Evolving with that ethos, today the Centre involves a nursery that runs five days a week, a family support drop-in where guidance is given on issues such as debt, health, and housing, a toy library, a musical group for babies, and a weekly lunch for elderly people in the community. While today the Carlington Centre is a separate organization from the church structurally, its roots as a sub-committee of the PCC are apparent through the large number of congregation members who give their time to the Centre, and the fact that the Centre is attached to St Andrew's.

The Carlington Centre and the community work that the church carries out originated before Justin's time as vicar of St Andrew's, but they are entirely in line with his philosophy of ministry. When I ask Justin what it means to him to be an Anglican, he provides an eloquent answer:

> The key word is presence, the fact that the Church of England has a presence still in most parts of the country, and a meaningful presence. So, you know, the classic, there's a church and next door to it is a house and the Church of England puts somebody in that house, and it says, 'We care enough about this area to put somebody [a priest] in it.' And I think that's still very powerful.

Justin then went on to describe how he had a revelation about this when he and his wife had lived in a small town "which you've probably never heard of, and most people haven't heard of":

> And I do remember this sort of Damascus Road experience, because we lived opposite a little school. I was walking past the school one afternoon, and I saw all the teachers leaving. And I thought, 'that's the difference between the school and the church,' and the school, you know, they're cracking people, don't get me wrong, wonderful people. But they drove in and they did their work. And then they went out again. Whereas the church said, 'Well, actually, we think it's worth somebody living here.' And you do get an entirely different experience if you live in a place. So that sense of presence, I think, is really important. And commitment. I really do value those things. And that's when I think the church is at its best, saying 'this area matters and this community matters and we're not, you know, we're not going to make it sort of commercial or, you know, or, it doesn't say, you know, this has to be viable. You know, it just says, we care about you, and therefore we'll put somebody in here.'

The fact that a small town, unheard of by most of the English population, was deemed worthy of meaningful presence by the Church of England, is important to Justin's ministry and participation in the Church of England. For Justin, this is the Church at its best: when it is caring for those who might otherwise be overlooked. Significantly, it is the principle of presence rather than the parish itself which is most important for Justin. The parish is important because it enables presence, but he is not attached to it for the sake of tradition. When I ask him about the parochial system and if it matters to his ministry, he says that it both does and does not. It matters insofar as he is "deeply committed to place and to this area." Right on the wall behind him was a map of parishes in his area, illustrating his commitment to the locality. Yet elements of the parochial system strike Justin as frustrating: "in an urban area like ours trying to draw hard and fast boundaries is mad." He pointed to the fact that the next parish over has 25,000 people in it while his has 7000, which he calls "crazy." It is comical to Justin is how the division between the parishes runs down right down the middle of a street, according to the map. "If you're on one side you're ours, and if you're on the other side you're St Clement's! It's crackers! So where the pencil lies, I am less and less bothered about that these days. But the actual idea that we are committed to this area, I think that's still a very potent idea and one that I cling to."

Unlike Fr Adrian, Justin does not use the language of 'parishioners' to refer to those who live in the parish. The parish for Justin is a means to an end rather than an inherent good: it gives structure for caring for people in his locality, but he is not attached to it as an institution. Likewise, the notion of the cure of souls helpfully points to "a responsibility that is beyond our own congregation and beyond our own immediate congregational life." However, Justin says honestly: "I've never felt responsible under God for the souls of other people. That seems to put you in a position which is a bit closer to God than one would really want to be. And ultimately, God has created those people and God holds them…but I'm not sure what that

notion [the cure of souls] means, particularly in a parish where lots of people are of other faiths."

Justin is consistently reminded that his parish has many people of other faiths, especially Muslims, due to the siting of a mosque directly across the street from St Andrew's. As we speak, Justin indicates the proximity of the two places of worship with his hands held up parallel to each other, "In the room that I'm sitting in now, if I look *that* way, I see the church, which is probably about 40 feet away. And if I look that way, I see the mosque, and that's probably 50 feet away. So it's literally like THAT, you know?" Justin was recounting the proximity of the church and the mosque while telling me about some of the challenges experienced by St Andrew's in running the Centre, namely pressure to not "rock the boat." He worries that "there are some folks in the mosque – not many, but some – who would be really cross if people became Christians if people left Islam." This is of concern because many of the individuals who come to the Centre, especially its wing that runs children's programming are connected to local Islamic life including the mosque:

> ….people of other faiths, particularly Muslims, are happier, coming to a place where there are people of faith than they may be going to a secular place. We've heard it said lots of times that, you know, a young Asian mum will say, 'This is the only place I'm allowed to come on my own.' That everywhere else, you know, the doctors or the school—those would be the two main things—they're always chaperoned there or taken by somebody else. Whereas the church is trusted, which I think is a really, really lovely thing, but creates some problems as well because it sort of can remove permission to speak.

There is an ongoing tension between wanting to remain a place of hospitality where Muslims can attend with comfort and wanting to fulfil the Christian function of a church community and speak about the love of Jesus. There are distinctly Christian elements to Sprouts: each session begins with prayer in the morning, and Justin says that the Muslim volunteers will often hear the prayers. Sprouts takes place in the church, where there is a large cross on the wall. Additionally, there are Christian stories told at Christmas and Easter. Still, Justin worries that there is "subliminal pressure not to speak." This pressure is important to Justin because it

results in an issue of authenticity: “For a church to be authentic, it has to speak as well as serve. It has to be sensitive; it has to wait for opportunities, and it has to be intelligent about the way it speaks. But I think a church that doesn't speak is selling people short, and not fulfilling the cause of the Gospel.” In particular, Justin wishes that St Andrew’s could invite people to church and tell them that Jesus loves them. But “if you speak, you run the risk of upsetting the applecart.”

The Carlington Centre and the programmes at St Andrew’s are therefore consistently navigating boundaries, a task made more difficult by the fact that the boundaries are unspoken. The situation is replete with paradox: from what Justin understands, Muslim women are permitted to take their children there alone by virtue of the fact that it is a place of faith, but when it attempts to fulfil its task as a Christian place of faith — sharing the Gospel — it risks complicating the relationship. Justin does say that the tension is largely unspoken; no one has threatened him or told him not to share the Gospel. Nevertheless, it is an issue which he navigates consistently, and situations arise where he has to set boundaries:

> Every now and again, a Muslim lady will feel so at home in the church that she will ask if she can do her prayers there. And it's been quite a learning curve for me, because I'm a fairly laid-back person, really, and I would much prefer to say ‘Yeah, go on.’ But actually, it's saying, ‘Well, no, we're not really comfortable with that, would you mind using the mosque? Because it is literally, you know, 100 steps away. It's not far.

When Justin tells me this anecdote, I ask if there is a prayer space in the mosque for women to use. He says that the mosque has a women’s entrance, although in practice he does not think that many women pray there. Sometimes women pray in the Centre, which Justin has less control over due to its status as a publicly funded building, though he is not comfortable with it. Justin roots his discomfort in two areas. The first is that the Church is a place for Christian worship, and Islamic prayers are not Christian worship. The second is a sense given by the proximity of the mosque and its prominent status in the area, especially on Fridays when the

area fills up with hundreds or even thousands of people going to the mosque and transforming the area.

> One of the difficulties of living in this area is that you can feel overwhelmed and you can feel sort of displaced. And certainly on a Friday, you know, Friday prayers for about, I don't know, half an hour, three quarters of an hour, the roads around here are almost impossible, because people will just park everywhere in order to make it to the prayer…So it can feel like you're either being overlooked just because you're a very small group, or it can feel like you're being squeezed out. And those are my feelings. They're not necessarily what other people are articulating. But I think that feeds into my sense of, 'I'm not really comfortable with the prayers being said here [the church], really.'

The Friday prayer rush affects Justin in a direct way through the use of the car park, which he calls a "strangely significant place."

> Because for people coming to the mosque, you know, 'it's just ten minutes.' Just ten minutes for *you!* If you want to get out, if you've got to go and pick somebody up, or have got an appointment to go to or something like that, that ten minutes is really significant. And it does feel like you are having your nose rubbed in it at that point, that your needs are not important. I've had some quite serious altercations, never come to blows, but some quite serious altercations with people because it ends up being the final straw that breaks the back of this sense of being an outsider, sort of, you know, the minority, you finally think, 'Well, this is what you think of me, isn't it? You think I'm so unimportant that you can block my drive, or you can fill the church carpark up so that it's literally every space—not just parking spaces—every space within the car park is taken.'

Justin is quick to emphasize that there are members of the mosque who oppose the behaviour of those who park without consideration for others and that during Ramadan when good deeds are especially valued – and when prayer attendance rises – there is permission asked to use the church's car park. He also says, after sharing the above, perhaps more to himself than me, "I mustn't get too carried away. It is only a car park." Still, the car park remains a site of tension.

In this sense, the setting of boundaries at St Andrew's around prayer is a limited exercising of Justin's agency. The sense of being a minority is difficult for Justin, as is the disregard for the Church's boundaries and for other people's needs. Justin loves Carlington and feels called to minister in that particular area. The parochial system provides a lens through which he can understand why the Church of England is present in an area where he estimates

only 2-3% of people are professing Christians, and the notion of presence is a motivating factor for his everyday ministry. It is, after all, the notion of presence and loving the neighbour that prompted his congregation to create the programmes that led to the creation of the Carlington Centre and Sprouts. Yet the parochial system is not of help when the church car park is full because of the mosque across the street, and he needs to drive to an appointment. Nor is the language of the 'cure of souls' helpful when he feels limited in his Christian speech. In this way, he departs from Fr Adrian, for whom the parochial system and the language of the 'cure of souls' is an establishment-rooted tradition to be sustained and upheld. For Justin, it is the principles behind the traditions rather than the traditions themselves which hold weight.

The differences between Fr Adrian's experience of the parish and Justin's experience of the parish are reliant on context. Due to the lack of domination of one single religion in Hillcrest—Christians are the majority but there are almost as many Muslims—Fr Adrian is able to cultivate an environment where people are 'meeting as people.' In Carlington, the siting of the church and the mosque in such close proximity results in people meeting with religion as their primary identity in those given interactions— it is Christians coming from church meeting Muslims in the car park, who are there because they are going to prayers. This direct Christian-to-Muslim interaction heightens tensions, as does the pressure, however subliminal, to be wary of the language used with these neighbours. The next case demonstrates how the parish can play a part in bridging religious communities without being understood as central, as in the case of Fr Adrian, or absent, as in the case of Justin.

St Augustine's and Fr Mark: 'Collective worship' with the local mosque

Fr Mark is the priest of St Augustine's, located in the inner city of Birmingham. Fr Mark originally planned to be a part-time non-stipendiary priest but "God and the Bishop of Birmingham had different ideas on that!" Fr Mark has a background in the Roman Catholic

Church. He contrasts his experience in the Church of England to the Roman Catholic Church when I ask him what it means to be an Anglican:

> I think it gives me a freedom that I don't see inside the Roman Church… I suppose it's less limiting. It's a very broad church. It tries to be a very embracing church. I know, it's failed. I know. You know, going back, I suppose from the end of the Second World War, our record on inclusion is not fantastic. But we try, it's there, it's part of us. So, rather than going to a church that is… 'you will only say this in a mass, anything else and lightning will come down and destroy you,' I think somewhere in the centre is where I am. We like to call it sitting on the fence, where we don't go one way or the other. So, I'm happy that the Church of England gives me the disciplines that I like and that I need, but also gives me the freedom from too much limitation.

It is this sense of freedom that guides Fr Mark's approach to ministry. He also appreciates the authority that the apostolic claims of the Church of England provide him with, especially in a diverse ministry context:

> In theory, I can trace my ordination back to St Peter—it might be difficult, and I'm not going to try. But that idea gives me the authority to do what I do…within a multifaith area where your authority comes from, obviously leads to your credibility which is very important. So being… within the Church of England… I still believe, and we affirm, that we are part of the One True Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. I think it's important to me, not to all others, but to me, and gives me the authority to continue.

Fr Mark is proud of the area that he ministers in. There were some news reports about riots that took place in the area some years ago. He warned me not to read them because they tarnish the reputation of the area. He walks up and down the main street every day, and he is "Shown the utmost respect with my collar. It's a good area."

When the local mosque was refurbishing its building, they needed somewhere to worship. Fr Mark allowed the community to worship in the church hall of St Augustine's, seeing it as "a great opportunity." This generosity and partnership led to a deeper relationship between the two religious communities. In turn, this led to several outdoor joint prayer services. One of the most memorable for Fr Mark was when St Augustine's congregation and the congregation of the mosque got together for a joint prayer service outdoors during Eid which he refers to as "collective worship."

During the prayer services, Fr Mark was careful to be respectful of differences and points of tension between Christianity and Islam, for example, “sticky points like the Trinity.” What seemed to have the greatest impact on those from the mosque was the fact that St Augustine’s prayed for them:

> For those who were attending prayer, they were saying ‘you're praying for us.’ And I kind of looked dumbfounded and said, ‘Well, because we pray for everybody within the parish!’… Beyond the imam, the other members of the Muslim community didn't think that Christians would pray for them. I don’t know what they thought we would do to them, but they didn't think that we would pray for them.

Those outdoor joint prayer services changed the way that interactions took place in the parish. Fr Mark refers to the events as “ground-breaking” in terms of their impact on both communities:

> Just those few events changed the dynamic. When I'm standing outside on the front road and people walk past, they are eager to say hello and engage in just a little bit of conversation. They might have [before] but they wouldn't really make a point of it. If I was talking to somebody they just walked past, they wouldn't wave or try and greet me in some other way. I think this was ground-breaking.

Fr Mark contrasts that experience with other types of dialogue:

> But unless it's a direct invitation to something like an iftar at the breaking of the fast during Ramadan or anything like that, our relationships are very informal. I don't tend to attend many sorts of discussion groups or anything like that because I find that I personally and the people who are represented don't get a great deal out of it. It's the rolling your sleeves up and getting your hands dirty that we like, getting out and seeing what's really occurring.

From this, it can be gathered that a joint discussion group between St Augustine’s Church and the local mosque may not have had the same positive impact. The mosque community’s use of the church hall came about organically; their building was being refurbished and seeing this, Fr Mark offered up the church hall for their use. This act precipitated the necessary conditions for the two communities to come together in what Fr Mark refers to as “collective worship.” The joint prayers were formal in that they were planned events that took place at a specific time and location with pre-prepared prayers. But they came about because of an informal

relationship, and their primary fruit was informal: sharing greetings on the street. Significantly, this was ultimately enabled and facilitated by the Anglican understanding of the parish. Particularly important was the Anglican understanding of the parish as a space encompassing all people rather than the Christian worshipping community. It is a distinctively Church of England phenomenon that everyone in the parish would be prayed for, which Fr Mark indicates was very touching for the mosque community. Other churches might pray for their city in general and for other religious communities but not by default. It is furthermore a Church of England phenomenon that he would have the liturgical freedom to choose which prayers to say, and even to pray with Muslims in general. This case study represents how an informal relationship can precipitate a formal event with informal benefits for a community that resists discussion group-type dialogue. It also demonstrates how Anglicans can use the spatial imaginary of the parish to create such opportunities.

Conclusions

Parishes have fluid identities. The parochial context of Carlington would be unrecognisably different from a decade ago. The identity of a given parish is determined in part by its demographics, but also by how active the priest is in defining the parish. Fr Adrian's story exemplifies how he transformed how his congregation thought about the parish, and how the broader community thought about the parish. However, such instruction and teaching can only go so far: it needs to be received positively to be sustained. In Carlington, the "looking outward" of the congregation resulted in the creation of childcare programming, but the notion of a parish church did not resonate with local non-Christians. Fr Adrian insisted that everyone who lived in his parish was a parishioner, that the church was "theirs." Justin did not use such language but the opening up of St Andrew's to meet the childcare needs of the community expresses similar values. Justin does not use the language of 'parishioners,' perhaps partly because it does not come naturally to him, but also out of realistic sensitivity to the fact that it

might have no utility in his context. The fact that the two parishes demonstrate such difference is indicative of a broader truth about the parochial system, which is the primacy of the local. Fr Mark and St Augustine's embodied the ethos of the parish through the welcoming of their neighbours and praying for them, and even with them. These cases are indicative of the fact that no two parishes are alike, even within the same Diocese. The commonality is its significance, whatever form that might take: 'meeting people as people' and welcoming all for Fr Adrian, and praying for others in the case of St Augustine's. While Justin's case is one of an ambiguous relationship with the concept of a parish, it did factor into his community's decision to open, rather than close, the gates and facilitate the childcare centre. Within the Diocese of Birmingham, the space of the parish plays a vital social function in the establishment of interreligious relationships.

CHAPTER 6
Varieties of Interreligious Experience

It was 2 p.m. in Ottawa Canada,[61] though in Birmingham it was already 7 p.m. I opened Zoom on my laptop. Myriad names and faces started appearing, some black screens and others who were more comfortable being seen. "Welcome everyone. Today we are talking about light in religion." With the exception that this event was taking place online due to the Coronavirus, it was in many ways a typical example of an interreligious dialogue meeting. Speakers had been selected from various religious traditions. They were leaders appointed as ambassadors of their religions for the purpose of the event. People gathered to learn from perspectives of other religions, and to share their own points of view during the discussion time, which took place as a large group and in 'breakout' rooms. Contrast this scene with one described to me by a local community member. It is Ramadan and her Muslim neighbours have brought her samosas at the time of the breaking of the fast. They have a very brief chat about their day, and then wish each other a good night. Which of these experiences is 'interreligious dialogue'?[62]

A strict definition might indicate that only the first instance, the Birmingham Conversations, counts as interreligious dialogue because it consists of an extended contemplation of a theme from a religious perspective. One might argue that the sharing of food, though prompted by a religious holiday, is not 'dialogue.' In this chapter, I will argue for an expansive understanding of interreligious dialogue based on an interrogation of two questions. The first is: what does interreligious dialogue look like in Birmingham? The second is: what are interreligious spaces? These two questions are intertwined, will be considered through my interviews with clergy in Birmingham. The first part of the chapter will consider the theoretical and methodological aspects of interreligious dialogue. In the latter part, I will discuss the everyday, informal types of interreligious dialogue in Birmingham through the lens of the participants, the settings, and the means.

[61] I spent three months of my doctoral work in my home city of Ottawa due to the Coronavirus pandemic.
[62] The decision to use the term 'religion' rather than 'faith' has already been discussed earlier in this thesis, and applies to my use of 'interreligious' rather than 'interfaith.'

Defining and Widening the Scope of Interreligious Dialogue

In her chapter 'Interreligious Dialogue' in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Diversity*, Sallie B. King defines interreligious dialogue as "an intentional encounter and interaction among members of different religions *as* members of different religions" (King 2011, 101, italics King's). King's first three examples of such dialogue, which build upon Diana Eck's examples of dialogue (Eck 1986) include: "Official or institutional dialogue between or among elites chosen by their religions as official representatives"; "Parliamentary-style dialogue in which religious leaders speak in an open forum with the main objective of making their views widely known"; and "Verbal dialogue, in which the objective is to come to a better understanding of another religion through a focus on a religion's doctrines, philosophy, theology, or worldview" (King 2011, 101).[63]

These top three examples of dialogue are not merely representative of King's, or Eck's, understandings but are typical of popular understandings of interreligious dialogue both in public life and in scholarship on the topic. Another prevailing model provided by Marianne Moyaert identifies similar forms: "Theological dialogue (discussions focussed on texts or teaching)"; "Spiritual" (joint prayer or meditation); "Diplomatic (between religious leaders)"; "Practical dialogue (social or political collaboration)"; and "Dialogue of life (everyday interactions)" (Moyaert 2013). It is not coincidental that the first three examples of dialogue in Moyaert's model are formal instances of dialogue, as are King's; as Brittain identifies,

[63] The other four are: "Intervisitation, in which members of one religious community visit with another religious community"; "Spiritual dialogue, in which one learns and engages in the spiritual practices of another religion, such as the other religion's form of prayer, meditation, or worship, or participates in a ritual together with members of another religion"; "Practical dialogue, in which the objective is to carry out a concrete project in the community or in the world"; and "Internal dialogue, in which a single individual has an internal conversation going on between two religions to which he or she has been exposed, ordinarily at some depth and over some time" (King 2011, 102). Of these, only 'Practical dialogue' is resonant with the 'informal' experiences I focus on in this chapter and even then only partially: the food banks projects were not envisioned primarily as dialogue; the dialogue emerged as a secondary effect.

"Traditionally, it has been the first three of these [Moyaert's] practices that have been associated with the concept of 'dialogue'; indeed, these activities remain the three most common activities associated with interfaith organisations and programmes" (Brittain 2016, 194). Indeed, there are several characteristics worth highlighting about these 'top three' examples of dialogue, all of which are normative characteristics worth challenging if a deeper understanding of interreligious dialogue is to be achieved.

These are the *participants*, the *setting*, and *the means*. The *participants*, especially in King's top two examples, are "elites' and 'leaders." In some ways, this is perhaps a natural outcome of the way in which information is disseminated. A meeting between the Pope and the Dalai Lama will undoubtedly garner media attention, whereas two neighbours sharing samosas will not. This is understandable, but it does not mean that the second example is not interreligious dialogue, simply that it is mundane. It is my central contention that interreligious dialogue can consist of the mundane and that overlooking the mundane risks overlooking much of interreligious dialogue. It is also worth noting that an understanding of interreligious dialogue focussed on 'elites' is one that normalises a male-dominated dialogue. While many leaders in religious communities are women, elites tend to be the *ordained* leadership, most of whom are male. Oftentimes the ordained leadership is conflated with leadership in general: a phenomenon sometimes known as 'clericalism.' I will be expanding on this in my section about women's groups in Birmingham.

Returning to King's examples, it is equally telling that they evoke a formalised *setting*: "institutional," or "parliamentary" or a "forum." By 'setting,' I refer to formal places such as a stage or a conference room. I also refer to a social atmosphere of formality, one in which shaking hands is more expected than an embrace. King's third example, while not evoking a formal setting to the same extent as the first two, is still suggestive of a general formality due to the statement of a discrete "objective" and the limitation of the dialogue to a "verbal" form.

This too can be understood through a contrast between a meeting of the Pope and the Dalai Lama and the sharing of samosas between two neighbours. Based on King's examples one would be more likely to expect the steps of St Peter's Basilica to be a site of dialogue than a doorstep in Birmingham. There is no doubt that formal interreligious dialogue is widespread. There are individuals who spend most of their careers shaking hands with the right people in the right places and organizations dedicated to providing them platforms, literally and figuratively. However, informal interreligious dialogue is also prevalent and worth drawing attention to, as I demonstrate later in this chapter.

Finally, in King's primary examples of interreligious dialogue, the *means* of dialogue is speech. All evoke activities which are focussed on dialogue in its strictest etymological sense: verbal conversation. This is especially worth challenging, as dialogue should be understood in a broader way than a verbal conversation around a table. In her research on Muslim-Christian relations in Leeds, Melanie Prideaux argued that "all encounter is dialogue," and used the term dialogue to refer to "any form of interaction, either between people or religious traditions, either inter-religious or intra-religious." (Prideaux 2008) Prideaux found that 'living dialogue' in the everyday was the most significant form of dialogue between Christians and Muslims in the UK and in religiously diverse states more broadly (Prideaux 2009). Moreover, she identified that 'living dialogue,' which is explained in her description below, is often overlooked in the dominant theological frameworks:

> The needs and experiences of people living in religiously diverse communities are not met through the formal model of dialogue meetings with which most theologians still work. Instead, it is the informal, practical reality of sharing space and activities which both influences and is influenced by personal understandings of God and truth. If there is to be any form of public theology which engages residents in religiously diverse neighbourhoods, it must facilitate and provide resources for inter-faith dialogue which speaks to the lived realities of such neighbourhoods. It must also be a public theology which values the experiences and responses of those who are, at present, developing theology in isolation from theologians. (Prideaux 2009a, 461)

Public theology does not fall within my own methodological purview. However, Prideaux's distinction between how theologians work and the reality of 'lived experiences' is a familiar one. It is, in fact, the dynamic between local life on the one hand, and the national Presence and Engagement programme on the other, whose task force produces reports that are attempts at practical theology. This chapter, which discusses formal and informal dialogue in Birmingham, aims to show that the experiences of Anglicans and Muslims in Birmingham are very much a 'lived dialogue' of a nature that is difficult to capture in a national report. Early typologies of dialogue did include something akin to 'lived dialogue or dialogue of life,' sometimes presented under different names (World Council of Churches 1979; Eck 1986; Mojzes 1989). However, these are too often overlooked in qualitative studies of interreligious relations.

Chris Brittian's attentive ethnographic study of the relationship between community members of a mosque and an Episcopal church in Aberdeen which share a building identifies that "the practice of interfaith dialogue…is generally limited to intellectuals in university contexts, and thus does not tend to penetrate very deeply to the level of congregational life or general public discourse" (Brittain 2016, 191).[64] This statement undoubtedly is influenced by a model of dialogue as elite and formalised. Indeed, after considering the existing models of interreligious dialogue, Brittain proceeds to argue that the relationship between the church and the mosque is one of interfaith *partnership*, not interfaith dialogue. Strikingly, he asserts that "their [the Christian and Muslim communities'] partnership was successful precisely because they were not seeking to conform to some abstract notion of interfaith 'dialogue.' Instead, both congregations came to celebrate their relationship for reasons resourced by their own needs and traditions" (Brittain 2016,193). Given the predominance of formalised models of dialogue, it is unsurprising that Brittain reached the conclusion that partnership was a more suitable

[64] My master's thesis (unpublished) examined the same two communities.

model than dialogue. While Brittain at least considered dialogue, other studies of similar interreligious relationships might overlook it as a concept altogether.

It is a regrettable but not irremediable quandary that the boundaries of dialogue should be thought of as impenetrable by any event or relationship that is not focused on the formalised speech act. The notion of 'lived dialogue' does not need to be (re)invented—it already exists in many of the prevailing models—but simply recovered and elevated from its debased status. As a corrective to this issue, I will consider the dimensions of dialogue in Birmingham that might be reconsidered in order to make better use of the pre-established, but underused, notion of 'lived dialogue.' In considering the *participants, the settings, and the means* of these top examples of interreligious dialogue, my aim is to call attention to the normative understanding of dialogue with the purpose of building upon it and expanding it. Pedestrian, informal, and action-focused dialogue is just as much interreligious dialogue as that which is elite-driven, formal, and verbal.

There is one further area worth challenging before proceeding. Some of the scholarship on interreligious dialogue suggests that for an interaction to 'count' as interreligious dialogue it must have advanced an irenic goal. Leonard Swidler in his 'Dialogue Decalogue' (1983) and in later writings (e.g., 2011) presents the ideal of dialogue as a peaceable encounter where change in the direction of an increase of similarity, is encouraged. Likewise, in her conclusion to her chapter *Interreligious Dialogue,* King writes:

> Interreligious dialogue represents a major paradigm change in the norms of interreligious behavior. It is a change from the intentionality of wanting to change or control others to an intentionality that accepts others as they are. (2011, 113)[65]

[65] The rest of the quote, which concludes the chapter, is as follows: "In the minds of many, it represents the only alternative to a future of interreligious hostility and violence. Yet its implications have scarcely been plumbed. It deeply challenges any religion's claim to exclusive truth, suggesting that each religion has its own unique value and contribution to make. It proposes that religions should not see one another as competitors in a zero-sum game but instead should embrace the existence of other religions as good. It insists that there can be harmony amid diversity." While I do not have the remit in this thesis to give this sentiment the full analysis that it might call for, I might note that it is a striking instance of the liberal, universalist Protestant ethic that has informed much of religious studies and its aims since its inception.

Unfortunately, this statement contradicts King's general definition of interreligious dialogue, which happens to be otherwise strong if somewhat limited: "an intentional encounter and interaction among members of different religions *as* members of different religions" (2011, 101). An encounter involving proselytization, e.g. '*you must convert to my religion to be saved, and here is why*…' does not "accept others as they are," but is still dialogue. Tense encounters may be more truthful than those which focus on commonalities to the exclusion of differences. In summary, dialogue can be tense in addition to pedestrian, informal, and action-focused.

Interreligious Dialogue in Birmingham

Birmingham has a variety of interreligious dialogue programmes as well as daily, informal encounters which I argue are themselves instances of dialogue. To begin with the more structured element, the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham has a full-time Director of Interfaith Relations. The present postholder is Canon Dr Andrew Smith, and he reports directly to the Bishop of Birmingham. Andrew's remit is to facilitate good relationships between religious communities across Birmingham. He is respected across the religious landscape of Birmingham: my interlocutors spoke highly of him and he has successfully connected religious communities which might not otherwise be in dialogue with one another. One of the ways he has done this is through the 'Birmingham Conversations' programme, which I participated in from May 2020 through to 2021. 'Birmingham Conversations' has the aim of "bringing together select groups of people of all faiths an [sic] none to discuss issues of faith and public life."[66] On a webpage dedicated to the conversations, Andrew summarises the 2020 and 2021 meetings as follows:

> During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21 the Birmingham conversations moved on-line using Zoom to stay connected and continue our work of bringing people of different faiths together. From March-June 2020 we met each week to discuss how our faiths could inspire us as we thought about solitude, grief, endurance, hope, joy and much more. In July we met three times to discuss prayer, each week having speakers from different faiths share something of a prayer that had great meaning for them. For

[66] "The Birmingham Conversations," FNCBham.org.uk, accessed January 2023.

> example one week we looked at the Lord's Prayer and the Mool Mantra. In January 2021 we took the themes of Silence, Light and Words to open up conversations and understanding. Once again we had two speakers from different faiths each week developing the theme and then put people into groups to share their own thoughts and ideas.[67]

The Birmingham Conversations functioned as a model for interreligious dialogue similar to that set forth by King's first three 'types.' The meetings consisted of a structured forum where explicitly religious themes were discussed, and the speakers leading the discussions were most often ordained—or otherwise 'official'—religious leaders. Due to the pandemic, all the meetings were held over Zoom. This meant that the 'Birmingham Conversations' were extended from people who could meet on a weeknight in Birmingham, as the previous format had necessitated, to a potentially worldwide forum. On several occasions, I joined the Birmingham Conversations from Canada. However, most of the participants who joined were from Birmingham or the surrounding regions such as Coventry.

Birmingham Conversations and Andrew's other work take place on the level of the diocese, which is the mediatory space between the parish and the national church. Andrew as the diocesan interfaith advisor to the bishop, and the bishop himself, then David Urquart, function at the level of the diocese. However, for my interlocutors who were parish priests, the diocese was not a particularly significant space. In Chapter 4,'Levels of Locality,' I argued that parish clergy overwhelmingly prioritize the local, and in Chapter 5 on 'The Parish,' I draw attention to how the local is synonymous with the parish. These two facts might function as one explanation of why the diocese is not a significant space For my interlocutors, the parish is a distinct and bounded space which can be approached with a particular method depending on its history, needs, and demographics. The Diocese of Birmingham is too broad a space in which to apply this principle. Parishes within the Diocese, even those located side-by-side, vary broadly on essential factors such as socio-economics, religious demographics, and

[67] "The Birmingham Conversations," FNCBham.org.uk, accessed January 2023

population size of 'number of souls.' The diocese is not entirely 'local,' not entirely the *space* of concern, socially or literally, of the parish priest.

It is also worth noting many of my informants' disinterest in 'formal' dialogue programmes altogether, even at the parochial level. It should be noted that 'formal' is a broad word with multiple interpretations. Some participants in the Birmingham Conversations, for instance, might think of it as formal while others might consider it informal. Still, when I asked my interlocutors whether their interactions with other religious communities or individuals tended to be formal or informal, none simply answered "formal." Some answered "both," and the majority answered "informal." My own participation in the Birmingham Conversations was helpful in gaining an understanding of a structured dialogue programme in Birmingham. I also met some of my informants through the Conversations. However, in what follows I will be discussing non-structured or arguably 'informal' dialogue. While there are some clergy in the diocese who are involved in 'formal' programmes, in Birmingham the parish priests are largely engaged in what can be termed 'informal' dialogue: daily interactions as well as ad hoc events, that is to say, events that are not part of a regular series and arise spontaneously based on a response to an immediate situation, such as a solidarity walk after a terror attack. There are also projects in which Anglicans and Muslims (or other religious groups) coordinate with one another, such as food banks. Projects such as food banks would not fall under a strict definition of 'interreligious dialogue' in the sense that any interreligious learning is an auxiliary effect rather than the direct aim, but nevertheless, they form an important part of the relationships between Anglicans and Muslims in Birmingham.

It is also worth making a note of the participants of dialogue before proceeding. Due to the scope of this research project, my interviewees overwhelmingly consisted of parish priests. In some senses parish priests are 'elite'; they are ordained leaders, and they may wear visible signs of this leadership, such as clerical collars, which set them apart from others. In other

ways, however, the average parish priest is the opposite of elite, functioning on a very low salary and without the large social platform of a bishop or someone in the upper administration in Lambeth Palace or Church House. They are not often the first choice among people who would be sent onto a stage to shake hands with a dignitary from another religion at a high-profile event. For the purpose of this discussion, I do not consider my interviewees 'elites' but nevertheless recognize that they do hold an important degree of authority and power.

The experiences of my interlocutors contradict the normative idea of dialogue as formal, verbal, and elite. Interreligious dialogue based on everyday interactions is more natural to them and more natural to parish space, which is after all not simply the consecrated religious 'space' of the church but the surrounding area including the neighbourhood as discussed in my chapter on the parish. I will demonstrate this through vignettes of experiences that my interlocutors shared with me when I asked them about their relations with Muslims and other religious groups. Often these emerged as being informal, pedestrian, and not limited to verbal 'talk' limited to religious themes.

The Settings: Relationship-Building in Everyday Spaces

The Local Shop

A common theme for my interlocutors was the value of relationships that are built through everyday interactions with others in the space of the parish. These relationships were not built with others with the intention to have lofty theological discussions but to become friendly with one another. The Reverend Daniel found that his choices in where to do his shopping gave him opportunities for forming relationships with people of other religions. He told me:

> …my newsagent was a Sikh, and there was a shop up the road owned by some Muslim brothers that I went in. And it was chatting to them, shopping in those shops,

> conversations on the street….**I think sometimes those mosque open days or particularly organized trips often seem to command all of our attention, but actually, a lot of the important stuff is simply relational.** It's getting to know their names, it's saying hello every morning, waving at each other. Asking about the kids, asking 'how's business, how's work?' Those are the things that really make the difference. And then, you know, as you get to know each other, then you can ask, you know, more adventurous questions about Brexit and other things. Slightly controversial, but yeah. So I just think it's just where you choose to shop, and who you choose to talk to. It really needs to start at that basic level, that's where it begins. And if you do that, then other opportunities come along.

For Daniel as for many of my other interlocutors, relationships are at the heart of any interreligious work that needs to be done. He noted that "simply relational" daily conversations do not command attention but are actually important, too. This relates to my argument earlier in this chapter that the normative interreligious framework risks overlooking daily encounters that are worth considering. Relatedly, Daniel pushed back against the notion that interreligious work is carried out by trained 'elites.' He gently but sarcastically parodied the attitude sometimes taken about how interreligious work requires training: "Is there a course I can get? Well, I mean, you could just be yourself and just go and chat with someone. You don't need to be overqualified to make a contribution."

In addition to critiquing the 'elite' aspect of interreligious dialogue, or what I called the *participants* in King's models, Daniel's experience also challenges the normative idea of a formal *setting*. Shops are part of everyday life. Daniel was particularly focused on relationships in the local context. When I asked him about the Presence and Engagement reports, he was resistant to the idea that a report – or anything formal and dislocated from individual relationships – could be that helpful for his daily encounters.

> I remember talking to a retired Bishop and he said that interfaith work is a bit like a dance except you don't know the steps and you don't really know the tune. And so because there's an unpredictability, you don't really know what any one encounter is going to yield and it's a bit like a dance you don't know. So you can read those [Presence and Engagement] reports and I think that can be helpful in focusing our thinking, but in the end, it's a relational thing. It's all about relationships. And reports don't really help with that. It's about your ability to build relationships across cultures. It's about confidence…all about how deeply your discipleship has gone…in the end, it's those rather simple human things that matter. **It's, can you make a friendship with your**

> **Muslim neighbour?** It comes down to that ultimately. Of course, the answer is, yes. If you can make friends with other people, then clearly, you can do it [interreligious work], too.

When Daniel speaks of the "Muslim neighbour," he means neighbour in the literal sense: someone who lives in one's vicinity: someone whose shop he might patronise. Daniel's words about neighbours and his focus on informal, friendly dialogue challenge the idea that interreligious relations have to be founded upon formal conversations carried out by elites. In order to build trust, relationships begin with friendships. In this sense, it also challenges the idea that interreligious dialogue necessitates people acting in their capacity as religious people. Everyday life complicates this, because it is often unclear, if not entirely indiscernible, which aspect of someone's multivalent identity is at the fore in any given moment in the "dance."

Taxis and Front Doorsteps

The Reverend Nathaniel describes himself as a "Bible-believing Christian," a term akin to what might otherwise be called 'conservative evangelical.' Unlike many other priests in the Diocese of Birmingham, Nathaniel does not have a particular interest in interreligious relations. His church has no interfaith events. He does not know who the local imam is, and he does not participate in the diocesan events. It would be accurate to say that he is not an 'interreligious' focused minister, but this is not to say that he does not have significant encounters with Muslims. Nathaniel told me that there are some mosques in his area, but not an obvious 'main' mosque since most were converted townhouses or shopfronts. When I asked him if he sought out relationships with any local imams or Muslims, he said:

> No. That's partly, I guess, because there isn't an easily identifiable mosque nearby. But if there was, I'm not sure I would particularly go out of my way to approach them. Partly because I suppose I wouldn't have a very clear idea in my mind as to what I was doing… I think, generally speaking in my experience, mosques and churches occupy their own space and their own world and they don't really overlap or interact, really.

Nathaniel told me this toward the beginning of our interview. One might wonder, in an interview about interreligious relations, what more could be said after he politely but clearly

showed disinterest in typical "interreligious" relations: dialogue, visiting others' places of worship, forming sustained relationships. Yet our interview went on for almost an hour. When I asked him about interactions that he had with Muslims in his daily life, he had plenty to say. This is because while mosques and churches might "occupy their own space" in Nathaniel's experience, Christians and Muslims do not always occupy independent spaces in daily life; they encounter one another as neighbours and colleagues and see one another in various places. One such place is the taxi. Nathaniel told me,

> [In taxis] conversation will very often be on spiritual subjects. Often usually at the taxi driver's instigation. I'm just trying to get from A to B… My experience in Birmingham, frequently, consistently, is that taxi drivers tend to be aggressively Islamic. And the conversation focuses on the differences between Islam and Christianity rather than the common ground. Usually, I'll have a 10- or 15-minute journey in which they'll tell me all the things that are wrong with Christianity and why Islam is much more superior and correct, often firm and quite strong. Which I don't mind, I'm fine with that. I'm very polite, I don't tend to argue much.

A particular interaction in a taxi remained in Nathaniel's memory as significant:

> Although I think the most recent taxi driver conversation I had, he was explaining why he thought the idea of God having a son was ridiculous, that God didn't need a son and what do you do with the son anyway? And how was it possible for that to be? So, I moved the conversation on to God's sovereignty, which is a good common ground with Muslims. So, I just posed the question, "Is there anything impossible for God? Anything that he can't do?" And the taxi driver said very quickly "No, no. God can do anything." So, I'm then able to say, "Well, so if God wanted to have a son he could, because nothing's impossible for Him…"

Is this interaction between Nathaniel and the taxi driver interreligious dialogue? Nathaniel and the taxi driver were speaking from their theological traditions as a Christian man and a Muslim man. The 'intentional' aspect is more difficult to fulfil. Nathaniel and the taxi driver did not meet for the purpose of discussing whether God has a son – as Nathaniel says in the first quote above, he was trying to get from point A to point B. Nevertheless, they ended up in the conversation, and one that sounded like it was being mutually sustained and thus 'intentional.'

Another example of an interaction, a more 'intentional' one at least on the part of the Muslim participant, is as follows:

> I've had a Muslim evangelist at the front door to convert me to Islam which was brave considering it was a vicarage. And we talked about the Quran or the Bible as holy books and agreed that we both believed our holy book, but also our holy book was different, so you've got a difference, and therefore we believe different things, which seemed to be fine. We talked about the importance of religious conviction. Which has gone down well, since we both hold our beliefs very sincerely. And though we hold our beliefs very seriously, they are different beliefs and we wouldn't shift on them. So therefore, again, usually coming back to the idea of good disagreement. We either live and let live or not, and nobody wants not.

These interactions sound intense, if not simply tense. They challenge the premise that interreligious dialogue has to be comfortable. The encounters are characterised by an honesty that can be lacking in formal interreligious groups where disagreement is often downplayed in favour of finding commonalities. Nathaniel's phrase "good disagreement" proves that a tangible outcome was achieved even without formal guidance – or a formal location. Nathaniel's encounters challenge the idea of interreligious dialogue as in a bounded space: here it is taking place in a taxi, or on the doorstep.

As noted above, the interview with Nathaniel had the indicators of a short interview: neither he nor his congregation take part in any 'formal' interreligious activities. Nevertheless, these two encounters are significant instances of interreligious dialogue. They involved a genuine discussion of theological themes — Trinitarianism in the taxi, and Holy Scripture on the doorstep. It is conceivable that these instances of interreligious dialogue were successful because they were informal; there were no rules to follow or constraints on speech. This would be particularly important for Nathaniel as an evangelical Christian. When I asked him at the beginning of the interview about formal dialogue with Muslims, he had said: "I'm not sure I would approach the imam to try and convert them to Christianity unless I had some clear indication that they were quite keen to do. Or at least a little bit keen. Imams aren't more keen to convert any more than vicars are." I had not asked Nathaniel about conversion: simply if he knew the local imam. It is telling that his initial impression was that the purpose of such a meeting would be conversion. This would be a taboo in most formalised interreligious dialogue

settings. However, in daily life where Nathaniel is able to be open that he thinks that Christianity is uniquely true, and where his interlocutors have made it clear that they believe Islam is uniquely true, more open conversation can be achieved even if conversion is not achieved by either party.

It is also noteworthy that in both instances of the taxi and the doorstep dialogues, the conversations were initiated by Muslims. In Birmingham (if not in most places in England), most formal interreligious dialogue programmes are instigated by Christians, especially Anglicans; recall that the Diocese of Birmingham has — despite its limited funding for parishes — funded a full-time Interfaith Advisor to the Bishop. The Church of England has a vested interest in maintaining social cohesion. In part, and most generously, this is due to a Christian commitment to loving one's neighbour by being loving and peaceable. But moreover, as is indicated in the Presence and Engagement reports, the Church is aware that it has lost some of its social functions to the government, and that its establishment may be at risk. If it is able to demonstrate to the government and nation that it can bring communities together, it is more likely to maintain its status. As a result, Church-driven interreligious dialogue programmes tend to maximise commonalities and avoid tension: the Birmingham Conversations had a friendly atmosphere, and it would have been highly out of place for anyone to use it as a platform for conversion or serious disagreement.

Friendly, cautious dialogue is fitting and has its place in the arena of interreligious relations, but practised politeness can be limiting. In contrast, the Muslim men speaking with Nathaniel were able to frame the conversation in a way that suited their outlook (by Nathaniel's account, the unique correctness of Islam) and their particular theological interests. Their frankness also suited Nathaniel as a conservative evangelical Anglican. There are few conservative evangelical parishes in the Diocese of Birmingham. When I asked the Diocesan

Interreligious Advisor about them, he was uncertain if they would speak with me.[68] The focus on dialogue to the exclusion of seeking the possibility of conversion is antithetical to a conservative evangelical outlook. The Anglican approach to formal dialogue mentioned above does not suit all Anglicans. In addition to being interested in conversion, Nathaniel was unsure of the overall value of the diocesan initiatives. When I asked him about them, he told me:

> Well, the impression I get is that many of the diocesan initiatives tend to be more formalized, more institutional…I've never seen a diocesan initiative on how to respond from the back of the taxi. That part of life isn't addressed. And, or even, you know, what to do with the local Muslim evangelist turns up on your front doorstep. Although now I know what to do.

Though there is an intentionality to them, Nathaniel and Daniel's instances of interreligious dialogue are unplanned. They simply occur in daily life, without being scheduled and without rooms (virtual or otherwise) booked to contain them. This makes them somewhat more difficult to capture and define. They fall outside the parameters of the dominant conceptions of dialogue as formal and elite. Nevertheless, Daniel's encounters in the local shop and Nathaniel's conversations with Muslims in taxis and on his doorstep are as much a part of Birmingham's (inter)religious life as the Birmingham Conversations or any formal programme.

The Means: Dialogue in Practical Scenarios

This section provides further elucidation of the scenarios in which interreligious dialogue takes place in Birmingham. The first example considers a priest, Imad, who moved from aggressive street preaching to friendly conversations with Muslim neighbours. Imad's church also has a partnership with the local mosque to provide services such as a food bank. The second case study considers Benedict and his experiences running a food bank. My aim is to demonstrate

[68] He was correct to warn me about this. While some of my interview requests were unanswered, I only received two outright rejections. One was from a mainline vicar who was very unwell and apologetic about not being able to speak with me. The other was from the vicar of a major evangelical church who said he was too busy and did not respond to my follow up email asking if I could speak with *anyone* from the unusually large leadership team of the church.

that interreligious dialogue is not always a stand-alone activity: scenarios such as food banks can be the means through which dialogue takes place, its vehicle either intentionally or unintentionally. This contributes to my earlier assertion that dialogue takes many forms, even forms not typically thought of as dialogue such as street preaching in the immediately following example.

From Street Preaching to Food Bank-ing

The Reverend Imad ministers in a majority Muslim area near the Birmingham inner city. Imad was born into a Muslim family in North Africa. He first learned about Christianity from missionaries to his home country, eventually moving to the United Kingdom for post-secondary education. As a Christian he was not initially an Anglican; he built up a non-denominational Arabic-speaking church and eventually trained for ministry in the Church of England. His congregation went with him to the church where he did his curacy, and then followed him to his current church. Imad's story is particularly salient in considering different forms of dialogue, as he transitioned from one means of dialogue, street preaching, to a different kind altogether. When Imad first came to Birmingham he worked as a street preacher and missionary. Imad's focus was helping asylum seekers and refugees from the Middle East and, crucially "sharing the gospel with them." Many of the people with whom he was working were also converts from Islam.

Imad says that his approach to building relationships with Muslims has changed over the years due to his experiences. He describes his initial approach as "confrontational." He would preach in the city centre, having heated exchanges where Muslims would attack Christianity and he would attack Islam. Imad recognised that his aggressive tone elicited a tone of defensiveness from his Muslim interlocutors, especially when he led by talking about how he had left Islam. Imad says that these exchanges could best be characterised as debates. The problem with debates for Imad is that "you enter a debate with the idea of who will *win* the

debate." The focus on winning meant that the conversations were "fruitless in essence." As a result, Imad changed his approach to interreligious dialogue and evolved from a negative approach of polemics to a focus on the positives of Christianity: "Saying why I love Jesus, what Jesus has done for me, and *then* how you don't find that in Islam. I try to be more sensitive and sensible and soft…" While Imad's approach changed in tone, it did not change dramatically in content; he maintains that Christianity is exclusively true but focuses on the virtues of Christianity rather than attacking Islam. He is also more discerning when he chooses to disclose that he converted from Islam to Christianity, recognizing that conversion is a sensitive topic. As Imad changed his tone his relationships with his Muslim interlocutors shifted:

> I have Muslim neighbours here but they assume I'm from a Christian background because they see me living in the vicarage at the back of the church…they deal with me according to that assumption. And actually, that's helpful, because they are more open to talk. Instead of feeling threatened by my background they feel safe and they can talk to me. They have asked me 'What about Christmas? What do you do?' and 'What's Easter?' and not every day, but every now and then we have a little chat, a little conversation and I've managed to share with them a lot of things about the Gospel.

The contrast between street preaching and a friendly conversation with neighbours is striking. Exchanges between Imad and Muslims during his street preaching days were interreligious dialogue in the sense that each party was discussing his or her religious identity with the other. There is no doubt that they were passionate exchanges on the basis of religion. However, the focus on winning detracted from the opportunity to build a relationship. In being discerning about his approach and developing a "sensitive and soft" tone, Imad's experience of interreligious dialogue changed: a testimony to the fluidity of the forms that interreligious dialogue can take. In addition to a friendly relationship with his Muslim neighbours, Imad's newer approach has borne fruit in the life of his parish church.

Imad's church has a food bank and several social services, including a career and financial advice centre. In addition to being a core ministry of the church, these services are a point of contact with Muslims in the community. Indeed, the food bank at Imad's church has become a central site for dialogue. He explains:

> We have a food bank in my church, and it is open to *all* people. Muslims, non-Muslims, English people and non-English, white and black, it doesn't matter who they are, they can come and have food…I stand outside and chat to those who are in the queue. Before the pandemic, they used to come and sit down in the church hall and walk around. I let people talk to me and approach me. I'm there if they need me to pray for them and [if] they want to share something. In fact, one person and another family, a couple with two children, they have joined the church and they've been with the church for the last two or three years. And they [came to] the food bank and then they started to come to church. They are on the journey of faith in a very nice way.

Imad's statement that 'I let people talk to me and approach me' is radically different from his street preaching, where he situated himself in other people's space in order to share the Gospel. In his new approach, he maintains boundaries and allows for choice in people coming up to him, rather than him approaching them. This new, "soft" approach does bear fruit as seen in the people who have started coming to the church because of it. In an individualized approach focusing on relationality, Imad is able to navigate his own identity in order to best connect with the person with whom he is speaking.

The local mosque brings food for the food bank and Imad has developed a partnership with the mosque to facilitate other social services. The mosque runs women's services which Imad sometimes refers congregation members to. Imad's case demonstrates that the content and outcome of interreligious dialogue are reliant upon the tone in which it is carried out. He found that a confrontational tone led to a debate format where the outcome was about who was a winner and who was a loser. This stands in contrast to an approach of building relationships with others, with the same goal of sharing the gospel but different means for accomplishing it. The social ministry of his church is a significant site of interreligious dialogue, demonstrating two types in itself. The first is the dialogue that takes place in the queue, where people will approach Imad to ask him about the church or to ask him to pray for them. The second type is the relational ongoing dialogue with the mosque which takes place in the form of a practical partnership in the food bank run by the church and the women's services run by the mosque. In the case that follows a food bank is again an important site of dialogue.

St John's and the Centrepointe Project Food Bank

Benedict is the vicar of St John's, "a middle-of-the-road Anglican church." St John's is in Centrepointe, a region that is one of the most affluent parts of the West Midlands. Though it falls within the Diocese of Birmingham, Centrepointe has a distinct identity: "many people who live in [Centrepointe] are quite adamant about the fact that they don't live in Birmingham!" Centrepointe historically has not had a vibrant interreligious life. Benedict recounted that about fifteen years ago, a group of Coptic Christians had wanted to build a church in the area and had faced resistance and campaigns against it because locals thought they were building a mosque.

When Benedict found himself as a vicar in Centrepointe, the lack of interest in interreligious dialogue was disappointing to him. He had come from a conservative background "where there was a lot of suspicion about other faiths and Islam in particular." Benedict's interest in interreligious dialogue started when he moved to Birmingham for university and he took the initiative to go to the Birmingham Central Mosque:

> I remember thinking…I'd like to go and meet some of the Muslim community in Birmingham, so I went down to Birmingham Central Mosque. I think it was Eid. And there were thousands of guys, thousands of men in the main mosque, and I took my shoes off, stood at the back and kind of watched what was happening. And then some of them invited me out for a meal afterwards. And so I had a bit of dialogue going from that. So, it just kind of made me more relaxed and more kind of less sort of fearful that that was kind of a helpful preparation.

Benedict says that experience was how interreligious dialogue began for him. He eventually began worshipping in the Church of England, having formerly been associated with a non-denominational evangelical church and trained for the priesthood. Like Imad, he experienced a shift in his understanding and practice of interreligious dialogue. Specifically, his training at Birmingham's Queen's Foundation theological school broadened his idea of what it means to be a Christian among other religions:

> The interfaith module was quite, it was quite radical…it was really good actually. It explained exclusivism, inclusivism and universalism, and through that course, I moved

> from being an exclusivist and having an exclusivist theology, to having an inclusive one…my faith is still very much based on Jesus, I kind of feel like he is the way the truth and the life and that salvation happens through him. But I have a broader perspective in terms of what that might actually mean in practice.

Recently Benedict's hope to participate in interreligious dialogue in Centrepointe came to fruition when the United Reformed Church across the street from his church had to sell its building due to declining church attendance and finances. When Benedict heard that the building might be purchased by an Islamic organization, he remembers thinking "I really hope they get it." For Benedict, "It would just make sense of why I'm here. I just *so* love to have interfaith. I was missing it living in [Centrepointe]." The Islamic organization did end up securing the building. Benedict describes the Centrepointe Project as follows:

> They're kind of like the Holy Trinity Brompton of the Islamic world, they're *really* well presented. They're all like doctors and engineers at the top of their game. They are of Arab background, they're not Mirpuri Pakistani background. They are quite traditional. Some of them are Sufi. There are also quite a lot of Western converts in there as well. One of the guys who leads, he's an English guy, brought up Church of England actually, a bit younger than me, married to an Egyptian lady, and they've got a couple of kids. And it's quite…a nice group.

Benedict candidly admits that he was intimidated by the Centrepointe Project at first because "they are really articulate…I was worried that they were going to be trying to pick off my congregation, that they might be trying to convert them. They totally haven't been doing that at all." The Centrepointe Project had been in that building for about 18 months when I interviewed Benedict, ten of which were "under the cloud of Covid." Nevertheless, he has had some significant encounters with them. When they first purchased their building, they invited him for an iftar meal. Along with the council, the Centrepointe Project and Benedict's church worked to commemorate a local figure of importance on the centenary of her death. On several occasions, the Centrepointe Project initiated contact with Benedict and his congregation. In the early days of the pandemic the Centrepointe Project got involved with a project around face masks and they distributed the materials for people to make masks at St John's.

The Centrepointe Project also started a food bank intended for use in the broader community. They approached Benedict and asked him if he knew anyone who needed food or support:

> They said, 'Look, if we're doing this, if we're collecting all the food, if there's anyone in your community who wants it, we can either organize it and take it around ourselves. Or if you want, we'll give it to you. And you can give the food to them in the name of [St. John's] not in the name of the [Centrepointe Project].' I just thought that was really a model of God's grace—completely unconditional. Really, really generous. And actually, a couple of weeks ago, someone who'd got their baby baptized at [St John's]…rang me up and said [Benedict], I don't have any money for months…we haven't got any food and my daughter's been refused a free food parcel from school. So needless to say I rang up the school and they sorted it out. But then I got onto the [Centrepointe Project] said, Okay, I have got a family who are really in need. And now the [Centrepointe Project] are supplying a member of my flock with all the food he needs every week, every week after week. So they've done that two or three times now. And I think that's quite a good Muslim-Christian interfaith relationship. They were worried that he might not he might not want it because it was Muslim…[but] it wasn't weird for him at all.

Benedict's interactions with the Centrepointe Project have prompted dialogue within his own congregation as well. He cites Islamophobia as being present and a real concern, both in his congregation and in broader society. Among his congregation, he has used the generosity of the Centrepointe Project as a teaching opportunity to encourage his congregation to not fear Islam. It also shows how an outward presence, another religious group, can prompt another religious group to re-examine its own identity. In this sense dialogue is multidirectional, both outward and inward. The Centrepointe Project case is also important because it shows how an activity not directly linked to spoken 'dialogue' or strictly about something called 'religion' can nevertheless produce interreligious cooperation. This relates to Imad's experiences with his church's food bank.

In considering the means of dialogue it is significant to think of *who* chooses the means. The national Presence and Engagement reports present an impassioned case for why the Church of England has a social responsibility to initiate interreligious dialogue. Yet other religious communities may also wish to do so. In the case of the relationship between the Centrepointe

Project and St John's Church, much of the contact has been at the behest of the Centrepointe Project. This acts as a corrective to the idea that initiating interreligious dialogue is the purview of the Church of England. In fact, Benedict was happy to correct a congregation member who was upset that the Centrepointe Project was feeding a community member and thought that the church should be running the food bank. He simply informed her: "The [Centrepointe Project] are doing it, and they're probably doing a better job than we would! So just let them do it and just be blessed by it."

Conclusions: A Note on the Participants of Interreligious Dialogue

Dialogue in Birmingham presents itself in a multitude of forms. In focusing on the more unstructured or 'informal' dialogue scenarios I have aimed to showcase instances of dialogue that might otherwise be overlooked. This is not to say, of course, that formal dialogue does not have a role in Birmingham or elsewhere. The online Birmingham Conversations brought together dozens of participants during the lonely time of stay-at-home measures of the coronavirus pandemic. Discussions of themes such as hope and light sparked interesting comparative discussions. Before the official dialogue began, people would share updates with one another informally, Andrew asking how people were and where they were calling in from. I have asserted that the participants of interreligious dialogue need not be elites, and this holds true for both formal and informal dialogue. The participants in Birmingham Conversations were not elites. They were, however, self-consciously participating in interreligious dialogue.

The preceding vignettes demonstrate that parish priests, street preachers, taxi drivers, and neighbours also participate in interreligious dialogue. This raises a question for studying dialogue going forward. Must the participants in interreligious dialogue realise that they are participating in dialogue? The taxi driver in Nathaniel's case likely did not intend to participate in dialogue but simply to share the truth that he experiences in Islam. Such examples suggest that in a diverse—perhaps even "superdiverse" city such as Birmingham (Vertovec 2007;

Phillimore 2013)— interreligious dialogue may simply be a part of everyday life that *anyone* can take part in.

A comparative study of "interfaith engagement" in Delhi, Doha, and London found that "Despite the widespread consensus that interfaith actors need to incorporate a more grassroots approach, dialogue—and highly formal dialogue in particular—remains a privileged means of engagement across all three sites…" (Fahy and Bock 2018, 69). This excerpt buttresses my point that there is an over-privileging of formal dialogue. However, I also choose to include it to question its assumption that there is such a thing as an "interfaith actor." In daily life in Birmingham, Anglicans and Muslims meet in shops, taxis, and on the streets and participate in interreligious dialogue. They are not necessarily self-consciously doing so as interfaith actors. Indeed, to assume that someone's religion can be artificially isolated from their broader identity and experiences is erroneous and risks dualism. When religious people meet, even when not discussing religion, there is always the potential for interreligious dialogue. In Birmingham, the presence of women's interreligious groups, considered in the final chapter, adds another dimension altogether, one that does not fit neatly into either formal or informal dialogue.

CHAPTER 7
Women's Groups in Birmingham: A Unique Form of Interreligious Dialogue

Women's groups are an important aspect of Anglican-Muslim dialogue in Birmingham. Among my interlocutors who were female clergy, four were involved in women's groups. When combined, the membership of their four local groups numbers in the hundreds. Women's interreligious groups, as understood through the Church's female clergy, provide a distinctive angle into the question of how the Church builds relationships with Muslims. They also provide a view into the role of gender more broadly in the Diocese of Birmingham's (inter)religious life, as one of the women's groups exists in contradistinction to another interfaith group which was ostensibly open to all, but in practice (from the perspective of my interlocutor) excluded women.

The purpose of this chapter is to add another dimension to my analysis of Anglican approaches to interreligious dialogue in Birmingham through a demonstration of the unique character of women's groups. Women's interfaith groups are distinct from the informal meetings and the formal dialogue groups described in the previous chapter. They depart from the former because the women involved in the groups meet intentionally and regularly over a sustained period of time. They are more akin to dialogue groups in the sense that they are formed on the basis of religion. However, unlike the structured dialogue groups, discussion about religion is the starting point rather than the end goal.

Women's interfaith groups in Birmingham have two common characteristics. The first is that they were each formed as groups for interreligious dialogue, but their activities are not limited to discussions of religion. Each group developed into a social circle of women whose relationships moved beyond the commonality of possessing a religious identity. In this sense, women's interfaith groups challenge the thesis that dialogue counts as such when people have their religion as their primary identity in the conversation.[69] For my interlocutors, their religious

[69] An example of such a definition is King's assertion quoted in the preceding chapter: interreligious dialogue as "an intentional encounter and interaction among members of different religions *as* members of different religions" (King 2011, 101, italics King's)

identity was bound up with their gendered experiences in a manner which made it insensible to attempt to separate the two. In mixed formal dialogue groups, the dominant operative identity was 'religious.' In everyday life, there was a web of identities. In women's groups, there are two dominant identities: gender and religion. The women in the groups then built upon those shared identities to have a social bond that moved beyond a discussion of being women or being religious. For example, the women of one group went out to dinner with one another with no set agenda for the conversation; in another group, they offered to mind one another's children.

The second common characteristic of women's interfaith groups in Birmingham was resistance to a hierarchy based on clerical status. My interlocutors were not the sole leaders or facilitators of the group. While each of them brought the pastoral presence and leadership skills that come with being a priest, they resisted being set apart from the other women simply because they were ordained. This was not the case with formal dialogue groups where the religious leaders guide the discussions nor was it the case with everyday dialogue in parish ministry, where the priests carried out their relationships on the basis of the fact that they were the parish priest. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this resistance to hierarchy is gendered. My female interlocutors also participated in the parochial-everyday and formal dialogue groups with their hierarchical elements: their interfaith work was not in any way limited to the women's groups. However, the resistance to hierarchy was seen strongly in women's interfaith dialogue groups, and only in women's interfaith dialogue groups. It is likely that the other feature of the groups — the social and non-strictly-religious element — diminished the need for a clerical oversight. Another component was that the female priests had been wounded by their male counterparts either excluding them or not recognising their ordination, which may have led them to avoid emphasizing their own authority in an effort to avoid wounding others. In either case, both of these aforementioned characteristics provide a

new angle in understanding the broader research question at hand; what is the character of the established Church of England's engagement with Islam? In the case of my interlocutors in Birmingham, the answer to this question has a gendered component.

Case Studies of Women's Groups in Birmingham

Rosemount Sisters

I first heard about the Rosemount Sisters when interviewing the Reverend Andrea, who had begun ministry at her parish church shortly before the coronavirus pandemic began. One of Andrea's hopes in training for the priesthood had been to participate in interreligious dialogue. It seemed like the fulfilment of this hope when she was invited to a women's group, Rosemount Sisters, by a laywoman in her congregation. Andrea describes Rosemount Sisters as a "Muslim-Christian fellowship" and says that even during the coronavirus pandemic, it is "flourishing." I asked Andrea to tell me more and she began with the foundations of the group:

> I think it was started by a wonderful Muslim sister, and possibly a Christian representative as well. But basically what it is today is a network of easily thirty plus women or more, Muslims and Christians. The way that things work is that we just stay in touch in various ways. There's a WhatsApp group. So people who want to chat regularly, can. In ordinary time [before the Coronavirus pandemic] there were small group meetings. So you were sort of organized into smaller groups, mixtures of Muslims and Christians, you would arrange yourselves to meet up and you would structure that how you wanted. So people met in someone's home over dinner, chatted, you know, that kind of thing. Sometimes it was faith-based, sometimes it wasn't, sometimes it was a bit of both.

When Andrea had first described the group to me and mentioned that Rosemount Sisters was founded by a "Muslim sister," I had wondered (but not yet asked) about her choice to use the word "sister." Was it a reflection of the title of the group? Are all of its members called "sisters"? Was it something she had picked up from her time with Muslims, many of whom refer to one another as 'brother' and 'sister'? One factor may also be the echoes of the language of sisterhood used in second-wave feminism, which is concordant with the ages of the participants. Chiefly however, as Andrea proceeded to tell me about the group it became

apparent that the women of Rosemount Sisters share a camaraderie that makes the use of the term "sisters" entirely natural. Andrea went on to tell me,

> My first encounter with them when I first came here [to Rosemount] was the Christmas meal, which was an eye opener, and we went to a local Turkish restaurant and there was just a banqueting table full of women. So I mean, some with hijabs, some not, some with crosses around their necks and some not, me in a [clerical] collar which was interesting. And we were all just chatting and being together and enjoying being together. We shared all sorts of stuff: political news, our experiences being women, women in faith, women in society. There is a real sisterhood.

That Andrea's introduction to the Rosemount Sisters was oriented around sharing a meal is characteristic of women's interreligious groups. Diane D'Souza reflects on her own participation in such groups: "It has been my observation that when women shape interfaith encounters, food and drink are intimately involved...Our exchanges over food were opportunities to informally and sometimes deeply share some of the threads which make up the weave of our lives" (2005, 445). The threads in the lives of the Rosemount Sisters include casual topics interspersed with reflections on experiencing womanhood in religion and society. D'Souza's reflections buttress the notion that the women of Rosemount Sisters are building relationships appropriate to the language of kin.

The "banqueting table" as described by Andrea is a location redolent with meaning. D'Souza names kitchens and meal tables as significant spaces for women's interreligious dialogue: "One of the useful learnings from women-organized dialogue, then, may be to give respect and legitimacy to spaces which exist outside of formal structures and see our encounters in more holistic ways. What women offer is an unapologetic affirmation of the importance of such spaces [kitchens, meal tables] because they contribute to not just "contacts," but significant opportunities to deepen trust and relationships. These spaces are not peripheral; they are central to the process of building sustaining relationships" (D'Souza 2005, 445). That the women were able to share threads of their lives was enabled in part by where they chose to have their conversation: the warm, informal setting of a dinner table in a Turkish restaurant.

The sharing of food encourages the sharing of lives. Such a space allows for fluidity of discussion which moves beyond the constraints of the 'official' reason for the formation of the group—religion— into a casual discussion of that same topic as it connects to other facets of life such as womanhood, and of different topics altogether. This is seen in the following anecdote about just how far the conversation went:

> There was some talk that was, shall we say, risqué, that I may or may not have been a part of. I think the waiters were most taken aback by that. To see a group of women, some of them looking quite modestly dressed, and one of them in a [clerical] collar, talking about rudeness. And they seemed to find that very amusing. The women just loved it. There was just a real camaraderie, and they just accepted me for who I was.

In the Rosemount Sisters group, there is a challenging of traditional expectations of what it means to be a Muslim or a Christian woman. Andrea jokingly told me in reference to the reaction of the waiters at the restaurant, "I quite like to subvert people's expectations. It amuses me." As above, this was specifically referenced to the behaviour one might expect of a priest as identified by a clerical collar. Andrea explained,

> The reason I showed up in the collar was because I was a bit of an unknown to most people. And I found it helpful to wear the collar so people could identify me, rather than it being a power thing or an authority thing. And thankfully, there was no sense of anybody feeling intimidated by the collar. If anything, I thought it was important for people to see a Christian representative, sitting at ease, relaxing, having fun with and just being with all sorts of different people, because that should be the way it is.

Andrea's point about not wanting the collar to be a show of power or authority is significant. Rosemount Sisters does not meet on the basis of leadership; it is not a group for clergy or 'leaders.' It is convened on the basis of religion, gender, and locality. This puts the group in contrast with the main other interreligious group that Andrea is a member of, the Rosemount Interfaith Forum, which consists only of 'leaders,' most of whom are ordained.

When I asked Andrea about the religious landscape in her part of the Diocese of Birmingham, she indicated that there are several Christian churches of different denominations as well as one mosque. The leaders of the Christian churches and the mosque meet regularly in a 'Rosemount Interfaith Forum.' Andrea described the Forum as "purely Christian-Muslim

because although there some Sikhs in the local community, and individuals [in Rosemount] who practise different faiths, there is no place of worship where there's a leadership." Due to there being more Christian churches in Rosemount than mosques, the Forum is majority Christian. During "ordinary time" (Andrea's term for what would be usual outside the pandemic), the religious leaders would meet monthly to reflect on different themes from the perspective of their denomination or religion. It is significant that the Rosemount Interfaith Forum is limited to leaders, even to the extent that religious people whose clergy or leaders are outside of Rosemount are not invited to the forum. The Forum's composition indicates a clear hierarchy, one that prioritizes dialogue among ordained "leaders." This characteristic of the Rosemount Interfaith Forum as described to me by Andrea puts it into sharp contrast with the Rosemount Sisters.

The comparison between the Rosemont Sisters and the local Faith Leaders forum is one that came naturally to Andrea. We had moved on from talking about the Rosemount Sisters and I was asking Andrea about broader interreligious themes. I asked, "How do you think that your gender affects your role in interfaith relations?" This naturally evoked a comparison between the Rosemont Sisters and the Interfaith Forum. Andrea first thought about the Interfaith Forum and said that she was the only woman involved in it, except for a Muslim woman who had been selected to be one of the representatives of the Muslim community. She made it clear that there were never any "issues or awkwardness" regarding her role as a woman in the Forum: "There was never any sense in which my views weren't heard because I was female or anything like that, really." From this, we can note that Andrea's participation in Rosemount Sisters was not an effort to escape a toxic or negative Faith Forum: it was not a negative move away *from*, but a move *to* something different. She then went on to muse,

> I think if nothing else, just the way that you experience faith as a woman is different in some ways. The [Rosemount Sisters] has a very different feel to it. The Interfaith Forum has a very businesslike feel to it…For me it feels quite businesslike. It's very civil, it's very nice, it's very open. But it's about leaders coming together to do the job. Talk.

> Share. Whether that's just my own perception, I don't know. But [Rosemont Sisters] has a *very* different feel. It's all female. There's no real sense of hierarchy. You wouldn't know who does what in any particular church or in the masjid. And those who take charge and organize things are just organizers. That's who they are. They're just organizers. They like to organize. And it's just very fluid and like a big family really, in that sense, and feels very different.

The Rosemount Interfaith Forum is founded upon the premise that 'leaders' should gather together as representatives of their religions. By contrast, the Rosemount Sisters is not only welcoming of non-leaders but is actively agnostic about the leadership status of their participants. Andrea's use of repetition in speaking about the organizers highlights this: "They are just organizers. They like to organize." Though Andrea showed up to her first gathering with the Rosemount Sisters in her clerical collar, she was not constrained by her status as a priest. The resistance to hierarchy and pushback against clericalism is an essential characteristic of not just the Rosemount Sisters but of the other women's groups, as will be discussed below. It also enables a deeper relationship, one that is not simply founded upon leadership status. The Rosemount Sisters goes beyond friendship and the humourous "rude talk" that was present at Andrea's first meeting. Andrea told me,

> Sadly, last year, one of our sisters died unexpectedly and quite early, she was only young-ish. And there was a real sense of the community coming together, Muslim and Christian, to honour her and grieve her and support one another. It's just a really lovely **place to be**, lovely group to be a part of.

Andrea's words about the woman who died are poignant in elucidating the nature of the Rosemount Sisters. Though the topics of conversation range at its meetings it is a Muslim-Christian dialogue group at its core. Mourning the death of a "sister" together *as* Muslims and *as* Christians is an interreligious act. It is an act that is enabled, moreover, by the women knowing one another on the basis of familiarity that is enabled in the broader relationship that they have with one another. In this sense the meals together, the "rude talk," the going to one another's homes, and the WhatsApp group are not peripheral to the interreligious life of the

group but in fact enable it. Tiemeier writes that women's "informal dialogues of everyday living…build the bonds of friendship necessary for theological conversations" (Tiemeier 2011, 127, quoted in Fletcher 2013, 178).

There is also Andrea's use of the term "place to be," a highly evocative phrase. Rosemount Sisters does not take place in a particular location or *place*. Sometimes the Sisters meet at restaurants, and other times in people's homes. What Andrea is describing then, can best be understood as a social space that is formed regardless of physical surroundings, one that is the product of the women gathered together and their interactions with one another. They create a social arena in which distinct interactions can take place. Women's gatherings, then, are a place as much as a church hall or a mosque. Above, Andrea uses "place" and "group" as synonymous here: a place to be, a group to be a part of. From this, it is evidenced that women's groups not only occupy a distinct place but are generative of place. Andrea's final thoughts about the Rosemount Sisters are as follows: "…In [Rosemount Sisters], there have been many conversations about gender and the way it impacts our own experiences of life and faith and other things. And it does impact all of us in quite similar ways." Rosemont Sisters generates a space to partake in dialogue among other women. Significantly, its characteristics of sociality and informality and resistance to hierarchy are hallmarks of the other women's groups in Birmingham, as I will demonstrate through a comparative analysis of two further groups.

<u>The Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group</u>

When the Reverend Clare arrived as a curate at St Bridget's, Hedgerow, she brought years of experience in interreligious dialogue with her. She had researched Muslim-Christian relations at university and worked with an interreligious youth organization before training for ordination. Seeking to build upon these experiences, Clare attempted to collaborate with the local mosque. However, as she told me frankly but unresentfully: "Unfortunately [the mosque]

didn't respond very well to me, I think because I was a young woman and they didn't know what to do with me." As a result, she decided to set up a women's interfaith group.

Clare knew some local women from a pre-existing community women's group that met for tea and cake weekly. Most of the women were Muslim, although it was not a faith-based group: "It just attracted especially a lot of newly arrived women as a safe place. So I got to know these women through that group and built trust with them." Clare found that the group dynamic naturally led to conversations about faith, so she said to them "Look, I think it'd be a really good idea to enable our community to be confident in how we articulate and talk about faith." As a result, the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group was built on a network of women who already knew one another, many of whom were Muslims. This was important to Clare, as was the idea that the formation of the explicitly faith-based women's group should be diverse and not Christian dominated. Clare told me about the formation of the interfaith group:

> So I set up a little committee for it. There were five of us on the committee, three Muslim and two Christian. And what's lovely is that of the Muslims, one was Pakistani, one was Somali, and the other was Yemeni. So actually, they were from quite different backgrounds. And that was really cool. And so then we would set up an organised event and make it open… we probably had four or five [events] when I was there. The first one was about Mary. And the way we did it, we got together to have some informal chat time. And then we had one Christian woman and one Muslim woman just give a five-minute talk about who Mary was to them, and then broke up into different groups... chat, and then come back together and then eat together. So we did Mary, we did prayer and fasting…they weren't very heavy topics, really. One was about motherhood…not just being a physical mother, but what it went meant to mother in the community as well. That was a really beautiful, special one. Some of them were quite big. We had like 15, or 20 people, and a couple of them only had 7 or 8. I like the smaller ones because I think you chat more.

There are several similarities between the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group and the Rosemount Sisters. The most significant here is the pairing of 'chat' alongside the discussions of officially religious topics.

It is also significant that Clare likes the smaller groups better precisely because "you chat more." 'Chat' is a topic which has not emerged in my review of interreligious dialogue, and its exclusion potentially to the detriment of understanding the topic. Tiemeier persuasively

argues for "Basic Dialogue Communities" based on friendship, noting that "dialogue can falter if participants focus only on theological discussion or "getting things done"…Rather, dialogue is deepest and most enduring when solidified by bonds of friendship" (Tiemeier 2011, 130 quoted in Fletcher 2013, 180). Likewise, advocating for her vision of women's interreligious dialogue, the theologian Maura O'Neill advocates for "storytelling" paired with "active listening" (1990). The notion of "storytelling"—though not as connected to the work of O'Neill—is briefly mentioned by Liljestrand to understand the approaches of interreligious groups in Oslo, Stockholm and London. Liljestrand defines storytelling as "theology based on personal experience" (2019, 199).[70] However helpful these ideas are, none of them approach the idea of 'chat' as expressed by Clare, or indeed as expressed by Andrea in the aforementioned case study.

'Chat' is not coterminous with friendship as in Tiemeier but an activity which may build friendship, or which friends may participate in. Nor is chat the same as storytelling, even though both are speech acts which produce and sustain relationality. 'Chat' as used by my interlocutors is often unrelated to theology, unlike Liljestrand's use of "storytelling" in dialogue. Instead, 'chat' is based on the sharing of everyday experiences which the participants then bring with them to their discussions of theological topics such as Mary or prayer and fasting. 'Chat' is a deceptive term; its pedestrian definition lends an understanding of something anodyne and trifling. It is exigent to understand the import of 'chat' as reaching beyond what these connotations might suggest. When women partake in chatting alongside interreligious dialogue, they reveal something of the matrix of identities which inform the dialogue: "the experiences and orientations [which] differ according to race, class, sexual orientation, cultural norms, socialization…" (Cornille 2013, 7 quoted in Gruber 2020). While

[70] Liljestrand's analysis is based on cases from the multi-year and transnational project known as Religion and Dialogue in Modern Society, as presented in *Interreligious Engagement in Urban Spaces,* ed. Julia Ipgrave (2019).

these are present in mixed interreligious dialogue, their discussion is better facilitated by women's interreligious dialogue which, by its nature of meeting on an identity additional to religion, allows for more exploration of multivalent identities.

Clare has since moved to a different area of Birmingham and as a result chosen to leave the group. Part of the decision had to do with her own philosophy of leadership and not wanting to dominate the group. In leaving the group she hoped to leave the women more confident and able to talk about their respective religions with confidence:

> One of my biggest challenges — and it's carrying on without me, I've handed it over, which is lovely — was trying to build the confidence in that committee of women to lead because I was *always* the one leading, and they were perfectly capable!... In inhabiting that kind of authority and space, I wanted to enable others to share their faith... I made sure that I was never the one who did the talk. Because I felt like it was really important…I felt a real sense that they look up to me, and they see me as the example. And I wanted to show that actually, anyone can do it. And all it is saying "This is who I am. This is what I think."

As with the Rosemount Sisters, Clare resisted hierarchical thinking. Though she did not use the term, the notion of 'clericalism' is useful for understanding the issues that Clare described. As a broad term, clericalism can refer to several things. In this case, its most salient connotation is an overly deferential attitude to priests with the concordant assumption that priests are superior to, or more competent than, laypeople. Clericalism has arisen in the Church of England at various points throughout its history. In graver circumstances than the realm of interreligious dialogue, it has recently been identified as an issue by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby as a factor which may enable sexual offences committed by clergy. Clare resists the idea that she is more capable than anyone else. At the same time, though she is a priest she has been on the receiving end of difficulties relating to other clergy. Clare told me,

> I'm very aware that I'm younger than a lot of priests. I think I *look* younger, which doesn't help. And also, I'm also a woman and I get very frustrated at times, because I don't think it's because a lot of these faith leaders are misogynist, I just don't think they know how to relate, or they feel like they just feel a bit kind of rabbit in headlights. So I have found a level of frustration sometimes trying to engage with other faith leaders because most of them are men. It would be different if we had a Jewish community in

> Birmingham, we don't—we have a tiny one—but in terms of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims, it mostly is men who are the formal leaders. But when I look at people who are *really* leading in the community, a lot of that is women, you know, are women anyway. Some of the formal stuff is really boring anyway. When they form an interfaith meeting where all the faith leaders gather, that's not the exciting stuff.

Clare's distinction between "*really* leading" and "boring" formal events is a significant one. As discussed in the previous chapter there is a pernicious bias in discussions of interfaith issues to lean toward formalised events and high-profile meetings between religious leaders. For Clare, this risks overlooking the truly "exciting stuff" such as the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group, where women are gaining confidence in articulating their faith, perhaps for the first time. Clare also makes an important differentiation between what she calls "formal leaders" and people who are "*really* leading in the community" (italics my own). It is worth considering what this might mean in the context of the Church of England.

In the Church of England as in most Christian churches, there is a distinction between laypeople and ordained leaders. The ordained leaders include the tri-fold orders of deacons, priests, and bishops. In addition to those orders, the Church of England formally recognizes Licensed Lay Ministers, sometimes known as 'readers,' who fulfil functions such as preaching and other visible 'leadership' tasks. These are the people who are most liable to be viewed as leaders. Their status is often, but not always, demarcated by material signs, including certain manners of dress. Many priests wear clerical symbols as part of their daily attire. Recall, for instance, Fr Adrian whose story I shared as part of Chapter 5 who would walk about the parish in a cassock. Andrea wore her clerical collar to the first Rosemount Sisters event. Clerical attire, while certainly not inherently *clericalist*, functions as an indicator which can mark out the priests as 'formal' leaders.

The opposite, who might be called 'informal' leaders are less visible leaders. Clare's distinction between 'formal' and otherwise leaders is not one that would necessarily be made by everyone; for some people, the formal in 'formal leaders' would be redundant because they

are the only true leaders. Formal leaders are leaders by virtue of their position in the Church. Informal leaders are leaders by virtue of their actions. Clare *is* a 'formal' leader: she is ordained in the Church of England. Nevertheless, even this formal leadership is not recognised by some in the Church due to the fact that she is a woman. Clare's statements about Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims not having many female leaders are important, but the failures within her own Church to fully welcome female priests are even more important to her, and more impactful on a personal level. Clare went on to relate her frustrations about how even within the Church of England, which accepts the ordination of women, there are those who do not see her as a validly ordained priest.

> And if I'm 100% honest, in Birmingham, I mean, you've been to our P & E meetings, I feel like the space is dominated by Anglo-Catholic men.[71] And they've got different lived experiences from the challenges of being a female priest. I had a phone call this week asking me not to take a funeral because I'm a woman, you know, they [men] will never have never well, *maybe* they will. You do sometimes get requests for women to take a funeral. And we say no to that, both of those [gender-based requests], you know. But the fact that I can be in a room full of Anglicans, and some of them will not accept my ordination while their ordination will never come into question. So even like internally as well as externally, yeah. And that is quite painful, actually, if I'm honest.

Clare's gendered experiences within the Church of England are a source of frustration and pain. This aligns with something that Andrea had told me: "If anything, I would notice the difference [in gender dynamics] more in interdenominational than interfaith…" It also raises the question, if Clare as a formal leader is overlooked, how much more are laywomen being overlooked? There are also moments where she finds humour in her positionality. Cringing but laughing, she relayed this anecdote to me:

> I went to one of the national Presence and Engagement conferences, and it was full of old white men, and I think was invited there because I was a young woman…Too bad

[71] Anglo-Catholicism is one wing of the church of England. Within the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England, there are two camps: 'Affirming Catholics,' who tend to be socially liberal and affirm the ordination of women and often LGBTQ+ issues, and 'Traditional Catholics' who hold to the Roman Catholic view of the priesthood as all-male. Within the Church of England, there is provision for the Traditional Catholics to have their own bishops in order to not be under the care of a female bishop or a male bishop who has ordained women.

> I wasn't a woman of colour because I would have ticked other boxes as well, you know.

Considering all of these struggles and frustrations, Clare's initiative with the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group is not simply a manner of helping others, but of finding solidarity among other women and rejecting the notion that leadership necessitates being ordained while being among those who do recognize her ordination as valid. It is perhaps because she is a woman and even her 'formal' leadership is not recognized as such that she is able to expand the view of leadership as a whole, ordained or otherwise.

For Clare, the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group offers a space to chat with other women and to discuss religious topics in a context that avoids the deleterious elements of other interreligious spaces such as the Presence and Engagement conference, where she felt singled out for being a young woman. The Hedgerow group shares two features with the Rosemount group: an element of informality—here considered as 'chat'—not found with other interreligious contexts, and a resistance to clericalism and hierarchy. In the final case study below we will consider a third group which shares these features and then conclude with a consideration of how women's groups function as unique spaces.

Renfrew Women

The Reverend Esther has been working in her current role as vicar of St Alban's, Renfrew for seven years. Esther describes Renfrew as "an extremely diverse area." The parish church of St Alban's has a particular ministry for asylum seekers and refugees. The weekly liturgy sometimes takes place in Farsi to reflect the sizable Iranian attendance at the church. Esther is proud of the fact that the church is welcoming and has "a real heart for the community": "We've got between forty and fifty asylum seekers and refugees attached to our worshipping community. I've never been asked whether they have converted to Christianity. The concern is, 'Are they welcome? Have they got a place in our community? Are they fed? Have that got all that they need to build their home?'" In addition to welcoming refugees and

asylum seekers, St Alban's helps in the operation of a local community centre which runs social services and is rented out for various events, including an educational programme for Muslim children, and Sikh weddings. All of this work and the fact that St Alban's is, to the congregation and to Esther, "a parish in the broadest sense" leads Esther to make a distinction between being a "parish priest" rather than a "church vicar"; the former encompasses "the care of all souls… I have a responsibility to the whole of the parish." By this, she means that she understands the parish as not merely the church building, but the surrounding area as defined by the Church's parish boundaries. It is this approach that delineates Esther's openness and intentional ministry in forming relationships with all people.

Despite Esther's vast experience working with asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom are Muslims, as well as chairing the board of trustees of the community centre involving liaising with other religions, she had some difficulties finding a place in the interfaith circles in the Diocese of Birmingham. The neighbouring Church of England parish created an interfaith programme, mainly comprised of "faith leaders," according to Esther. In the discussion below I have given this group the name Other Interfaith Group to emphasize its inverse relationality to Esther's Renfrew Women, which was created after issues with the Other Interfaith Group and which she uses as a rhetorical object of comparison to the Renfrew Women. The name of the Other Interfaith Group did not indicate that it was for men, nor did official descriptions. "But we discovered – well, *I* discovered, that all the things that were happening were happening for men and were quite exclusive in terms of gender." Esther described to me the process of realising that the group would not welcome her or other female 'leaders': "So when they were meeting for a curry, I said 'Well can I come? I'm part of the group, can I come? And I was told no, no I couldn't." She continued to ask to participate whenever the group would do an activity: "I asked over and over again!" but eventually realised that with all of her work, she did not have the time or energy "to keep fighting the fight to get

nowhere." Esther emphasized to me that she understands difficulties around gender but the way that the situation was handled remained a source of frustration as well as disappointment in terms of her colleagues' lack of support.

> I do understand sensitivities. It's not my place to change things fundamentally in regard to gender, but I do expect something from my Anglican colleagues that I don't get, and I struggled…I am an Anglican leader in an area that is very diverse and I think it is my place to be part of that conversation.

I asked Esther specifically if the issue was with colleagues who do not support the ordination of women, thinking of Clare's frustration with the 'traditionalist' Anglo-Catholics. Esther clarified that she did not have issues with those colleagues; the church that founded the programme which didn't welcome her has both men and women involved in its governance and worship. Esther's frustration is palpable when we speak. From her perspective, the programme's desire to be amenable to the sensitivities of other religions and cultures resulted in the Anglican men letting down their female colleagues.

Esther's use of the word "place" above is significant. Her words serve as a reminder that this is an embodied issue. Interreligious dialogue does not exist in the aether but in places like curry houses, where Esther was denied a material seat. Feminist spatial theorist Doreen Massey writes, "The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things—the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other—have been crucially related…" (Massey 1994, 179). In Esther's case the limits of the interfaith activities she can partake in as a woman are enacted through emplaced boundaries. The women's group that she participates in, Renfew Women, is a different experience altogether.

Esther and a group of other women including Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, took the initiative to form their own interreligious group for women after Esther's difficulties with the

other programme. In contrast to the other programme, Renfrew Women began as a casual social group for all women of faith, not just leaders. Esther describes its origins:

> The very first time we met we just said, right, let's have some food, let's have some craft activities, let's have some opportunity for conversation and we just invited people. Women, lots of them. And we had about 35 people turn up to that and then we consulted with those 35 people about what the needs were and what might work…we can't underestimate the social aspect of our gathering.

Esther's comments about meeting casually and determining the needs of the group draw a contrast between other groups which impose an agenda from the top down. This group instead sought to receive feedback on what would best suit the participants. In this way, what began as a social gathering has become a multivalent programme of events. Esther contextualised, given that we were meeting during the coronavirus pandemic, "Everything happens on WhatsApp at the moment. We haven't met via Zoom because quite a lot of people haven't got access to computers in our parishes… But when we do meet, we meet at least monthly, and we've done all kinds of things." Even the consideration that not everyone has a computer indicates the level of thought that goes into inclusion. The activities that took place were diverse, from "social" to "low key political," to "look[ing] at issues that are pertinent to our community." Esther ran a six-week confidence-building course for the women. They visited Coventry Cathedral to learn about the peace and reconciliation work being done there. They also had a "bread project" where they learned to bake bread from different religions and cultures, and members of the group shared what the bread meant to them.

I asked Esther how much of a role faith or religion has in the group. She recalled a profound conversation with someone from another religion when they visited Coventry Cathedral. "There were these different depictions of Christ. And somebody asked me, How could that be? If it's one Jesus? How could we have these different depictions of God? And just that question which is both simple and really difficult at the same time, and then triggers a

conversation that then becomes part of how we talk in the group." At the same time, she contrasts the group with explicitly religion-focussed groups:

> I've been to things that have worked really well, where you do come in explicitly to say, look, let's talk about our faith. And let's talk about our differences and our similarities. We [Renfew Women] don't do that, it's much more organic. But when something like that [in Coventry] happened, I thought, gosh, that is really, that's interesting! So then we start a conversation going around that, and that moves into different things. And like lots of groups like ours, around the festivals or key points in the year we would talk about those things. So during Ramadan, we talk about that at length.

The "organic" nature of the group echoes how Clare and Andrea described their groups. Again, it makes the women's group resist neat categorization into 'formal' groups that meet only to talk about religion on the one hand or informal daily interactions on the other hand. Additionally, the group caters to the needs of women specifically; Esther says that the consideration about where to meet was less about finding a 'neutral' space and more about finding somewhere where children could come so that mothers would not be excluded.

It is worth commenting on the non-hierarchical nature of the Renfrew Women as a final note of comparison to the Rosemount Sisters and the Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group. In contrasting the Renfrew Women to the Other Interfaith Group, Esther reflected: "The men's group is faith leaders, that's who they are. We are a group of women. And I *happen* to be a faith leader. But at the moment, I think I'm the only faith leader in the group." Esther uses the term 'faith leader' not to suggest that being ordained in the Church of England makes her more of a leader, but as a neutral cross-religious term for clergy. It is remarkable that Esther defines the Other Interfaith Group not simply as a group of men, but as: "…faith leaders, that's who they are." While I suggested above that women's interfaith groups by their very nature give more room for the multivalent identities that one might bring to the interfaith encounter, in considering the anti-hierarchical feature of the women's groups, it emerges there is an identity that is suppressed: ordained leadership status, or lack thereof.

Conclusions

In women's groups, there is an explicit jettisoning of the notion that being ordained makes someone more of a leader. The false leader/non-leader binary based on ordination status maps onto the duality between formal and informal interreligious encounters in the previous chapter, where the formal encounters are sometimes as the 'real' interfaith work, a notion that is rejected by those who value the informal encounters. Formal interfaith encounters are usually carried out by formal (i.e., ordained) leaders whereas informal encounters are possible for anyone. What is striking about women's groups is that by virtue of being outside the formal/informal dialogue binary, they also challenge the leader/non-leader binary placed on the participants of such dialogue.

Women's groups are different from both formal and informal groups but are similar to each other in striking ways. The commonalities reside in the resistance to clericalism and a focus on meeting social needs, both socialising in a casual sense and social justice. The role of religion is integrated into the whole person rather than being isolated as a topic. They also are very localised, taking into consideration the needs of the women living close to one another: the participants in Rosemount Sisters, Hedgerow Women's Interfaith Group, and Renfrew Women all came from the eponymous neighbourhoods in Birmingham. These commonalities make women's groups a category that makes sense as a distinct phenomenon, one that is important to consider when thinking about interfaith in localised spaces. In the daily life of Birmingham, women gather. They talk about faith: feasting, fasting, and Mary being just some of the topics. They do not do so from a disembodied standpoint or a male standpoint masquerading as neutral but *as* women. They gather in cafes, restaurants, churches, and in mosques. Yet what matters the most is the metaphorical space: the space that is generated among women. These women, or "sisters," form a large part of the interreligious life of the city but would be liable to be overlooked.

CONCLUSIONS

Interreligious Dialogue, The Church of England, and Power

Like any social practice, interreligious relations and the practice of dialogue are embedded in complex matrixes of power. When the interreligious encounter takes place, it is unlikely to be between individuals or communities with equal access to resources including finances, space for meeting and worship, social influence, and even security.[72] Having a seat at the dialogue table confers a degree of belonging, but the fact remains that one party owns the table and made the seating plan. “Interreligious dialogue never takes place "on a clean slate"—rather, it is always already entangled with the politics of representation, which govern access to speech and conditions of visibility” (Gruber 2020, 68). In this dissertation I have sought to understand the most visible and arguably dominant religious body in England: its Church. There is value in studying the powerful. Anthropology’s “tendency to focus on people who are relatively powerless” has resulted in a flawed and incomplete narrative wherein “there are powerless people on the one hand, and then a homogenous force that acts upon them on the other.” By “studying up,” (a disciplinary term for studying the powerful), “we are able to show that power is specific — that it is exercised by specific people according to specific cultural logics…” (Archer and Souleles 2021, 199).[73] Studying the cultural logics that have produced, and are produced by, the Church of England sheds light on core dynamics of religious life in England, and thus on the factors that influence interreligious relations in England.

My dissertation has shown that the cultural logics behind and within the Church of England have produced an institution that understands, arguably paternalistically, all people in England to be its “parishioners” and seeks preferment from the government over other religious bodies (e.g., The Church of England 2009, 14). They have also produced a Church that advocates on behalf of neighbouring mosques and feeds hungry people indiscriminately. A

[72] An example of security is seen in hate crime statistics. In the year 2021/2022, 42% of religious hate crimes were committed against Muslims, compared to 8% against Christians. These figures refer to hate crimes reported by the police in England and Wales (The Home Office 2022) .
[73] The origins of the term ‘studying up’ can be seen in Nader 1972.

simple association of the 'the powerful' with 'the bad' must be avoided. Likewise, and as I have argued, the Church of England and its power cannot be understood as a monolith. In this dissertation I have understood it on two levels, the national and the local. Just as power is unevenly distributed among religious communities in England, it is unequally stratified within the church. The Church of England as an institution is powerful, but its parish priests working within the institution may chafe against that very power, such as when reports from the national level attempt to dictate their behaviour at the local level. Understanding how the Church can be experienced differently from *within* is instrumental in the task of understanding how it might be experienced by other religious bodies from the outside.

Further Avenues of Research

In future research, this study might be mirrored by an investigation of Anglican-Muslim relations from a Muslim point of view. This would allow for an exploration of how Muslim communities experience the Church of England's approach to interreligious relations as detailed in this thesis. For instance, how is the Church's institutional position that 'all people are parishioners' experienced by Muslims? How do Muslim communities feel about the established status of the Church of England? What matters to Muslims in interreligious encounters? Where are the points of diversity of thought and experience within the plurality of Muslim communities in England? Perhaps most provocatively, do Muslims in England think about Anglicans as much as the Church of England thinks about Islam?

Returning to the Church of England as a research subject opens up further avenues as well. The interview element of this study could be fruitfully reproduced in different dioceses, which might yield new insights. The topic of interreligious relations at the Church of England's schools, many of which are highly religiously diverse, fell just outside the remit of this thesis but certainly merits academic study. The Church's approach to asylum seekers is another area worth exploring, especially with a view to asylum seekers who state a desire to convert to

Christianity. So long as the Church of England remains established, these topics will matter not just for academic interest but for the public good.

The Palace and the Parish

This dissertation contends that the Church of England's approach to interreligious relations is best understood on two levels: the national and the local. The national strategy is comprised of the Presence and Engagement programme, founded in 2005. The five reports chiefly associated with Presence and Engagement theorise about Islam as pertains to the identity of the Church and its place in multireligious England. They are documentary evidence of a Church in dialogue not with a religious other, but with itself. The reports, which span between 2005 and 2017, oscillate between tones of confidence and anxiety. The authors reflect on events such as the 7/7 terror attacks, the publication of demographic statistics indicating declining affiliation with the Church and rising numbers of Muslims in England, and the multi-million pound government grant for *Near Neighbours*.[74] In 2009, the programme was challenged from within the Church of England when a lay member of General Synod, supported by over one hundred signatories, argued that Presence and Engagement risked losing evangelism in an effort to promote community cohesion. Presence and Engagement acceded to the challenge, eventually coming to label the ensuing report as one of their own.

The national strategy demonstrates that the growing presence of non-Christian religions in England, especially Islam, drove the Church to a project of self-reflection which has now spanned over a decade and a half (2005-2023 — though the latest report was in 2017). Central to this project has been the mobilising of key motifs in the ecclesiology of the Church toward justifying its place as the national church in multireligious England. Here I refer specifically to

[74] "Partly in recognition of the Church's track record, HM Government has recently funded the Near Neighbours programme, investing £5m over the next three years in the work of building relationships at a local level through the Church's networks. Near Neighbours, administered by the Church Urban Fund, has grown out of the Church's Presence and Engagement programme which has developed over the last five years into a major resource for the Church's witness and service in our multi faith society" (2011, 1).

the parish and the Church's notion that "A parishioner may equally be agnostic, atheist, Muslim, or Christian, but remain nevertheless a parishioner" (The Church of England 2005, 55). While ostensibly a welcoming sentiment, the insistence that non-Anglicans partake in a spatial system owned by the national Church can equally be seen as a statement of control. It can also be taken as a statement of ownership: after sharing anecdotes from the parochial level, the authors of the 2005 report write, "The stories illustrate the range of places and situations of encounter with people of other Faiths that are now a normal part of parish life — the wider world of other Faiths has arrived on **our doorstep** and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindu people are now parishioners" (2005, 21, emphasis mine). What is "our doorstep" but England, with every part of it marked as a Church of England parish? The hegemony of the parish and the Church's presence across England is then asserted with transcendental truth claims ("Trinitarian theology"), providing an additional level of authority:

> Street by street, locality by locality, the segregation of our society is increasing, not only in relation to other Faith communities, but certainly significantly in their case. It is the Church, present in every location, living amongst and with a care for all, which can if it wishes, be the truly diverse body, holding hands with the multiplicity of communities in its neighbourhood...Fundamental Trinitarian theology by contrast speaks of the holding together of likeness and otherness. (2005, 13)

The message above is that "other Faith communities" are complicit in the segregation of society, whereas the Church of England is the unique solution. The Church's infrastructure across the country, coupled with its establishment privileges, have allowed it to view itself, and promote itself, as a solution to various pluralism-related quandaries. This aligns with David Feldman's assertion that the politics of multiculturalism in the UK "buttresses the position of an otherwise beleaguered Anglican establishment": in partaking in the national conversations around pluralism, the Church of England has ensured itself a role even while its own membership declines (2011, 302). A similar notion has been expressed by Daniel S. Loss, who has written that the Church of England has "shored up its institutional position through the framework of communal pluralism" (Loss 2018, 563). It is worth recalling that the notions of

the common good and social cohesion run throughout the Presence and Engagement reports. The purpose of this discussion is not to suggest that the Church of England's primary or sole motivation is social power, but instead to demonstrate how sincerely-held theological beliefs interact with socio-political factors, including a religious institution's desire to maintain a prominent societal role. This is an especially salient issue when the religious institution in question is the state church, an issue which has arguably been present since the emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. I have grounded my discussion of this topic in the imagined space of the parish, making use of both the poetics (theology, in this case) and politics of the space as it is understood by the Church.

The Presence and Engagement task group understands itself to acknowledge the value of the parish, acknowledging in the foreword to the 2005 report that "the parish is where the action is." However, the fact that the national Presence and Engagement reports frequently comment on the parish as a local reality does not negate the reports' primarily national character. The reports make use of the parish as an idea as theoretical fodder for a discussion of the national status of the Church. Just as I have argued that the Church makes use of the idea of Islam in its national reports, the Church makes use of the idea of the parish, but the conclusions that it draws are national. Indeed, this is acknowledged in the first report where the authors justify a national approach to discussing the level of the diocese and the parish: "…practical considerations tend to mean that individual dioceses can only see their own picture and that comparisons across dioceses of the kind made in this report cannot be made locally. It falls therefore to the national office to provide for data of the kind presented in this report" (2005, 84). The same report quotes anecdotes and reflections from parish priests. Those data, however, are not necessarily returning to the diocese or the parish.

The second part of this dissertation has focused on the local in a case study of the Diocese of Birmingham. It began by considering whether the national Presence and

Engagement reports reach my interlocutors in Birmingham, most of whom are parish priests. I found that the parish priests rejected the reports as irrelevant to their ministries, instead choosing to focus on interreligious relations in their immediate contexts. The experiences of the Anglican parish priests in Birmingham are diverse, and their interactions with Muslim individuals and communities take many forms. Examples of Anglican-Muslim relationality in my case studies include sharing a letter of encouragement after a terror attack, raucous talk at a restaurant, running community services, playing with children, joint prayer, attempts at evangelism, disputes over parking space, friendship, Zoom meetings on religious topics, and more. I have argued that *all* of these are interreligious dialogue, and in fact that "all encounter is dialogue" (Prideaux 2008, 7). This argument has served as a corrective to prevailing assumptions that interreligious dialogue is formal and elite. Moreover, I have rejected the notion that interreligious dialogue must be peaceable in form and outcome to count as such. The insistence that interreligious dialogue should be irenic is a theological aim rather than a social reality, and it bears little value in social scientific studies of religious communities.

The broad experience of interreligious dialogue in Birmingham reminds us that "…dialogue does not take place between ideas, books, or even religions as abstractions but between concrete persons" (Mojzes 1989, 99). "Concrete persons" have diverse modes of living and interacting with one another and it is fitting that dialogue might take many of these forms. For instance, I argued that women's groups form a unique type of interreligious dialogue, being neither wholly formal nor informal, and being reflective of a distinct mode of gathering. Mojzes' quote above also serves as a portion of the explanation for why the national level does not partake in interreligious dialogue. The Church of England as a national institution engages with Islam as an abstraction in its Presence and Engagement reports. This is partially attributable to the fact that while there are various Muslim organizations in England, there is no direct bilateral Islamic equivalent to the Church of England. Mostly, however, it is

because of the reasons expounded just above: that *qua* national institution, the Church of England practices dialogue with itself *prompted by* Islam more than dialogue *with* Islam. The same is not true at the local level, where my interlocutors have Muslim friends, colleagues, "parishioners," neighbours, and engage in dialogue on an everyday basis.

It is fitting that the diversity of forms of interreligious dialogue in Birmingham were met with an equal diversity of theologies and approaches. For instance, the parish is a motif at the local and the national level. At the national level, the Presence and Engagement reports make the Church's understanding of the parish explicit: all people are parishioners, and the parish is to be used as a mode of engaging with non-Anglicans. In Birmingham, however, my interlocutors did not have a uniform understanding of the parish. While Fr Adrian's approach of "every person belongs to the parish, whether they like it or not" aligns with the national reports, the experiences of Justin would indicate otherwise; that presence is important, but the divisions of the parochial system can be "crackers," i.e., nonsensical.

Another area of diverse theological perspectives was soteriology, specifically if my interlocutors thought that Muslims needed to be "saved." This was a sensitive topic that came up in many, but not all, my interviews. In revisiting their perspectives, I did not map my interlocutors' views onto any hard metric of inclusivism and exclusivism, instead preferring to highlight their own language choices. One informant told me, "I think God is everywhere. I think in the Muslim faith, there is God, they worship God, a true God. Like in other faiths, I don't think my god is superior to their gods, God is God. Anyhow you worship God as is long as you find peace and solace." This contrasted with another informant who knowledgably contrasted the differences between the figure of Isa in the Qur'an and Jesus in the Bible, finishing by telling me that Muslims "…pray to Allah, who is *not* Jesus. I pray to the Trinity, God Father, Son, Holy Spirit, they pray to a deity called Allah." Yet another presented me with a hypothetical scenario: "If a Muslim came to the door, and said, 'I want to know about

Christianity,' I certainly wouldn't say 'Focus on being a good Muslim. That's your best chance of getting into heaven'…there's only one name under heaven by which you can be saved, namely Jesus."

In considering the breadth of approaches to essential topics like the parish and soteriology as seen above and in Part 2 of this dissertation, it is not sensible to speak of a unilateral Anglican approach to interreligious relations in Birmingham. The Church of England's engagement with Muslims in Birmingham is characterised by its theological diversity. Priests operate within the same system, making use of the same language — 'church,' 'Jesus,' 'parish,' 'diocese,' 'neighbours,' 'mission,' 'service,' 'ministry'— but with diverging and sometimes even contradictory viewpoints. This finding is consistent with the diverse theological character noted in the Church of England since its inception. The lines of Wordsworth (1838, Quoted in Atherstone 2015, 77–78) come to mind:

> High and Low
> Watch-words of Party, on all tongues are rife;
> As if a Church, though sprung from heaven, must owe
> To opposites and fierce extremes her life.

Notably, however, the viewpoints of my interlocutors did not even map consistently onto the various 'parties' in the Church of England. I would explain this in reference, again, to the contrast between the national and the local: a task group at the national level is able to agree upon terms to produce a theological report to represent the Church as an institution. In contrast, at the local level where the dialogue takes place, there are as many ways of practicing dialogue as there are individuals and communities. This is not an obstacle but is in fact a necessary feature of honest dialogue. While my interlocutors belong to the Church of England, they are not bound by its Presence and Engagement reports — in fact, most do not read them.

The character of the established Church of England's engagement with Muslims and Islam is two-fold: the Church engages with the idea of Islam while at the local level the Church practices interreligious dialogue. There is further diversity of character within each approach,

as befits a church content with the sentiment that “Its credentials are its incompleteness…it is clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic. For it is not sent to commend itself as ‘the best type of Christianity,’ but by its very brokenness to point to the universal Church…” (Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, quoted in Chapman, Clarke, and Percy 2015, 14). From Lambeth Palace to the parish, the Church of England’s approach to interreligious relations with Muslims defies simple explanations and demands our attention.

APPENDICES

i. Ethical clearance
ii. Online interview information sheet
iii. Online interview consent form

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD
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ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk

1 December 2020

Lauren Morry
Faculty of Theology and Religion

Dear Lauren,

Research Ethics Approval
Ref No: R71347/RE001
Title: Liturgies of Encounter: The Character of Shared Spaces and Interactions Between Anglicans and Muslims in the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to the IDREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted.

In line with current guidance please do not undertake any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants. Once in-person research is permissible again, you will need to notify the SSH IDREC via email *before* undertaking any recruitment for in-person interaction with participants. More detailed guidance is available via https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to the IDREC for consideration: https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/apply/sshidrec#collapse394916.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Blaikie
Research Ethics Manager

cc: Professor Sondra Hausner
Lisa Driver Davidson

Liturgies of Encounter: The Character of Shared Spaces and Interactions Between Anglicans and Muslims in the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) Approval Reference: R71347/RE001

1. ***Why is this research being conducted?***

Purpose of Study: This project is a doctoral dissertation. My research question is: How is the Church of England, in its capacity as the Established Church, engaging with Muslims in England at local and institutional levels? I intend to analyse textual sources which are produced and disseminated by the authoritative and juridical bodies (e.g., General Synod, committees, task forces, etc.) of the Church of England to address the institutional dimension. My fieldwork in the Diocese of Birmingham will function as a case study through which I will address the local dimension. I plan to attend events in Birmingham pertaining to Anglican-Muslim dialogue or relations, such as iftars, joint prayer services, discussion groups, or events where Anglicans and Muslims have partnered with one another for community service.

2. ***Why have I been invited to take part?***

You have been invited to take part because you live in Birmingham and you belong to a local Anglican or Muslim community, and you lead or take part in interfaith events.

3. ***Do I have to take part?***

No. You can ask questions about the research before deciding whether or not to take part. If you do agree to take part, you may withdraw yourself from the study, without giving a reason, and without negative consequences by advising me of this decision. The deadline by which you can withdraw any information you have contributed to the research is anytime before I have published based on the research. My thesis will be published in 2023. Data will be stored securely using Oxford's Nexus 265 OneDrive System.

4. ***What will happen to me if I take part in the research?***

If you chose to take part, I will ask you about your involvement in interfaith relations in the context of Birmingham and/or in the broader context of the Church of England. So you have an idea, questions will cover the topics of:

- Your religious identity (e.g. What is your religion and how long have you been practicing it?);
- Your perceptions of the religious community you belong to and its involvement with interfaith relations;
- If you are based in Birmingham, your perceptions of the parish you live in within Birmingham and how neighbours and local communities interact with one another;
- Your perceptions of the Church of England and how it is adapting to multifaith contexts.

If you are an author of a Church of England report, questions will cover the topics of:

- Your interest in the topic of the report and why the report was written;
- Your perceptions on the process of researching and writing the report;
- Your perceptions on how the report was received.

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be interviewed during a single session online using Microsoft Teams. If you do not use Teams, we can discuss other options such as Zoom or a telephone conversation. The interview/session should take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. You can also ask to pause or stop the interview at any time. If you are still happy to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form, which I will send to you via email. With your consent, I would like to audio record our conversation to have an accurate record of your thoughts.

5. ***Are there any potential risks in taking part?***

The following risks are involved in taking part: I will be storing interview notes, recordings, and photographs on the Oxford Nexus 365 System. Though the system is secure, data breaches do occur online.
To reduce any potential risks, I will be pseudonymising personal data so that your name is not stored. This means that I will not be using your real name. Instead, I will be using a fake name. However, other traits may be retained, such as your age group or the city you live in.

6. ***Are there any benefits in taking part?***

There will be no direct or personal benefit to you from taking part in this research although I hope that it will be fruitful for you to have a chance to reflect on your engagement in your local community.

7. ***Expenses and payments***

There will be no payment for taking part in this study.

8. ***What happens to the data provided?***

The information you provide during the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified is known as **personal data**. This includes more sensitive categories of personal data such as your religious identity. I will store the audio recording from our interview for ten years after publication of my thesis, on Oxford's Nexus 365 system.

Other research data (including consent forms) will be stored for at least 3 years after publication or public release of the work of the research.

I will have access to the research data and my supervisor will see drafts of my thesis which include the research data. Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the research.

I would like your permission to use direct quotes and for your name to be attributed to these against a pseudonym [in any research outputs.

9. ***Will the research be published?***

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research. The research will be written up as a doctoral thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives to facilitate its use in future research. If so, the thesis will be openly accessible.

The research may also be published in academic publications such as journal articles or a monograph.

10. ***Who is funding the research?***

My research is funded by the Abrahamic Religion Studentship from the Faculty of Theology and Religion and Lady Margaret Hall.

11. ***Who has reviewed this study?***

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. Reference number: R71347/RE001

12. ***Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or I wish to complain?***

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please contact me at lauren.morry@lmh.ox.ac.uk. I will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

13. ***Data Protection***

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that is performed in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/compliance/gdpr/individualrights/.

14. ***Further Information and Contact Details***

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

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PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) Approval Reference: R71347/RE001

Liturgies of Encounter: The Character of Shared Spaces and Interactions Between Anglicans and Muslims in the Church of England's Diocese of Birmingham

Purpose of Study: This project is a doctoral dissertation. My research question is: How is the Church of England, in its capacity as the Established Church, engaging with Muslims in England at local and institutional levels? I intend to analyse textual sources which are produced and disseminated by the authoritative and juridical bodies (e.g., General Synod, committees, task forces, etc.) of the Church of England to address the institutional dimension. My fieldwork in the Diocese of Birmingham will function as a case study through which I will address the local dimension. I plan to attend events in Birmingham pertaining to Anglican-Muslim dialogue or relations, such as iftars, joint prayer services, discussion groups, or events where Anglicans and Muslims have partnered with one another for community service. I will also be conducting online interviews, which is the purpose and topic of this consent form. Details about the interviews can be found on the attached Information Sheet.

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version dated December 2020 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw before the publication of the researcher's doctoral thesis, which will be taking place in 2023, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by authorised people outside the research team. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐

8	I consent to being audio recorded.	☐
10	I agree to the use of pseudonymised quotes in research outputs OR:	☐
11	I do not wish to be directly quoted.	☐
12	I agree to take part in the study.	☐
Optional:	I agree that my personal contact details can be retained in a secure database so that the researchers can contact me about future studies.	☐

	dd / mm / yyyy	
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

	dd / mm / yyyy	
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

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