With Respect

A perspective on what it means to live together as Christians and Christian leaders in a local neighbourhood.
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PREFACE

Choice and change are the mantras of modern day life in the West. In one sense nothing has changed since the story of Eden. The Biblical story of the beginning, relates to the same two subjects. In that story, the choices led to the terrible consequence, banishment from the garden. A change, brought about by a choice. This booklet asks questions of Christian churches and their leaders today when called to minister in a local community. It asks questions of how we use and possibly abuse our hard won modern day freedoms of association and freedom of religion. It asks if there are ways in which leaders and members of the church could thereby mishandle change, misuse choices? It asks whether related actions result in Eden like consequences for our neighbours, those who Jesus asks us to love as much as we love ourselves. It asks whether here there are inconvenient truths for many of us in today’s church.

I recall when a management student in the 1960’s, I was somewhat sceptical of many management texts which appeared to offer general advice & set out universal management theories, but were written by authors who had based their conclusions on their experience and observations from careers spent in one industrial sector, company or factory. I could not therefore complain if you, the reader approached this booklet with a similar degree of scepticism. The questions I ask, the thoughts I share are based on a single life, lived at a specific time in history, and a life spent in a localised region, albeit embracing locations in two neighbouring countries.

My particular and unremarkable adult journey has taken me first to a suburb in a large metropolitan area, then to a small city and currently to life in a market town. In what is becoming an ever more mobile world, that itinerary is rather limited. However in those three locations the journey has given me the opportunity to contribute to and have experience of Christian communities of several different traditions. I explain this story briefly in a short section at the start of Chapter 2 of this booklet, Page 29.

In the first chapter of this booklet I begin the exploration of whether we as denominations, groupings, congregations and individuals in the church of Jesus Christ misuse the freedoms of religion and association.

I ask that we first consider the implications of being called of God to serve Him in a local community. I ponder whether in organizing structures and activities there is a tendency to seek our own comfort? I take a brief look at the nature of schism in the church and then ask about our handling of truth. Then finally in this first chapter there is an examination of Biblical pictures of the church and a comment on the recent trends in the UK church.

In Chapter 2 I relate my observations of some of the events in one town church and community. The community is situated in the Welsh - English borders, a town (at
one stage the largest in Wales) which has a long history as a market town, a centre of brewing, of mineral extraction & then light industry following the 2nd world war.

It’s a town of some 40-50,000 souls set in a Borough of smaller more rural townships, villages and hamlets, some which once soared, sang and suffered with the growth and subsequent decline of mineral extraction and steel making industries. Communities in which church and chapels sat, and as I sense is often the case in Wales, they sat sometimes as rather uneasy neighbours. However, in both the main town, and the smaller townships around it, they are all of a size where most local movers & shakers, leaders & elders would know or know of each other.

I start the Chapter by relating my journey and the rather amusing story of events leading up to my family living in this town where my wife and I spent the major part of our married life. I reflect on the rather messy story of incarnational cooperation in this place amongst the churches and chapels. I doubt there is a model here for others to follow, but maybe in my relating some of the things that happened here, and some of the structures that helped things happen, the reader might find help by seeing parallels with what they sense they are being called to, envisioning, desiring or experiencing in their own locality. If so, I hope this story may help them to persevere and press forward.

I end in Chapter 3 with some conclusions, and I am sure there will be much that others might challenge.

Are there in these pages some inconvenient truths for one or other of us to consider? Is there a challenge for some of us to get immersed in this messy, uncomfortable life of growing and building a cooperative church by respecting others called to live and minister in the local community?

And for those who are already involved in cooperating together in our diverse local church is there a need to be careful? Careful that we don’t settle for the easy bits of cooperation? For in congregational and cooperative community life, we must ensure we always give the highest priority to the fulfilment of the Lord’s great commission, that we make disciples.

And could some readers conclude with me, that we just may be impeding the Spirit touching individual’s lives and community life, if in that community we choose to stay apart, separate and failing to embrace the Biblical picture of interdependence in the neighbourhood Church of Jesus Christ?

I am so grateful to so many friends, leaders and members of the local church who over these decades were the living stones, the arms and legs and brothers and sisters working, praying, worshipping and reaching out cooperatively in our town. Men and women who have personally supported me and my family in the joys and sorrows that make up life’s journey. Friends who have kindly reviewed drafts of this short volume. Thank you. For all of you, and those who read these pages, may we all be helped in the choices we must make and the changes we decide to embrace.
CHAPTER 1.1. The Call of God

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11 ESV

There are many events recorded in the Bible which we could understand as God calling individuals to various locations, works and service. Abraham was called out of Ur to journey to the Promised Land, Moses to lead the Children of Israel out of captivity in Egypt. Prophets were called to proclaim often unpopular messages in uncomfortable situations, disciples were called by Jesus in Galilee to ‘follow Him’, and on a mountain before his ascension, Jesus promised by His Spirit to be with those disciples in the task He had for them to do, ‘to make disciples of all nations, baptising and teaching the nations to obey everything He has commanded.’ On another occasion it is recorded Jesus called on His disciples to wait and then baptised with the Holy Spirit, to be His witnesses in all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

After the Gospel accounts of Jesus life, death and resurrection the Bible then goes on to tell the story of how the Apostles (sent ones) fulfilled, with the Spirit’s enabling, the commission Jesus gave them. Here we read how they called others to turn and follow Jesus, and form communities of believing people, the church. This first began to come into being in the Mediterranean lands, and then, after Biblical times, ‘in all the world’. The Bible records for us the teaching given in the Biblical period in a series of letters to the early church, the Epistles. Often the writers of these Epistles explain to the fledgling Christian Communities, or young individual Christian workers, how to order church life and respond to God’s call.

In these letters one sees the writer’s belief that God will continue to call and guide the young church. Their expectation seems to be:

1. God graciously gives his people diverse gifts, which are to be used in the varied ministries of the church
2. Church order is important, as demonstrated by the amount of teaching included in the Epistles
3. There is specific, but consistent teaching for each of the communities, finding themselves as they did, in different geographic, social, economic and religious settings.

Even with the limited geographic and cultural reach of the Christian message at the time the Epistles were written, the writers recognised different situations in which
each of the young churches was seeking and being encouraged to move forward, and understand the purposes of God. The writers often emphasise aspects of seeking cordiality, respect, unity, and interdependence amongst those called to be part of the local church and community.

God’s call has always had an important place in a Christian’s understanding of their God given ministry. So what are the implications for Christian ministers, leaders and congregations as they find themselves by whatever process, called to minister as part of the church of God in the same community? This is a question I want to explore in the following pages of this booklet.

The Epistle to the young church in Ephesus talks about living the life of community to which we are called. The fourth chapter begins.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4 v1-6 NIV

Here and elsewhere the writers also encourage the young churches to persevere on what is a journey towards maturity and more understanding of what faith means in their ever evolving situations. The chapter goes on.

The gifts he gave were..... for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Ephesians 4, part of v11-13, NRSV

History tells us that over the ages leaders and teachers (both the sincere and also the manipulative) have formulated understanding and structures which they have presented as ‘truth’, but about which others, (both the sincere and the manipulative), have found it impossible to agree. When the manipulative have clashed, very often much suffering followed. When the sincere have clashed, separation and schism have often followed.

However, despite the disappointment that God must feel sometimes at the shortcomings of our fulfilling our calling, He graciously continues to:

- bestow gifts and equip His disciples,
- offer guidance by His Spirit,
- be faithful to His promise ‘to be with us always’ and
- call us to ‘seek first the Kingdom’.
CHAPTER 1.2 Inconvenient truths??

I think it takes a fairly saintly disposition to avoid the temptation and tendency to search for a degree of comfort in life. For many in the UK, the home is now a far more comfortable setting to spend one’s leisure time than was once the case for most of the population of Britain.

Even in my lifetime, the home has been transformed from a place with a single warm spot, where there were limited resources to provide entertainment and information, and where there would be very few comfortable chairs. For most British homes today there will be central heating throughout, an abundance of comfortable seats and many and varied sources of entertainment and information.

The attraction of daytime or evening activity in an old church hall, public library, theatre or pub is no longer there when today everything you need can be accessed and enjoyed at the comfortable modern home. So the continued existence of these many and varied familiar institutions is often today under threat, whether it’s the pub, community centre or individual congregations of local church.

Environment may be one factor in making certain situations ‘comfortable’, but it isn’t of course the only factor. Another is the opportunity to be able to choose to be in situations whereby we avoid having to get alongside those we don’t agree with, or take part in events which we don’t particularly enjoy. After all, one of the advantages of this modern day life of change and choice, is the opportunities it offers to ‘pick and mix’. Nowhere is this more so than amongst faith communities. No longer is it necessary to have a life-long allegiance to a denomination or particular chapel. If what’s on offer elsewhere, a welcome will await there, and with the family car(s) now available to many, one can(each can) choose to travel passed several places of worship before finding in a nearby town, the spiritual and social comfort and challenge one is looking for, or ‘one feels called to’.

As mentioned earlier in this booklet, the freedom to associate with who one wills and the freedom to worship where and how one feels called, these were hard won treasures which must be carefully guarded. However we have to ask ourselves, is it possible for Christian leaders and people to abuse these freedoms? If I am right in suggesting that such abuse could take place in today’s church, it will be an inconvenient truth for us to have to consider if that is, we are willing to consider it?
CHAPTER 1.3 Some personal experiences along the way

Whatever church is, it’s pretty well guaranteed our understanding will embrace just a minute percentage of all that church really is. One’s understanding will be an even smaller percentage of what in totality the church has been, is and will be in the future. For although the Scriptures tell us Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever, the outworking of His Church in the world is ever changing. The darkness hides an ever changing myriad of evils, the light must expose and overcome in ever evolving environments. The nature of evil and of God’s light remains constant, and thankfully we are assured:

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* John 1 v 5 ESV

Only on a very few occasions in my life have I participated in services in Roman Catholic churches. Two of those occasions were the funerals of two uncles, who had converted to Roman Catholicism, and in their retirement years were active in their local St. Vincent de Paul Society. When the first of the 2 uncles died, I remember a very formal and traditional funeral service. I recall the fact that there were no hymns in the service being commented upon by another uncle, who although not a regular churchgoer, obviously had anticipated the communal comfort of singing well known hymns at a funeral.

When it came some short time later for us to attend the funeral service of the second uncle, the service could not have been more different. The young priest had I sensed been touched by the Charismatic renewal in Catholicism. He encouraged and led the congregation in some joyful singing appropriate to the setting, and engaged us all in the service. The two services, separated by just a short period, took place in two nearby Roman Catholic church buildings, serving different parts of the same community. I was struck how that worldwide, huge, historic outworking of Christianity could in a very localised setting offer space for change and diversity.

As I have mentioned earlier, our own journey gave my family the opportunity to be part of churches of several different traditions, or denominations. Never having been ordained, I have not experienced what it means in a very formal historic setting to be accredited, ordained, commissioned, recognised, set aside, or whatever within a denominational structure, but my observation of church leaders within such structures suggests to me that they value and find comfort in the fellowship and recognition that comes through their association with these ‘families’ within the church.

On a couple of occasions I attended as an observer, the Council of the covenanting churches in Wales, a group of historic denominations working within a covenant concerning their moving towards unity. This gave me some limited but illuminating
insight into the difficulties that denominations face when they seek to reconcile and find ways through the different understandings across denominations concerning truth, ministry, church order and practice. While the discussions appeared to be held in good spirit and mutual affection, it was obvious they faced real challenges and struggled with the issues before them, borne of their different historic traditions and understanding of truth.

There were other occasions when for one reason or another a local church leader would explain to me that they could not identify with others as their understanding of essentials went beyond, say the historic creeds of the church. They would explain that their understanding of doctrinal purity would cause them to stand apart from neighbouring leaders and look for those of similar views in other distant communities with whom to work rather than work with those leaders called to the same community as themselves.

I am sure the truths maintained and the fellowship experienced in ministry which unite those within a denominational structure have been used of God over the centuries in both local, national and international settings. These structures must be a comfort to those who loyally serve and work in the denominations today.

Also, I am sure church leaders are used of God who find comfort primarily when they associate themselves with others who find common understanding in a particular theological truth or form of churchmanship. They may be evangelicals, liberals, champions of women’s ministry, an interdenominational mission organisation or those who share a concern for a particular aspect of justice, peace, social or political cause.

It appears to me God graciously embraces and uses the ministry of many who hold divergent views of Kingdom life and truth and He uses the alliances that they choose, and have chosen through history.

I do however become concerned when for leaders called to minister in the same community, they use denominational allegiance or theological or ministry affiliation as a reason to avoid walking the walk and talking the talk with leaders called to minister in that same community. Sometimes this is also associated with their congregations remaining apart from others in the same neighbourhood.

This concern brings me to what I have come to believe is for some an inconvenient truth and for others a forgotten or hidden truth about living as Christians in the church of Jesus when ministering in the same geographical community as other Christians. But before exploring this subject, a couple of other aspects of church life are perhaps worth noting.
CHAPTER 1.4 Schisms happen

Firstly, taking a longer perspective, let us look at some events in church history. The protestant reformation did what the name suggests, it re-formed expressions of church. Before the reformation happened and in eleventh century Catholicism there had been a schism. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches emerged. I believe at another time, the Roman Catholic Church also experienced life under two rival Popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon in France. I don’t know whether in the 11th century and other early schisms the events led in many towns and cities to the two ‘churches’ working on the same patch? But certainly the events following the Protestant reformation, and the struggle for freedom of religion and association, led to the possibility that in many towns and cities across the world, you could see several different forms of Christian outworking. In the emerging situations for most citizens, whilst they could see different forms of church expression, it was unlikely as individuals or individual family units they would experience life in more than one type of church. Freedoms hard won are often freedoms fiercely defended. The transfer of allegiance by an individual or group was rare. When it happened, it could lead to painful separation and an ongoing difficulty in relationships.

My own family folklore going back to the early 20th century talks of different members of the family not speaking for decades due to a transfer on marriage to a family of a different Christian tribe. In my home city of Liverpool 19th century Protestant versus Roman Catholic community rivalry led to a century or more of tension, separation and the occasional outbreaks of violent hostility.

In our 21st century Christian communities we are the inheritors of two quite recent schisms. In the 1950’s and 1960’s, following 2 devastating world wars, in the protestant church liberal theology appeared to be gaining influence in many of the historic denominations. Some evangelicals within these churches felt ill at ease and heeding the call of some prominent churchmen calling for a ‘coming out’, new congregations formed, distinct in their interpretation of what it meant to be ‘evangelical’ in their theology and church life. Many of these new congregations chose to be non-denominational, but could be linked by theologically defined associations.

Later in the century there was, in both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches a movement known as the charismatic renewal, related though not identical to the belief and practices of the Pentecostal churches, which themselves had emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. Many who experienced this renewal worked it out within the historic churches, but others again felt called to form new charismatic congregations, sometimes first called ‘house churches’, due in part to a feature touched on earlier, the post war emerging of comfortable more spacious homes, with plenty of comfortable seating!
In most medium sized towns and communities within large metropolitan areas in the UK today you will still see an outworking of the historic Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations (Anglican and Non-conformist), together with Pentecostal, Independent Evangelical and Charismatic congregations, of varying types. In my town with some 30 Christian congregations, you can find all these outworkings, plus some being separated by language and even now some even newer ones, catering mainly, though not exclusively for ethnic minority groups, serving first generation Christians from abroad who bring something distinctively different again, traditions developed in other countries.

What image does this situation portray to those outside the church if that is, the presence of the church registers at all with a large proportion of a local population? For surely the prayers of Christian people must relate to today’s schism in the UK between the churches and the communities they serve. Communities distracted or disinclined to listen to, or perhaps dissuaded from hearing the messages about the Gospel proclaimed by Christian churches.

In some communities, young people will be at least two, if not three generations from regular contact with the local church. For instance it is now some 60+ years since Sunday schools of 200-300 were the norm.

A Methodist Sunday School in New Brighton, Wallasey in the early 1950’s. The author is seated somewhere, wearing his Sunday best, and surrounded by Sunday School teachers who in all likelihood would not only teach this large group on a Sunday afternoon, but attend morning and evening church services.
Stories of large scale Sunday school anniversaries and outings are now largely constrained to older grandparents and great grandparents. For many, the only visit to a church building today will be for a school carol concert or the funeral of a family member or work colleague. It is in this situation the church of Jesus Christ seeks to fulfil its mission in these early years of the 21st Century.

Could the local church involved in cooperative activity, be seen to be demonstrating something which a schismatic church fails to demonstrate?

Could a determination to find a Unity of Spirit be something God could use to help overcome modern day society’s spirit of distractions caused by pleasure, wealth and care? (Timothy Dudley-Smith Words © 1969 by Hope Publishing Co.)

Could this be a dimension of ‘Kingdom life’ we need to choose as a God given priority for the church in any community??
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CHAPTER 1.5 Truth

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.  
1 John 2:20 NIV

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. John 16:13 NIV

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 NIV

I can recall a time in my early teens, shortly after I had youthfully trusted God for salvation, verses like these made me think understanding the truths of the faith would come easily, naturally even. There was a youthful joy in this, but I was soon to find out that when faced with difficult situations Christians, even in the same congregation could have a very different understanding of ‘truth’ or ‘the way forward’. In my later teens and early twenties and while at University in the early 1960’s, I came across different strands of Christianity, and even in a place of learning, there could be little communication between those with different understandings. It was the era when separation and suspicion between liberal and evangelical, Protestant and Roman Catholic wings of the church was very evident in different student circles.

Those early years in the pathway of faith were illustrating to me I had much to learn if I was to have a mature understanding of this ‘truth’ aspect of ‘the way’.

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” John 4:23 & 24 NIV and see also:  
1 John 4:16 NIV, John 3:16 & 17 NIV and Matthew 16:17-20 NIV, which are provided in full in Appendix 1

The scriptures confirm over and over again that truth is important, but the wisdom of God appears to have been that Jesus himself sought in the larger part to teach the truths of the Gospel by telling illustrative stories (parables), living a life of prayer and obedience, and continuing to be with us by giving us the Spirit and His church.

The Apostles faced the contemporary issues of their day, and left us the final part of the scriptures informing us how they discerned ‘by the revelation of the Spirit or the renewal of the mind’ the truth in those situations e.g. the Gospel and the gentiles, the place of women, the eating of food which had been dedicated to idols etc.

Even in the Apostolic days, finding ‘The Way’ forward was not always straightforward, but at least with the preservation of the scriptures we can read the
account of their difficulties, discernment, the progress they made and the teaching they left for us.

As we have seen, even with all these deposits and gifts of God, the story of the church is one of struggle, and alas also strife, leading often to separation.

But the amazing grace of God has brought the church and its understandings of truth for today’s world, to where we are in each community, country and in this ever shrinking world.

It seems both across and even within the different strands of the Christian Church, we have often been a long way, from a settled understanding at any time of His truth as it relates to our way and His Way, our life and His Life, our use of authority and of government. But even with the diversity so evident across the Church of Christ, the scripture still pronounces, as we briefly noted earlier:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all......

To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4, 1 – 7, 11 – 16. NIV

There is nothing in this passage about separation, or a justification of such a stance because we have a different understanding of aspects of ‘truth’.

Perhaps it is understandable that our tendency historically to respond to ‘the spirit of truth’ has been to seek to codify the ‘truth’. Doctrine is something that lends itself to study. The results of which is a product of what we have recognised as sanctified minds.
As we have seen, the other words used by Jesus of Himself were ‘way’ and ‘life’. John recorded (Chapters 13 to 17) the fact that Jesus used these words during that remarkable time when He shared and prayed with His disciples before leaving with them to go to Gethsemane.

Most commentators understand that time as an occasion when Jesus in His caring for His disciples was preparing them and helping them understand all that had to unfold over the hours, days and weeks ahead. In this it was important that they understood the unique central part which only Jesus Himself could play in demonstrating (in both his humanity and divinity), the length, breadth, depth and height of God’s love for mankind. So He said to them:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 NIV"

Elsewhere Jesus:

- invites us to follow Him in our earthly lives i.e. to follow ‘The Way’, and
- as ‘The Life’ says of His sheep that ‘He had come that that they may have life, and have it to the full’ (John 10:10 NIV).

So as I read this great discourse (John 13-17), I see that even in these moments, Jesus demonstrates to them, teaches them & prays for them concerning what His being the ‘Way’ & ‘Life’ is to be for their way and life (in all its fullness) in the years ahead.

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:14,15"

"My prayer is for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me & have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17 20-23 and see also:

John 13: 34,35, John 14:12-14, John 15:7, 9, 10, John 15:20 which are provided in full in Appendix 1"
These aspects of following ‘The Way’, living ‘The life’ are seen in the Ephesians passage (Page 18) where the first things we are called to, urged to & are to seek for are:

- Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
- Be completely humble & gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- As you were called to one hope

These encouragements from scripture relate to aspects of the faith which are not so easy to codify as our various understandings of doctrinal truth. They relate to the spirit of our relationship with Jesus and our relationships together, our living together – most intimate and visible when we are in our local situation.

It seems to me these passages of scripture are a call today to find locally in the communities in which we live, a ‘unity of Spirit through the bond of peace’ and recognise the journey we travel is to be a journey towards maturity, looking to God to help us in our ‘growth towards truth’.

These passages would seem to be sufficient encouragement for us to be a cooperative church in our community.

So does scripture also point to this ‘inconvenient truth’, the call to cooperation?
CHAPTER 1.6 Images of church from Biblical times

The Bible leaves us with many images of how we relate to God and each other as church. Three are perhaps the most telling about our relationship one with another in the church of Jesus Christ:

* as children of the one Father God,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Matthew 6 v 9 NIV

* as members (limbs, organs etc.) of the Body of Christ, and Christ the head of the body

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Romans 12 NIV

And see also: 1 Corinthians 12, Colossians 1 NIV, Colossians 2 NIV which are provided in full in Appendix 1

and

* the other powerful but less developed image is of spiritual stones fitting together as a spiritual building.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Ephesians 2 NIV

**The living Stone and a chosen people:** 4 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 5 For in Scripture it says:
'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ ℓNow to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ ℓand, ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ℓOnce you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ‘́1 Peter 2 NIV and see also: 1 Corinthians 3 NIV and Hebrews 3 NIV which are provided in full in Appendix 1

All these images talk of relationship to God (Father, Head, Cornerstone) but all also speak of our relationship or interdependence one with another:

* brothers and sisters growing up in one family,

* members joined one to another, each necessary, working together in a body to enable it to function purposefully

* stones, shaped to fit together in a structure — living stones placed in a living structure.

None of the images suggests that siblings, body members or stones are identical, but the images are of absolute INTERDEPENDENCE, and all dependent on the one vital SOURCE if the church is to be what it is meant to be and do. The source being known as or known through:

*our Father,

*our Head,

*our Cornerstone

There are of course other aspects:

* the eras of existence of the church and

* the other spatial aspects (universal, worldwide, national out-workings). However, it is about the local church in today’s world to which I’d like to relate these images.
At any point in time, bodies, buildings and (usually) immediate families are positioned in one locality. In a place a body (person) is registered on the electoral roll; a building receives planning permission to be erected; a family lives and grows. Despite the longevity of Dr. Who, teleportation still doesn’t allow bodies to be in two places at the same time!

In the early church we understand why Epistles were written to churches in specific locations. And whilst, looking at our current situation, I’m sure our gracious God is active offering by the Spirit, guidance to each denominational grouping, and those of different theological groupings (Evangelicals, Liberals, etc.), I wonder whether He would still like to send the modern day equivalent of Biblical letters to give guidance to Christians working alongside each other in each local COMMUNITY?

It is in the local setting that a community experiences Christians living as their neighbours, workmates, class-mates. It’s where they see Christians serving them in the local surgery, shop, or school. It’s in their locality they do or they do not experience Christians cooperating. Walking the streets of clubland in the early hours as Street Pastors, working together as a team feeding the homeless at the local Salvation Army, see local Christians from different churches walking alongside each other at the Good Friday united walk of witness. It’s in the local setting they hear us expressing views about each other, including Christians from different churches speaking well of one another, or alas criticising or speaking ill of other Christians.

It’s in the locality that families live, buildings are built, ‘members of bodies’ make up complete ‘bodies’. So it is in the immediate locality that more than anywhere else the ‘church’, the one church of Jesus Christ in its many congregations and institutions exists and is experienced. It is in the one ‘community’ it seeks to witness, to minister as body, building and family.

It is true of course that one modern and new form of relationship, not bound by physical presence is developing at a pace around us, that which is enabled by social media and the incredible internet. Some of the more entrepreneurial and politicised forms of religious outworking have already aggressively sought to evangelise, influence or in some cases manipulate those who have begun to dip into ‘community and / or relationship’ via these new means. These are emerging and rather scary aspects of modern day life, both wonderful and worrying, and again arenas in which participants will be in some cases comforted and other cases troubled by the variety of expressions and often conflicting expressions of ideas and opportunities.

In acknowledging this new emerging area of relating as church, I have, I think to leave it to those who will grow up experiencing and maybe engulfed by this new world to understand what it all means for ‘church’.
I will return to the world I know, and suggest that expressions of life in local communities will remain important in our understanding of what Jesus commanded us regarding our neighbour and what scripture teaches in relation to local expressions of Christian communities.

And for the church to be in the local community all that it is meant to be will require us to work at understanding and practicing all that it means for us to live and work with a mutual acceptance of, dependence on and responsiveness to FATHER, HEAD and CORNERSTONE.

And in relation to our life and ministry alongside one another in the local community, the word I think that stands out from the Biblical models and pictures is INTERDEPENDENCE.

So as leaders and members, let us work out our calling in the community in which we are placed and recognise our God, the generous giver, of whom the apostle Paul wrote,

*The gifts he gave were..... for building up the body of Christ....*

encouraging us to press on, in unity of Spirit through the bond of peace **UNTIL**....

*......until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Ephesians 4, part of v11-13, NRSV*
CHAPTER 1.7 Modern day trends in the UK church scene

Over my three score years and ten, I have observed many trends and developments in church life in the U.K. Alas, overall the trends and developments have included a significant decline in the U.K. population’s regular involvement in the organised Christian Church. Within that overall situation, there are many evidences of God calling people. People wonderfully responding to God’s call and the Holy Spirit continuing to equip Christian people who seek to be lights in a dark world. There is also much evidence amongst the population of continuing inquisitiveness regarding spiritual dimensions of life. But where this exists, very rarely does the hungry soul turn to and call on the church for spiritual food. This is a major change in the countries of the United Kingdom, compared with a couple of centuries ago. And in this present time when individual ‘freedom to make choices’ is so invasive in our society, there is a danger that those with spiritual hunger might look for and find junk food or fast food remedies, offered by charlatans and pedlars of bad religion, some of whom can be within organised religion.

During this era of decline in involvement in the organised church in the UK, there are of course other discernible trends, not least the overall decline in adherence to many historic denominations, and in relative terms, a growing proportion of regular churchgoers adhering to churches in new or no denominations.

It is also a feature that over the last 100 years, despite the decline, it appears the historic denominations in the UK have not felt able to make many significant changes in their structures and structural relationships used in the Christian Church. Some denominations have felt called to seek change, have tried, but the perceived obstacles have eventually been seen to be too great, either by one party or several.

Many Christians continue to find a major comfort by being within these historic Christian denominational structures. A visit from a Bishop, or a trip to hear a renowned preacher who shares your theological understanding are seen as highlights, & for leaders, the opportunity to fellowship with like-minded leaders, can energise & encourage. Churchmanship & theological alignment have remained important aspects of life within the church, particularly amongst church leaders.

The changes which recent decades have brought in society and the opportunities those changes now offer to us, are quite remarkable. The rate of change in many aspects of western life makes it more and more difficult for different generations to communicate with each other. I’m sure my life as a 1960’s teenager was quite confusing to my parents, but as was common then, most of my grandparents had died by the time I was approaching my 20’s. Today, for grandparents like me in their 70’s, the changes now being embraced by our grandchildren pose us considerable challenges if we want to maintain a meaningful participation in our grandchildren’s
lives. And for many of my age it’s likely there are one or two decades of such challenges ahead!

Nowhere does this rate of change impact more, than in the world of communication and community. Undoubtedly, as already noted, new technologies are enabling us all to form new friendships and communities, research new sources of information, and be bombarded by new choices, whether they be tempting options, ideas or products. Gone are the days when the whole family would live nearby and they along with local school, library and church formed the major social centres and sources of information for significant sections of UK society.

Today families come in different shapes, sizes and locations, and the influences and services we consume are more global than local. Community is more diverse in its varied forms, participating races and religions and certainly in the rates of change and range of freedoms and choices it offers and accommodates.

Given the nature of God’s graciousness and creativity, it’s likely that in this ever more diverse world, the range of gifts He wants to make available to us and the forms of church and ministries he has for us to embrace will develop to enable us to do His work in our changing situation.

The choices we make in response to God’s graciousness and gifts will determine whether we use all that God gives for good or ill. We could see some new and wholesome adaptation of structures and out-workings, and at the other extreme, we could see tragic forms of bad religion offered, whether through holding on to things passed God’s use by date, or offering new forms and messages which are built on false foundations.

Our structures (so little changed) will be stretched to be constructive elements in this environment, this era of rapid and constant change. They could either facilitate and embrace or constrain and deny. There will be much to pray about, probably much to sacrifice, and certainly much to seek for, if:

- Modern day transformation is to be achieved,
- Our minds are to be renewed, and
- We are to ‘understand His good and perfect will’

...... I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12 v.1-3 NIV
CHAPTER 1.8 What to put first?

As we have already noted from John’s Gospel Jesus said of himself

‘I am the way, the truth and the life’        John 14 v 6 NIV

In a later chapter of John’s Gospel it is recorded that Jesus prayed:

‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’

John 17 v 20-21 NIV

And as we noted, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Chapter 4:

*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all……. It was He who gave us……..to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

We seem to be left in no doubt that:
* the truth of who Christ is in God, and
* the way we are to live in Christ and with each other

are vital aspects and always have been vital aspects of being church.

Here we are in the 21st century, and undoubtedly Christians differ on their understanding of truth and in the ways we understand authority and are to order church life. However, how we behave, whilst having differences, is how we portray the Body of Christ, the Kingdom of God to our neighbours. What does the Apostle ask of us?

Earlier we suggested the epistles gave teaching appropriate to each local church situation and how it was developing. However, I feel it is possible to suggest this scripture would be teaching appropriate to all local situations:

‘to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.’ Ephsians 4 v 1-3
And if we choose not to do this, I think we must go on to ask could the effect be, as it was in Eden, to be part of the lifetime banishment of our neighbours from the garden, by potentially creating a barrier to others finding faith and a home amongst the local community of the people of God? For Jesus appears to infer in His prayer, that such behaviour by any of us could impede other’s belief viz:

‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17 v 20 - 23 NIV

In my experience, it is for some local church leaders a very difficult challenge set for them here in scripture. For some, their understanding of the church or their understanding of the truth make sitting down with other local church leaders an uncomfortable experience, and they choose rather to confine their association to either the councils of their denomination or the councils of those who take a similar discrete theological position.

I would suggest this ‘standing apart’ could diminish the ministry of the local church. Cooperative ministry can be powerful in the longer term in that members of different congregations and organisations get to know each other, discovering sometimes they live in the same neighbourhood. In this situation it is more likely unbelievers will hear Christians speaking well of one another and of other neighbouring churches, and experience them cooperating. It speaks of respect, and it recognises a Biblical priority of the first order, a truth in each of the scriptures we have highlighted which picture the church’s ‘interdependence’.

On the journey towards maturity:

- the whole family is meant to learn and grow together;
- the body is not meant to balance on one leg or be short of vital organs;
- the building is not meant to be structurally weakened by having stones missing.

So let us grasp the opportunity, and with respect, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace as we work and live together cooperating in our local church and community. But what does that involve?
CHAPTER 2.1 Called to Wrexham in Wales?

Nearly 40 years ago and with a young family, my wife Ann and I moved to Wales.
Neither of us had a Welsh background, though our youthful Christian faith had brought us together while members of a beach mission team working on the beautiful Llŷn (Lleyn) peninsula in west Wales in the early 1960’s.

I had been born in Liverpool in 1944, blessed with two loving parents. They would only very occasionally go to church. For my first ten years, my family, like many families at the time lived in what today would be called inadequate accommodation. We shared bathroom and toilet with other families in a multi-occupied house, but not knowing anything different, I never felt deprived. In fact I loved my primary school years living beside the River Mersey in New Brighton, still then a vibrant, but shortly to become a fading sea and river-side resort.

As a child I could spend hours watching the ocean liners, freighters, small coastal vessels and ferries in the busy river which was literally at the bottom of the road in which my family lived during my primary school years.

In 1956 my parents had enough ‘points’ to be allocated a brand new Council House in another part of town and this led to me getting to know through secondary school some new friends who socialised at a local youth club which had a football team, a great youthful interest of mine. The Youth Club was at a local Baptist Church and my mates went to something called ‘Youth Café’ on a Sunday night. Here I heard a message, and made the decision that would massively impact my life. I found I trusted God for salvation, I’d become what in first century Mediterranean lands they called a ‘follower of the Way’, or in then Syrian (now Turkish) Antioch they called ‘Christians’.

Since those days I’ve often thought how for me the acceptance of faith in a loving Father God and with that the concept of ‘amazing grace’ was helped by having such
loving parents, allowing me to grow up in a secure, a conflict free environment. I’ve also had cause to be thankful for caring selfless Christian people who helped me retain my early faith, as the late 50’s and early 1960’s were a time when doctrinal conflict was very much a feature of some non-conformist faith communities. Some young Christians like me could observe at first hand the lack of conflict resolution skills in such faith communities, leading sometimes to angry schism for families and confusion for young people. Unless that is, they could find access, as I did to those caring welcoming folk, who would open their homes, lead youth clubs, stand on muddy wet touchlines each week on cold winter Saturday mornings, then next day help convene the Youth Café or other forms of groups for the newly emerging class of ‘teenagers’.

Those youthful experiences were part of the path to college years and various forms of Christian service, one of which led to my meeting Ann whose background and upbringing were very similar to mine, though her coming from South London and me from the Merseyside provided for different regional loyalties throughout our marriage! With marriage she bravely left her large and loving family and ‘came up north’. After setting up our first home on Merseyside, employment led to us eventually moving on and away on a couple of occasions. We were blessed with a young family and through our journey had the opportunity to experience several different types of churches, styles of worship and Christian affiliations.

Having met in Wales, Ann had always thought that one day we would live in Wales. However, one day in 1968 on a business trip to Oswestry, and with Ann in the car, I drove through the centre of the town of Wrexham. Before us was a rather grim looking Yorke Street (see picture below) which led in those days to a grimy industrial part of town, the site of the old town gasworks, town incinerator, a local leatherworks & the aromas of a couple of Wrexham’s many old town breweries, all overshadowed by a huge blackened Parish Church which served this border town, a regional centre of coal mining and heavy industries.
Although always disputed as to who exactly mouthed the words, one of us said to the other ‘What a dump. This is one place in Wales we’ll never choose to live’. Well such sentiments are rather unkind and dangerous things to declare. Ten years later we did move to live in Wrexham, simply because two things coincided. My employment moved to the town and we had a growing family and needed a larger home. To correct our earlier first impressions, the town and its people made it a wonderful place to live and at that time a good place for one’s children to be educated in the two decades that followed.

Our first 15 years in the town saw us experience life in both a Methodist and a Pentecostal congregation. Then in the mid 1990’s, the congregation of which we were then a part got into difficulties. Advisers were brought in who recommended friends separated amicably and formed two new congregations out of the one church.

I was involved in a team asked to establish one of the new congregations, and I recall a young man on the team recommended that to show respect to the other churches in the town, we should write a letter, explaining what had happened, what we were doing and sending greetings to the other churches, assuring them of our desire for fellowship with them.

It was about a year later a Welsh Presbyterian minister in the town arranged with a number of the town churches to invite the Billy Graham Association to hold a mission in the town. Quite possibly because the minister had received the letter from us, we were invited to participate, and I was asked to act as organising secretary. As is normally the case with these missions, we brought together a group of local Christians from different churches who over the following 18 months, made all the necessary arrangements for the mission to go ahead during 1997.

As often happens with groups involved in major projects, there was a certain reluctance amongst members of the group to disband, and so a decision was taken to form ‘Mission Wrexham’, a grouping of churches and individuals with a heart for mission amongst the local community. A couple of years later local ministers decided to form a Wrexham Church Leaders Fellowship, both organisations having specific remits and working alongside the Welsh version of the Churches Together organisation, which is known as Cytûn, which translates into the English language as ‘in agreement’.

The next two decades coincided with a season when God gave much new vision to people amongst us. These friends felt led to introduce new ministry projects to the supportive organisations. In the cooperative setting enabled by the three organisations, these projects were successfully launched and brought Christians from many different traditions together to pray, welcome national speakers, study and work in outreach to the local community.
The range of cooperative projects operating during that period is listed in Appendix 2. Some predated this precise period referred to above, and the sponsoring teams / churches varied from project to project.

Everyone was able during that period to participate through the three organisations in the cooperative work of the many congregations in the town, and some of the work embraced churches from across the wider County Borough. During this time I got to know many ministers and church leaders who came to work in the town and Borough. Many were deeply committed to this cooperative work, others got involved on an occasional basis, while others kept their distance. The experience caused me to think what it meant to be a member of the Church in the community of Wrexham, and for church leaders (ordained or lay), what it meant to accept a call to minister in a particular town or community.
CHAPTER 2.2 What is cooperative ministry today?

My own experience of cooperative ministry is really limited to a period of some 20 years in just one town, where there was a lovely spirit of cooperation. During this time I was encouraged to hear from and learn from the experiences of such cooperation in other towns through organisations and networks like:

‘Gather’ (www.gather.global),


I doubt whether any of these ministries could have developed without decades of existence of organisations such as Councils of Churches, the Free Church Federal Councils and ‘Churches Together’ which have over the years provided the means by which local Christians from different congregations have got to know each other.

The second half of the 20th century, with the emergence of more independent evangelical churches and house churches saw a disappointing trend in such churches remaining separate from such Councils. However as the century came to an end, the by then ‘maturing’ Charismatic/evangelical churches and the emerging ethnic minority churches and many Pentecostal churches began to see cooperative town ministry as important and in a growing number of cases began to relate to town wide councils of the church.

Cooperative ministry speaks of this being more about relationship than structure or hierarchy. My sense is that these structural dimensions pose deep issues for some. For hierarchal denominations, embracing local relational cooperative ministry does have implications, but with sensitivity and common sense surely they can enhance locational Kingdom ministry. Senior churchmen and women can ensure cooperative ministry appears as an important part of induction, installation and ongoing review.

Perhaps one secret of healthy local cooperative ministry is having a strong focus on prayer and mission rather than ‘unity’ as an end in itself. If mission is the focus, then unity is a ‘means to an end’ rather than an end in itself.

The highlighting of mission and prayer is in part a pragmatic response to scriptural direction & local experience. I would conclude from my experience that congregations in one town found greatest ease in certain ministries and greatest difficulty in other ministries.
I put them in this order:

OUTREACH, DOING GOOD TOGETHER

PRAYING TOGETHER

WORSHIP ‘SERVICES’ TOGETHER

OUTREACH, EVANGELISM TOGETHER

As I have explained earlier, I have a very limited understanding of how important it must be in historic denominations to continue their search for recognition of ministries and structural unity with their orders of ministry and structural hierarchies. However my experience would be that neither this difficulty, nor differences in theological understanding need stand in the way of making real progress and taking real steps forward in ‘doing good together’ and ‘praying together’, as forms of local cooperative ministry. And nothing does more to demonstrate to non-believing members of the local community that:

- the Church of Jesus Christ is ‘Good News’, & maybe it has
- a message of faith, hope & love (with its many dimensions) worth considering, &
- it offers a series of diverse local communities (congregations) where there is worship, wholesome mutual care, nurture, and opportunities for service.

A rare occasion when churches worked together in evangelism, when in 1997 churches extended an invitation to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association to hold an evangelistic mission in the town.
There have been very few forms of evangelism, and very few evangelists that have been embraced across a wide spectrum of Christian traditions and theological groupings. Even Billy Graham’s ministry was unacceptable to some strands of Christianity, and not everybody would accept the efforts of some evangelistic Popes. The Alpha Course is not everyone’s cup of tea, albeit its success has spawned a whole series of seeker courses which offer an introduction to a Christian Gospel which is orthodox but distinctive. It is perhaps understandable. We seem as a general rule to prefer to do our evangelism from our own congregational base, and maybe that’s largely OK, for it is to the local congregation that we would wish to welcome any who might be seeking.

However, if in a community there are individuals, a team or teams, gifted in effective Godly evangelism, what a wonderful gift God has given to that local community and what a precious resource to share by way of finding ways of humbly learning and being equipped together across the churches. And how wonderful if groups of churches find it possible to invite a person or team to the town so the opportunity is there to learn or offer to welcome to friends and neighbours.

It is wonderful when Christians from different traditions can worship together, expectant that their worship could lead to spiritual renewal. It needs an acceptance that different forms of worship are valid and that it is permissible and potentially beneficial and enjoyable to embrace them from time to time.

Whilst the vast majority of worship services will take place in individual congregations, and take place in the ‘style’ used by that congregation, it is important that on a number of occasions each year, the town witnesses large scale worship gatherings when Christians of the various traditions are found together at ease, and engaged in purposeful creative worship. What is purposeless is a bland form of worship, searching for a lowest common denominator, delivered without a helpful hand. Thoughtless application of liturgy, rigid adherence to a chapel hymn/prayer/preach sandwich format, or a lack of preparation on the pretense of ‘spontaneity’ being the only valid approach, are unlikely to be helpful approaches.

Helping a united congregation into new and different forms of worship is a great gift, and helping congregations from different traditions to be sensitive to one another yet also adventurous is so important. I believe its difficult and rarely are local churches successful in having truly united large scale worship services engaging a broad cross section of the church in the town, embracing those who normally worship in a contemplative mode, & also those whose worship is usually exuberant.
Jesus sets us our highest common factor, and that is ‘worship in Spirit and in Truth’. Christian testimony across the world and throughout the ages would suggest that many different forms of worship can enable worship ‘in Spirit and in Truth’. What a preparation for eternity, if we can learn by experiencing alongside our townsfolk something of heaven’s potential diversity through cooperative worship.

In the months approaching the millennium celebrations, a local Vicar asked that Christians in the town gather each weekday morning at 8.10am to pray for 30 minutes for town and nation. There was a lovely response of folk, mainly senior citizens who faithfully gathered in the Vicar’s church. It was a very interdenominational group, and rather than last for a few months, the gathering continued for over a decade, and the period was noticeably a period when individuals in the town brought vision concerning several ministries including Street Pastors, YWAM discipleship training schools, Feeding the Roofless, ministries which have been marked by their collaboration across congregations and a servant-heartedness amongst a generation of Christian witness in the town.

In my experience, Christians from different backgrounds have little problem in gathering to pray together, providing there is recognition of and space for people to pray in different ways, and without pressure to participate in particular ways. Townwide Weeks of Prayer allow this and somehow, fellowship in prayer can provide a foundation of trust and mutual concern. These are important factors in fostering collaborative identification with and participation in town-wide ministries.

In Wrexham the town churches have also used various schemes whereby Christians are encouraged in their personal daily prayers to share in common programmes of praying for aspects of local church and local community topics.
Undoubtedly in my very localised and time limited (20 years) experience of cooperative town-wide ministry, the most encouraging and heart-warming feature has been the way Christians from different backgrounds have responded to the vision to reach out in compassion type ministries, all of which enable us to mission together, ‘doing good’ in our community.

The exhortation to ‘do good’ is one of the most dominant themes in the Bible, particularly in New Testament.

"But love your enemies, & do good, & lend, expecting nothing in return; & your reward will be great, & you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful & evil men." cf. Matt 5:38-48

For, "the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. ‘He must turn away from evil and do good, he must seek peace. 1 Peter 3:10-12 See also:


In a sense it’s pretty obvious why there is this persistent, call to reach out to do good. A local community will quickly conclude that a faith that is all about preaching & not practicing, is indeed an example of ‘faith without works’ being dead, a church which is in danger of being seen as ‘hypocritically not practicing what they preach.’

Could it just be that only as we are learning afresh the Biblical call to reach out to do good together & to pray together will we be building in our communities the
foundations on which Godly & creative worship & effective evangelism can happen? Happen through a church demonstrating love for neighbour & a Godly beauty in the local body of Christ?

There is a more complete list of these ministries and initiatives in Appendix 2

Progress on any of these areas of collaborative life is unlikely to flourish unless there are the forums in place whereby leaders and activists meet together to share, to prayerfully endorse, to launch and sustain cooperative ministries and to promote support from their pulpits. It is here in a town or community setting you can really exhibit as the Apostle encourages ‘unity of spirit in the bond of peace’, in particular when leaders give these sometimes uncomfortable settings, the highest priority.
In my experience it was very rare for the meeting to be the place where vision emerged, but rather, vision was often brought by an individual or an individual church and the meeting was the place where the whole church endorsed, encouraged and enabled. The enabling might be the agreement of individual church leaders to offer speaking opportunities where vision could be shared, or leaders recommending the their congregations that a gift be given of money, facilities or extra people to join a project group i.e. the secondary forum (a project group or steering committee) that is often necessary to move a project forward from vision to functioning project ministry.

It is through the general churches forum referred to earlier on this page that the local church can dialogue most effectively with those other agencies commissioned to offer public services supplying a ‘common good’, create wealth and wellbeing and keep order in the local society. Scripture speaks of there being a way in which God puts governments in place, so it’s good if there is dialogue. (but always avoiding the ‘capture’ of church by civic government and also church avoiding straying into attempts at political alliances or power). It’s a place for the church to seek to use its prophetic voice.

Another aspect of the church being heard in the public place relates to the time church leaders and ministers remain in the same community. Gone are the days when the church was widely represented on local Councils and similar bodies and research suggests that a senior churchman or organisation needs to be around a fair time before he / it gets a hearing in the public place. Many denominations and their ministers appear to expect to move on after a relatively short period. I wonder whether this important aspect of the collaborative church earning the right to have a voice (perhaps a prophetic voice) by leaders remaining a longer time in the community, requires denominations and their ministers to give this subject further consideration?

One other factor that is likely to be common in all locations, is that cooperative working will need the resource of time set aside by leaders to pray and take counsel of one another. Someone will be required to provide the administrative hub to bring people together and communicate news. This is a resource commitment which will test whether leaders do accept the priority of cooperative working together.

Again from amongst a community’s busy church leaders, there will be those who are called to be willing and able to offer to Chair meetings, to represent the cooperative groupings externally and prepare for meetings with the person fulfilling the administrative hub role and other officers. A prayerfully thought through agenda for gatherings together can be one of God’s most enabling and motivating gifts to the local church. This, when placed alongside effective arrangements to communicate to
congregations and leaders can help ensure a well informed and confident expression of cooperation together. For almost 20 years in our town a forum convened at 8a.m. on a Saturday morning 3 times a year. It proved an effective way of bringing busy committed people together to pray, share vision, learn of progress and move things on. It won’t be the answer for all, but it may be an idea for some!

As mentioned earlier, this ‘with respect’ cooperative agenda can only really have widespread impact if endorsed by denominational leaders and the councils of other theological or ministry associations. Without that endorsement ‘local cooperative ministry’ will at best be patchy, and loyal members of denominations and associations will see their situations as something of a dilemma.

The Lord’s great pattern of prayer is in those most challenging phrases, given us in a geographical setting: ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’. In hallowing the name of God, may we live and work alongside our fellow Christians ‘with respect’, that we might see our Lord’s prayer answered in our community and:

‘God’s Kingdom come, God’s will be done in our local church and community as it is in heaven.’

There are of course contemporary challenges, some which may require a generation or more to pass before we see progress. The growing movement of peoples as globalisation has its inevitable consequences and brings people into the local Christian church from settings very different from the UK. Polish Roman Catholics would find it very strange to work with other denominations, as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland is so very dominant. The churches of the developing world, particularly in Africa have very distinctive forms of worship which 1st generation immigrants may find it helpful to hold onto even if it means some isolation. Indeed we should expect of all immigrant communities a first generation need to associate with those of similar culture and language, just as the British would have retained their communities, clubs and churches when they were migrating or colonising those huge chunks of ‘pink’ on the maps of my childhood. In these connections we need to be patient, understanding, but most importantly, welcoming, available and embracing where and when appropriate, ensuring we ourselves are willing to evolve and expecting to be enriched as and when integration takes place.

Other dimensions of the challenge come as the local community embraces peoples of other faiths, and here some will sense they are called to engaging in dialogue and inclusive activity. Two such opportunities developed in Wrexham Tangnefedd and TCC, Together Creating Communities (see Appendix 2).

One final dimension I would mention relates to the encouragement of cooperation in very dispersed rural areas or very large urban metropolitan areas. Here there are challenges in defining the extent of the local cooperative community. How large, how widespread? Which local authorities and church structures to relate to?
CHAPTER 3.1 Concluding thoughts

When I think back on our experience 20 years ago in being involved with others in establishing a new congregation, I have to conclude how important it was that a young Christian team member suggested that we did the other congregations in the town the courtesy of informing them of what steps we were taking and why. That simple act led to all sorts of good consequences far beyond the confines of the life of that new congregation.

It was meant to be a respectful gesture and in large measure it was received with a generous spirit. Subsequently a number of local ministers from all sorts of backgrounds played a significant role in the life of the fledgling congregation, mainly through their advice, generous contributions and support of our work in those early years.

I guess what I'm asking in this booklet has implications for those well tried and greatly valued institutions; denominational structures, theological associations and alliances and also independent congregations, all of which have been and continue to be used of God to advance His Kingdom.

I am asking that all recognise that the following aspects of God's call stand above all others for both the ordained and the non-ordained Christian:

* the call to live and minister, alongside fellow Christians as part of a local geographical community and

* this primary call, is to be fulfilled collaboratively in the local outworking of God's church in that local community.

We are first and foremost members and leaders in the Church of Jesus Christ in OUR TOWN / COMMUNITY, alongside other Christians & leaders. Meaning there will be times when one’s cooperation in that setting will require (however uncomfortable this might be) to explain that a TOWN / COMMUNITY commitment takes priority over some other denomination, association or other theological alliance matter.

However God's call is authenticated, be its Bishop’s licence, denominational sending, congregational call or is simply a group of local Christians deciding to meet together as a congregation, I am asking that all authorities emphasise and encourage cooperative working and all recognise that the demonstration to the local community that ' these Christians love one another', and will strive with all their hearts to seek the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace is a primary calling, if not THE primary calling when ministering in a local community setting.

More important than making disciples? No. Every church and individual congregation must ensure the Lord’s great commission is never neglected, but has a
central place in all aspects of church life. But insofar as participation in local cooperative ministry is not being practiced and given priority, surely it will impede the work of making disciples for ALL Christians in the locality.

How can I justify saying this?
* Well, if the stones aren't hewn such that they fit together and mutually bear the load, the spiritual house in my town will be less than it should be.
* The body of Christ in my town will be unable to respond purposefully as it is meant to when the head finds the organs and limbs uncoordinated in their response.
* Or in our streets the children squabble and think they alone are the true sons of the Father and have no time or care for other siblings, or their neighbour’s children.

But isn’t it likely that this is just a pathway towards a bland 'lowest common denominator' constraint on individual church leaders and their congregations taking bold and radical initiatives that not everyone gets behind?

I have not found this to be the case but rather cooperation is a good way of saying ‘God bless You’ as someone strikes out with a radical initiative about which you are uncertain. Often for some at a later stage, once the project is demonstrably proven, then it enables those from another congregation to see the good that has been done and to come on board in phase 2. Examples from my town would be street pastors, feeding roofless programmes, pilgrimages, drop in centres. A beautiful aspect of this kingdom environment is to find church ‘A’ having a vision and either at the pioneering stage or later, other congregations actively seeking to encourage any of their members who sense a call to that ministry, to go and get involved. If ever there was a practical demonstration of Christian unity being worked out, that is it. For those for whom denominational loyalty or doctrinal clarity is of the upmost importance I would say it is important for us to recognise that some 90% of each congregation’s life is lived and worked in and round the individual congregation.

Collaborative working will always be a small proportion of the total pastoral, prayerful, worship, evangelism & fellowship life in a community. However, what I am asking is that the 10% which is the locational cooperative part is not 'optional', but rather is recognised by local church leaders & their congregations, by denominational leaders & any other authority structures as being of the highest priority. It is valid to ask, if it is only 10% of a leader or congregation’s life, how can it be so important? This question made me ask whether something I came across in management, could be applied to the spiritual & church life. That something is known as ‘the Pareto principle’, or the 80/20 rule. I discuss this further in Appendix 3 and wonder again – if we by choice opt out of this 10% of our calling to a community, could it be we neglect a most significant aspect of Kingdom?

In these testing times for church leaders and ordained ministers who are asked to look after more and more congregations, there must be a temptation to drop the
cooperative element of ministry. I would suggest that theological alliances, denominations and associations must seek to accommodate this dimension, even though at times and in certain ways it may require the alliance/denomination to take second place in this specific regard.

In looking to make progress, my experience suggests that there is value first in looking for cooperation in ‘WAYS OF DEMONSTRATING KINGDOM IN DOING GOOD AND PRAYING TOGETHER AND LOOKING TO THE DAY creative and diverse WORSHIP TOGETHER can be tackled and then opportunities for appropriate collaboration in EVANGELISM. But meanwhile it is vital each congregation must seek renewal in worship and urgently seek those forms of evangelism which are most effective.

Each local community must seek to find God’s way forward in their situation. For some situations, & when opportunity arises, it may be this order for attempting collaboration should be turned on its head. Father knows best!!

In all this, perhaps the focus is moved to prayer and the mission to demonstrate Kingdom to community rather than looking first for structural unity?

**May we together seek first the Kingdom, with respect.**

And may our choices and the changes 'see all these things added unto you', and that none of the choices or the changes we make, cause or contribute to any to be excluded from the garden.

So may ‘Kingdom first’, the Highest Common Factor be prioritised by collaborative church life in the local community. And is this being seen more and more in many modern day outworking of local Christianity and Church life practiced ‘with respect’ in towns and cities in the UK and across the world?

In this world of changes and choices, may we be part of a Romans 12 church in each local community, diverse & distinctive disciples demonstrating collaboratively:

3 ...I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 5 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is ....then...... 9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.

Romans 12 3-11 NIV
Appendix 1 Extra References, referred to on the pages indicated

From Page 17:

1 John 4:16 NIV
God is love.

John 3:16 & 17 NIV
For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Matthew 16:17-20 NIV
Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

From Page 19:

John 13: 34,35
“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 14:12-14
Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

John 15:7, 9,10
If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

John 15:20
Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.
From Page 21:

1 Corinthians 12

Unity and diversity in the body

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

Colossians 1 NIV

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Colossians 2 NIV

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.
1 Corinthians 3 NIV: The church and its leaders

3 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? 4 For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings?

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. 9 For we are fellow workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.

16 Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives among you? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple

Hebrews 3 NIV

5 ‘Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,’ bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

From Page 37:

Matthew 12:9-14
And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?  Cf. Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; Luke 6:35
John 5:28-29
"...for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, & will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life...."

John 13:34-35
A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another."By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Acts 9:36
Tabitha (Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.

Romans 2:5-11
...God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life;

Galatians 6:9-10
Let us not lose heart in doing good.... So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Ephesians 2:10
For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Philippians 2:12-13
.....work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Colossians 1:10-12
so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God....

1 Timothy 6:17-19
Instruct those who are rich.... Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.....

2 Timothy 2:20-21
....if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17
All Scripture is inspired by God & profitable for teaching...reproof correction.for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work
Hebrews 10:24
And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Hebrews 13:16
And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

James 2:14-21
What use is it...if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing & in need of daily food, & one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed & be filled," & yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

James 3:13
Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behaviour his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

James 4:17
Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth [it] not, to him it is sin.

1 Peter
2:20:But if when you do what is right & suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favour with God.

3:8-13: To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead...
Appendix 2 Town-wide collaborative ministries in one community

Adoption & Fostering Support—workshops, teaching and support to families who adopt or foster children.

ARK Drop In — Providing a weekly drop in for the roofless and needy.

Chaplaincy in Uni/College/Schools—Offering pastoral support, prayer, events and sign-posting.

Christians Against Poverty—Offering advice and support to those in financial difficulties.

Food Bank — Providing food parcels to individuals and families throughout Wrexham borough Monday through Friday in partnership with over 100 local organizations.

Interfaith, Peace & Justice Forum/Tangnefedd - meets to facilitate the harmonious living of all faith communities in North East Wales.

International Christian Fellowship of Wrexham—meetings for international people from all faiths and none. Every Sunday at 1600

Impartial Pregnancy Advice Centre - Providing pregnancy crisis counseling and post abortion counseling in Wrexham, Chester & N. Wales.

Just Across Drop In Centre—Offering hospitality to international folk, with English Teaching, Health Advice and an atmosphere which celebrates our human diversity.

MANNA Book & Coffee Shop— A place to come browse and purchase Christian Books, Bibles, Music, Cards & Gifts or enjoy a light lunch or snack.

Community Cafe—A place to meet and eat in a local community

Rocksalt — Building trust, showing love, developing relationships and sharing God with people in a village.

School Pastors—Taking the presence of Christ to support pupils at High school.

Street Pastors—Taking the presence of Christ to help pubbers and clubbers Friday/Saturday nights.
TCC (Trefnu Cymunedol Cymru / Together Creating Communities) – a diverse alliance of faith groups, community organisations, and schools working together (through training & support) to tackle issues of social injustice in North East Wales.

Wrexham Feeding the Roofless—Church teams provide sandwiches and warm drinks to the roofless on Thursday, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday evenings.

Wrexham Listeners—Offering time and a listening ear to those who just want to share their concerns.

XL Mentoring—pairing trained volunteer mentors with young people in a local secondary school who need help realising their potential.

Youth With a Mission (YWAM)—Training young people to be involved in the community through a variety of ministries, partnerships and teaching.
Appendix 3

Is it possible for an aspect of church life that represents 10% of our life, to be so important?

It seems likely from the Biblical account of Jesus life, that His public mission and ministry occupied just 10% of His earthly life span. Much of His earlier years could well have been occupied by work in Joseph’s carpentry cottage business. We know very little about those earlier years. Was his major role as the eldest son to help Joseph and his family in a daily struggle to put bread on the table for his younger siblings? Was there time for study, and helpful teachers from whom He could learn? Whatever experiences and learning those years contained, the Bible’s record is largely silent, and is confined to just 10% of His time on earth.

In His teaching he left for us, we are left in little doubt that he wanted to emphasise certain aspects of life:

He left us commandments, but chose one as the greatest

He summarised the foundational statement of his teaching by telling us there was something for us to seek as a priority: ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom’

And in His crisis in the garden there was obedience ‘Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’

On the Cross, in His moments of agony there was compassion: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.

His final words to His disciples there was commission: ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Does any of this suggest that in following Jesus there are things He wants us to prioritise? And in understanding more about these priorities, was He suggesting they had the greatest effect?

In business and other professional circles you will hear talk of the 80 / 20 law, sometimes known as the Pareto Principle. Wikipedia states (but there are other accessible and maybe more scholarly sources):
The **Pareto principle** (also known as the **80–20 rule**, the **law of the vital few**, and the **principle of factor sparsity**) states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. Management consultant Joseph M. Juran suggested the principle and named it after Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who, while at the University of Lausanne in 1896, published his first paper "Cours d'économie politque." Essentially, Pareto showed that approximately 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population; Pareto developed the principle by observing that 20% of the peapods in his garden contained 80% of the peas.

It is a common rule of thumb in business; e.g., "80% of your sales come from 20% of your clients."

Examples of its application in various aspects of life include the following:

**In economics:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
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<tr>
<td>Richest 20%</td>
<td>82.70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second 20%</td>
<td>11.75%</td>
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<td>Third 20%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
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<td>Fourth 20%</td>
<td>1.85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poorest 20%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
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**In business:**

The distribution is claimed to appear in several different aspects relevant to entrepreneurs and business managers. For example:

- 80% of problems can be attributed to 20% of causes.
- 80% of a company's profits come from 20% of its customers
- 80% of a company's complaints come from 20% of its customers
- 80% of a company's profits come from 20% of the time its staff spent
- 80% of a company's sales come from 20% of its products
- 80% of a company's sales are made by 20% of its sales staff

Perhaps this just provides us with food for thought as we consider Jesus teaching and whether he calls us towards some foundational or impact priorities. The:

- Biblical pictures of the church and how we relate as church to each other and together to Father, Son and Spirit and
- the aspect of being called to minister and live as part of a geographical community

suggest the fact that although the cooperative aspect of such work may be only 10% of our activity, it is important, and could it just be, that its effect is substantial and significant in its spiritual impact in a community – perhaps another aspect of some inconvenient and sometimes uncomfortable truths? **Finding the Kingdom things we are meant when, where and how to prioritise.**
Back Cover

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