

WESLEYAN CONNECTIONALISM AND NAZARENE ECCLESIOLOGY:  
INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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In our Article of Faith on The Church we begin by saying, “We believe in the Church, the community that confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, the covenant people of God made new in Christ, the Body of Christ called together by the Holy Spirit through the Word.”<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere in the Constitutional section of the *Manual* we use a number of relational terms that speak of the Church as a covenant community that exists in culturally-conditioned forms. In a news release just before our recent General Assembly, General Superintendent Stan A. Toler commented that “It is much more than just a legislative session for the church, . . . We are a *connectional* people [emphasis mine]. We worship, we fellowship together as God's family.”<sup>2</sup> Published a few months earlier, the *Report of the Commission on the Nazarene Future* identified nineteen basic characteristics of the Church of the Nazarene that should be preserved, and Connectionalism was one of those.<sup>3</sup> The Wesleyan notion of ‘connectionalism’ does justice to this understanding of church as a covenantal relationship, in which we participate in the life of the Triune God through Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit. This graced participation is defined in terms of love for God and neighbour—both the people already in the church community and those who are not yet within it. The language of our *Manual* is faithful to the original vision of John Wesley, who believed that the Methodists were “called to propagate Bible religion through the land—that is, faith working by love, holy tempers and holy lives.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dean G. Blevins *et al*, eds, *Manual, 2009-13 Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2009), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Stan A. Toler, “Toler emphasizes connectional aspect of GA,” *NCN Global News Summary*, Volume 1324. June 11 2013, <http://www.ncnnews.com/nphweb/html/ncn/article.jsp?id=10012630> (Accessed 14 June, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> J. David McClung and Kenneth L. Mills *et al*. *Report of the Commission on the Nazarene Future to the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene*, June 22-27, 2013 (Indianapolis), 5. The Report recommended “That the list of 19 characteristics that make us “Nazarene” should be used by the Board of General Superintendents as it determines best.” See p. 13. Connectionalism as a critical value was also listed in the *Nazarene Future Report: A Sustainable System of Global Mission* that was presented to the 90<sup>th</sup> General Board Session on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2013 at Overland Park, Kansas by the Board of General Superintendents; see p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*. ed. John Telford. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 6:291.

According to these [the Scriptures] it lies in one single point: it is neither more nor less than love—it is love which ‘is the fulfilling of the law’, ‘the end of the commandment’. Religion is the love of God and our neighbour. ... This love, ruling the whole life, animating all our tempers and passions, directing all our thoughts, words, and actions, is ‘pure religion and undefiled’.<sup>5</sup>

More explicitly, he believed that “this doctrine [‘full sanctification’] is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.”<sup>6</sup> This is echoed in our own Nazarene understanding of the nature of the church:

The Church of the Nazarene is composed of those persons who have voluntarily associated themselves together according to the doctrines and polity of said church, and who seek holy Christian fellowship, the conversion of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, their upbuilding in holiness, and the simplicity and spiritual power manifest in the primitive New Testament Church, together with the preaching of the gospel to every creature.<sup>7</sup>

During John Wesley’s lifetime, every edition of the *Conference Minutes* listed the ‘Preachers in Connection with the Rev. Mr. John Wesley,’ thus making ‘connection’ a technical term and a critical one for Methodism, emphasising the ‘web of interactive relationships’ that formed its nature.<sup>8</sup> Regarded in this way, connectionalism is more than a form of corporatism, more than simply a polity;<sup>9</sup> it is fundamentally about personal relationships, no matter how much later developments tended to move the focus to impersonal organisation and structure. In the Introduction to *The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference*, Henry Rack reminds us of the key role of ‘conferring’ and an

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<sup>5</sup> *Letters* (Telford), 6: 189.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters* (Telford), 8:238. See also John Wesley, *Minutes of Several Conversations, between the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. And the Preachers in Connection with Him. Containing the Form of Discipline Established among the Preachers and People in the Methodist Societies* (London: G. Whitfield, 1797), 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Manual*, 37

<sup>8</sup> Russell E. Richey, *Methodist Connectionalism: Historical Perspectives*, (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. The United Methodist Church, 2009), 5-7. According to Richey, one of the four ‘marks’ of Methodism is connectionalism; see Russell E. Richey with Dennis M. Campbell and William B. Lawrence, *Marks of Methodism: Theology in Ecclesial Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), ix. A similar point is made by British Methodism; see *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Russell E. Richey, *Doctrine in Experience: A Methodist Theology of Church and Ministry*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 161.

openness to persuasion that characterized the early meetings between John Wesley and his preachers.<sup>10</sup> It highlights the centrality of dialogue between Wesley and his preachers as they tried to discern God's will and direct people in the scripture way of salvation.<sup>11</sup> Eventually the Conference came to have a two-fold purpose: to foster the spreading of the gospel and the consolidation of its fruits by Wesley's system of connectional supervision.<sup>12</sup> For example, in British Methodism it is the Conference that is the "final authority" in all matters concerning the interpretation of its doctrines, emphasising the work of God through community, mutuality and connectionalism.<sup>13</sup> While this is clearly a part of our Nazarene heritage, I believe it needs a fresh emphasis today in order to discern and respond to the needs of 'this present age' in a local, regional and global context. The question for us to consider is whether this understanding has real value and potential for our denomination. Will it truly help us to define our own ecclesiology in the light of the global challenges of the 21st century, which will enable us to faithfully fulfil what we believe to be our mission from God?

In the context of Methodism, Russell Richey writes that "connectionalism and conference structures, when carefully assessed, turn out to embody practices and implicit understandings that stand up to the best in the Christian tradition's notions of 'church.'"<sup>14</sup>

a 'conferencing' ecclesiology looked outward rather than inward. It gathered to disperse. It had an incidental relationship to buildings. It orientated itself regionally to where people lived and worked. There it appointed its meetings and services, using the most public spaces available, including particularly the homes of the faithful and its own meeting houses where existing. It behaved missionally, strategically, evangelistically.<sup>15</sup>

In a letter to one of his preachers in 1767, Wesley wrote, "I will not attempt to guide those who will not be guided by me."<sup>16</sup> This underscored that during his lifetime it was a voluntary relationship and not one enforced by legal constraint. The image was further enriched in his

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<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-), Vol. 10 Henry Rack, ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-), 1 and n.2. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

<sup>11</sup> Wesley, *Works* 10:4-15. It must be admitted that Wesley, in practice, directed the meetings in a fairly autocratic way.

<sup>12</sup> Wesley, *Works* 10:106-07.

<sup>13</sup> Angela Shier-Jones, *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005), 44-49.

<sup>14</sup> Richey, *Doctrine in Experience*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> Richey, *Doctrine in Experience*, 73.

<sup>16</sup> *Letters* (Telford), 5:64.

letter to Francis Asbury in 1788, where he described himself being “under God the father of the whole [Methodist] family.”<sup>17</sup> Richey points out that it was the notion of a ‘family’ headed by Wesley that was so important in Methodism’s beginnings; a people bound together by affection, common rules, shared mission, mutual watchfulness and care. It was capable of expression in a wide variety of ways and was a peculiarly Wesleyan style of organization and spirituality, which emphasised unity, mission, reform, and mutual interdependence.<sup>18</sup> The structural mechanisms were flexible and easily altered in innovative ways to accomplish the mission, which was to reform the nation and spread scriptural holiness.<sup>19</sup> This focus, with love and holiness at the centre, meant that purely administrative and structural matters were of less significance, though never treated with indifference. Central to Wesleyan ecclesiology is an emphasis on the vigour of apostolic life and loving relationships that are non-exclusive and thoroughly interconnected at all levels of the church’s existence.<sup>20</sup> The ‘essence’ of connectionalism is implied by the accounts of the New Testament church in which the apostles travelled extensively and conferred with other Christians on matters of faith, practice and mission.<sup>21</sup> In the light of this, it is worth reminding ourselves of the words of John Wesley:

What is the end of all *ecclesiastical order*? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God? And to build them up in his fear and love? *Order*, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; if it answers them not it is nothing worth.... And, indeed, wherever the knowledge and love of God are, *true order* will not be wanting. But the most *apostolical order* where these are not is less than nothing and vanity.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley believed that if our understanding of the nature of the church was faithful to Scripture, then its functioning and ordering was a matter of prudential wisdom and discernment under the guidance of the Spirit. In all cases, form was always to serve function, thus emphasising love, freedom and flexibility in serving the church and the community.

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<sup>17</sup> *Letters* (Telford), 8: 91. This image of “spiritual father” also recurs elsewhere in his writings; see for example *Letters* (Telford), 8:168. The description was also used by a visitor who met Wesley in 1769; see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley as Seen by Contemporaries and Biographers*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 87.

<sup>18</sup> Richey, *Doctrine in Experience*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> Richey, *Doctrine in Experience*, 163-64.

<sup>20</sup> David Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome: A British Methodist Perspective on the Church*, (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Called to Love and Praise*, Section 4.6.5.

<sup>22</sup> Wesley, *Works*, 206.

Deeply embedded in early Wesleyanism ecclesiology is a theology of communion that is both intensely personal and totally corporate in the experience of salvation. The Church is a commissioned community that is formed by the Spirit from people who have responded to the love of God in Christ Jesus and entered into a relationship with him. One of the most important models of the Church is that of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:12). This emphasises that every part has its own distinctive function, but is also an integral part of the whole and is needed for the health of the whole. Transferred to church structures, it reminds us the church is an interdependent community, because there is only “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4.5-6 NRSV).<sup>23</sup> The essential nature of the church is, therefore, determined by the nature of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We believe in the Triune God—an eternal, loving, communion of Persons—and the whole experience of salvation is grounded in the gracious privilege for each of us to participate in this Triune life through the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is a community gathered as Christ’s body and is essentially relational and social, bound together by mutual love and self-giving interdependence because of Jesus. In this relationship we are called and empowered to ‘be’ his ‘witnesses’ (Acts 1:8) and this involves both ‘being’ and ‘doing’; it involves both transformation/formation into his likeness and going out into the world as witnesses in word and deed to the Saviour (mission). From this perspective, we are ‘called and shaped’ before being ‘sent’ out as witnesses; ecclesiology therefore comes before missiology. The roots of authentic ministry are found in this Spirit-empowered community, not in any organizational hierarchy, program, method or technique.

The Methodists emphasised mutual love and care as they journeyed toward holiness and perfect love.<sup>24</sup> While the leadership role of Wesley himself was very important, as the movement grew the mutual oversight in the societies, classes and bands became ever more vital.<sup>25</sup> This ‘connectionalism’ is intimately linked to the vitality of the missional nature of his movement and is a valid ecclesiological principle that is ‘directly relevant to the Church’s institutional expression of its interdependent nature.’<sup>26</sup> Connectionalism corresponds to the deepest spiritual instincts of all those who trace their heritage back to Wesley and the Methodists, making both congregationalism and episcopalianism unsatisfactory. We are a church that should emphasise interdependence at all levels of organisation, from local groups

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<sup>23</sup> *Called to Love and Praise*, Section 4.6.3.

<sup>24</sup> Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, 18.

of believers through to global corporate ministry structures. Connectionalism stresses watching over one another in love, building one another up in love, and bearing one another's burdens in love, in such a way that we are increasingly formed in Christlikeness, both personally and communally. This 'life together' is gathered around shared values, purposes, and commitments that arise from a common vision of the holy life and its implications for how we structure our engagement with the world around us (mission).

For connectionalism to work, it requires a heavy investment of time and energy in the fostering of relationships. In a world of 'instant communication' and intense time pressures, it is much easier to invest in methods, mechanisms and systems that can be 'marketed' in a wide range of cultural settings with minimal personal engagement. The corporate business model applied to the church as an institutional organisation often seems to be a far more productive and effective way forward, and that is particularly appealing to those raised in a Western setting. This means that the focus of energies and abilities goes into organisational structures and its accompanying accountability structures—with these being devised by the central organisation rather than the local bodies. Richey notes that the tactics of organizational change may work in the short term but they eventually fail because such adjustment in itself cannot overcome the resistance inevitably generated at one or more levels of the organisation. He writes about a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that makes this stress on organisation unlikely to achieve genuine and lasting transformation.<sup>27</sup> In part this is seen when the membership only pays lip service to denominational goals and priorities, and refuses to 'fund' them by their presence, energies, abilities and finances, leading to ever-more desperate appeals to 'get on board and support the program.' This almost always results in leadership being seen in terms of 'power' and accountability running primarily in only one direction—in favour of the leadership group.

There is a further danger in structuring the church for accountability and efficiency: that of turning the living Body of Christ into a 'machine' in which the 'parts' are seen in terms of 'usefulness' and are valued when they operate smoothly and in harmony with the directives from leadership. Richey believes this happens when we develop an overly-structured polity: reducing discipline to over-regulation; reducing mission to influence and numbers, and with all of this resulting in an increasing congregationalism.<sup>28</sup> He notes that bureaucracy, congregationalism, regulatory discipline and capitulation to culture infect every

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<sup>27</sup> Richey, *Doctrine in Experience*, 179.

<sup>28</sup> Richey, *Methodist Connectionalism*, 236.

level of his Methodist church;<sup>29</sup> we are not immune to this in the Church of the Nazarene. The ever-present danger is simply to multiply and centralise the layers of leadership and organisation in the name of efficiency by increasing regionalisation and fragmentation in the name of a measure of localisation and autonomy. This can lead to an unhealthy stress on cultural particularities, that differentiates ‘our situation’ from ‘your situation’, resulting in a suspicion and mistrust of those ‘not from here’. None of this is easy to change.

If the heart of Christianity is about love and relationships involving both God and neighbour, then church life cannot be essentially defined by polity and organisation. In every relationship, trust is a critical element in forming, sustaining and enabling them to flourish. Given the presence of trust, loving relationships are manifested in a variety of expressions, but are all characterised by grace that truly values freedom and flexibility along with forgiveness when it brings hurt rather than benefit. Even in the business world, the observation has been made that without trust it is difficult if not impossible to have effective and productive working relationships.<sup>30</sup> Susan M. Heathfield notes that “trust is the necessary precursor for the following: Feeling able to rely upon another person; Cooperating as a group; Taking thoughtful risks; Experiencing believable communication.”<sup>31</sup> Without trust, it is impossible to foster the “total sense of interconnectedness and interdependence involved”<sup>32</sup> in forming genuine relationships. Parker J. Palmer, writing from the context of an educator, reminds us:

Relational trust is built on movements of the human heart such as empathy, commitment, compassion, patience, and the capacity to forgive. If the inner work necessary to cultivate such dispositions and counteract whatever undermines them is not seen as vital to educational success—and if institutional support for inner work is lacking—then this critical variable is left up for grabs. We know what its fate will be in a culture that is consistently corrosive of trust.<sup>33</sup>

He goes on to say: “Who does not know that you can throw the best methods, the latest equipment, and a lot of money at people *who do not trust each other* and still get miserable

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<sup>29</sup> Richey, *Methodist Connectionalism*, 246-48.

<sup>30</sup> John Castro, (1994) “Trust, teamwork, and business in the 90’s” quoted in Clayton Becton, Allen Wysocki and Karl Kepner, “*Building Teamwork and the Importance of Trust in a Business Environment*” Gainesville: University of Florida Original Publication date 2002, revised 2008, reviewed 2012. Accessed at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>. June 14, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Susan M. Heathfield (2002) “Trust Rules! The Most important Secret”, quoted in Becton, Wysocki and Kepner.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10th Anniversary Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), xvii.

results? Who does not know that people *who trust each other and work well together* can do exceptional work with less than adequate resources? [emphasis his]<sup>34</sup> As Palmer reminds us, to change an institution, you need to change the hearts of its people.<sup>35</sup> This, by its very nature, cannot be achieved by structural change; it requires a change of heart through the work of the Holy Spirit on both a personal and a community level.

In our setting, the key danger is ‘mistrust’ between clergy and laity, between the local church and other levels of organisation. This happens when we relate to ‘strangers’ rather than to ‘family’. David Carter comments that it “betrays a want of grace in the heart and a distrust of the efficacy of the Gospel in the minds of [people]”; it can only be reversed by “a generous and unlimited mutual confidence, disposing to habitual cooperation.”<sup>36</sup> With trust, it is possible to form a genuine connection that lessens the reliance on structures, allows for a more gracious acceptance of representation on committees and other bodies, and allows for divergence of views without breaking fellowship. It fosters a willingness to experiment more and explore new forms of being church. There is less emphasis on legislation and more openness to suggestions; our assemblies would be characterised as places of grace, rather than efficient business meetings. In other words, genuine relationships need to be valued and strengthened in all our connections with each other rather than mere efficiency in administration.<sup>37</sup> This, of course, takes time and effort marked by an investment of ourselves in the lives and relationships of others.

The *Nazarene Future Report* stated that “Mission is the driving force of structure.”<sup>38</sup> This would make the key questions all about the practice and effectiveness in mission. The later *Report of the Commission on the Nazarene Future* stated that “our polity should flow from our ecclesiology”<sup>39</sup> This raises the key question: what truly drives Nazarene polity? Is it theological reflection or pragmatism defined in terms of numerical church growth and influence in more areas of the world? As we have already seen, connectionalism allows for a wide variety of forms and structures. Our shared values, purposes and commitments are capable of being expressed in many ways, but we need to be sure that the ‘means’ serve the ‘end’ and not the other way round. Our organisation/structure/methods must serve the

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<sup>34</sup> Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, xvii.

<sup>35</sup> See Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*.

<sup>36</sup> Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome*, 45.

<sup>37</sup> Richey, *Methodist Connectionalism*, 248.

<sup>38</sup> *The Nazarene Future Report*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Report of the Commission*, 6.

overarching purpose for which we feel God called us—and that is always relational. The constant danger is that we will set in place structures that actually hinder our people from growing in Christlikeness and fully embracing the life of a ‘witness’ in words and deeds.

The issue here is not the word ‘connection’ as such, but the concept that lies behind it. The church as the ‘Body of Christ’ is a thoroughly biblical model that emphasises interconnectedness and interdependence, and rejects the common Western notions of atomistic individualism and independence, as well as the ‘tribalism’ that often characterises other cultures. This is true at a personal level and at all levels of church organisation—currently identified as local, district, field, regional or global. We are not only interdependent as persons, but also as small groups of believers, and as local churches all the way through to the various global entities in our denomination. It is important to reiterate that ‘interdependence’ is neither ‘independence’ (congregationalism), nor ‘total dependence’ (episcopalianism). There is always the need to balance the autonomy of the parts of the body with their interconnectedness. To arrive at and maintain such a balance needs all the guidance, wisdom and discernment of the Holy Spirit in both personal and community life. The Church of the Nazarene should not seek to impose some form of uniformity defined culturally, nor should it favour a segregated diversity of churches that effectively destroys connection. To be truly faithful in mission, it needs the rich diversity of the Body, but always working together in harmony for the health of the whole. There is a genuine place for an authentic expression of church in its local cultural setting that enables genuine engagement with local peoples, as well as a glad embrace of the wisdom and insights of the larger body. In the matter of resourcing ministry, it is surely to be acknowledged that it can rarely be ‘funded’ entirely from local assets alone, but needs the resources of the wider church. This is seen, for example, in such things as the provision of quality education, compassionate ministry projects, building programs, and ministries requiring specialist expertise (and not just finances). There is a genuine place for balancing the autonomy of the ‘local’ church over against the guidance and direction of the larger body for the sake of the glory of God expressed through the overall mission of the church.

We have seen that the Church of the Nazarene shares with Methodism an ecclesiology that stresses relatedness as an essential element in the concept of church, and this relatedness is seen in the principle of ‘connection’. This connection at local levels is demonstrated by an emphasis on fellowship and shared discipline exercised in small groups. It looks outward rather than inward; it gathers to disperse; it strongly believes that the church should be

structured for mission and able to respond innovatively when new needs or opportunities arise.<sup>40</sup> We reject congregationalism and firmly believe that each local church should be linked essentially and structurally to the wider church.<sup>41</sup> It is through the resources of the wider church, whether at district, field or regional level, that local churches are enabled to engage more effectively in their mission and extends their mission into new areas. These organisational levels should enable and empower relationships between local churches facing similar challenges. The danger is that our desire for autonomy (of the individual or ‘our’ group) tends to undermine these wider relationships, and ties are more easily severed except on the most functional levels of management and reporting.

In trying to alter structures without a clear theological understanding, we may put into place arrangements adapted to one cultural setting which are then ‘universalised, and perpetuated in other cultural settings. We always face the challenge of simply promoting the ‘status quo’ of one particular part of the church, or being guided exclusively by the needs of one particular group, to the detriment of the whole.<sup>42</sup> British Methodism reminds us that to be true to Wesley, we need to hold to the conviction

that the Holy Spirit leads the Church to adapt its structures as it faces new situations and challenges. This flexibility is itself an important principle, rooted in Scripture, theology and experience. Methodists, therefore, should not feel the need resolutely to defend the structures of the Methodist Church.... The underlying principles, however, of interdependence and relatedness, reflected in appropriate local, district, and national structures, of small-group fellowship and discipline, and of a flexibility which enables the Church to be more effectively structured for mission, will, it is hoped, be contributed by Methodism to a larger whole.<sup>43</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene at its best exemplifies a family relationship around the globe. For life together, we need to continue to graciously explore our values, purposes, and commitments. It will take careful work to make sure our denomination’s stance on today’s social and moral issues are not divisive, because one sector of the church finds certain topics not to be clearly settled by biblical revelation, or we argue over hermeneutical interpretations narrowly shaped by our cultures and experiences. A similar concern is to be found our varied conceptions of the purposes of our ministry, the goals for which we work, and how we organise ourselves to achieve these. If relationships lie at the heart of the Christian faith, then

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<sup>40</sup> See *Called to Love*, Section 4.7.1.

<sup>41</sup> *Called to Love*, Section 4.7.4

<sup>42</sup> *Called to Love*, Section 4.7.10.

<sup>43</sup> *Called to Love*, Section 4.7.11.

how will we envision and structure religious life so we can pass on the faith to the next generation and with that a heart for our mission to the ‘neighbour’? How will we ensure that our own organisational arrangements do not become another structure of power in our society that impacts matters of justice and equity within the church?

With increased electronic forms of communication and relatively cheap travel for many people, it is increasingly easy to be ‘connected’ and for far-reaching friendships to be formed and nourished. Such a global or regional connection is much more of a struggle in areas of social and economic deprivation, though within these communities a very rich shared life is often evident within the church. This is where the value of such things as Work and Witness, student exchanges, mission trips, and personal service are so invaluable for fostering and developing relationships across the wider church. To make these types of relationships truly effective will need management and administration structures that are elastic and evolving. There is a vital place for innovation, creativity, and new ventures that are capable of being expressed in many forms and structures. There must be openness through the Spirit to non-traditional forms of life and ministry. Our organisation must embrace experimentation and innovation under the guidance of the Spirit and the prudence, wisdom and discernment of the whole church family. To carry this out effectively will need a Christ-like spirit to animate the forms of organisation that we develop.<sup>44</sup> In seeking to find new depths of community and cooperation we cannot rely upon a top-down leadership, nor can it simply come from appointed commissions or groups of ‘thought-partners’ chosen and selected within one particular cultural framework. Learning how to genuinely ‘listen’ to all levels of the church and to allow the ‘least of these’ to have a voice will take hard work and discipline by all of us. At all times we need to clearly remember that ‘means’ absolutely must serve the ‘end.’ We must never lose sight of Wesley’s focus on a ‘collective ministry’ that embraces every person and all of their relationships, within a fluid and dynamic ministry structure geared towards the salvation of all those for whom Christ died, so that “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.... [By] speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.” (Eph 4:13-16. NRSV)

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<sup>44</sup> Richey, *Methodist Connectionalism*, 238.