

COME WALK WITH US, THE JOURNEY IS LONG

EXPLORATION OF THE EMBODIMENT OF VALUES IN URBAN EXPRESSION CHURCHES

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Exploration of the embodiment of values in Urban Expression churches

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ABSTRACT

Urban Expression seeks to plant exciting, grass-roots, transformative ways of being church in inner city neighbourhoods. In doing this they work from a set of values, one of which describes faith as a journey. This essay looks at how this value is worked out in three English Urban Expression churches, focussing especially on the point in people's faith journey when they become involved in a church. Chapter 1 seeks to define what 'faith journey' means and why it is a helpful image to describe faith. In doing this the theme is linked to postmodernity and post-Christendom as well as Van der Meulen's pastoral model of the men of Emmaus and Ganzevoort and Visser's hermeneutical narrative approach to pastoral care.

Field research among church leaders and regular church members shows that the main factor in becoming part of a church is the welcome and support given by other people. The possibility to ask questions and hear different opinions are highly valued. It also suggests that in order to help people move forward on their faith journey Urban Expression teams need to continue to journey themselves and need to be skilled in leading dialogue and handling conflicts. Developing local leadership is a challenge faced by the researched churches and Urban Expression wide, further research into how to go about this would be helpful.

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INTRODUCTION

Before you lies the research report of my research into faith journeys in Urban Expression. Urban Expression is a mission agency focussing on incarnational mission, planting grass-roots, creative expressions of church in urban neighbourhoods, among the poor and people on the margins of society. In doing this they work from values rather than models and it is the embodiment of (some of) these values that has been looked at.

One of these values describes faith as a journey. This value lies at the basis of this research. I'll explore this value and what it implies in chapter 1. But first I would first like to propose the following working definition, with which to read this essay: "Faith journey is the way faith develops in people's lives over the years." This is a very basic definition and I'll look into it in more detail later on.

This research came about in consultation with both Stuart Murray and Oeds Blok, coordinators of Urban Expression in respectively the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, and I'm glad to present you with some results and conclusions in answer to the question:

What do Urban Expression teams need, in terms of embodying the Urban Expression values, in order to be equipped in supporting people on their journey of faith?

This essay begins with a literary exploration of the faith journey theme, which will be considered from both a missional and a pastoral perspective. These perspectives make it clear what it is that makes the image of journey fitting to describe faith. Subsequently, you'll find results of the field research executed among three Urban Expression churches, two of which in London, the other one in Havant. In each church¹ four interviews were held; two with people on the leadership team, two with other people involved in church. The interviews were structured around selected Urban Expression values, as are the results. Lastly, in chapter 3 you'll find conclusions and some ideas for a Survival Guide for (future) church planting teams.

¹ Except for one church in which I couldn't make an appointment with people on the team. There I only interviewed two people from church.

CHAPTER 1: FAITH AS A JOURNEY

*"We recognise that Christian faith is a journey and we are committed to helping people move forward, wherever they are at present."*²

This statement is one of the Urban Expression core values and lies at the basis of this research. The field research focuses on the embodiment of this value in three English Urban Expression churches. The results of that research can be found later on in this essay, but in this chapter we'll first look at what it means to describe faith as a journey. What makes us describe it as such and in what ways does this image help in wording people's faith?

In her book 'Urban to the Core', Juliet Kilpin describes what this value means for Urban Expression teams.³ Most importantly, the notion of faith being a journey erases the 'them and us' division. It allows people to take all the time they need to explore faith and see what it contains. But before they can even start to explore Christian believe, Kilpin argues, people might need to belong deeply into a Christian community. Regarding faith as a journey allows that space to first become part of a community. It takes off pressure for both the one starting to enquire about faith and the church planters. There's no rush in journeying towards Christ.

This value acknowledges that people first enquiring about Christianity, aren't the only ones learning, developing and growing. We are all continuously challenged by the words and example of Jesus, always on the lookout for Gods will in our lives, ever in need of the Holy Spirit leading us. This value reminds us that we're all journeying together and that everyone could be a teacher and a student.

It is interesting to see the place journeys and roads have in stories about people coming to faith and interpreting faith. Two stories in particular represent commonly used ways of looking at faith and conversion.⁴ One is the story of St. Paul on the road to Damascus⁵, the other the story of Jesus' appearance to Cleopas and another disciple on the Road to Emmaus.⁶ Both stories have been found helpful for people to interpret their journeys towards faith. Some describe it as a sudden experience, like when Christ suddenly revealed himself to Paul and caused him to move from being a fierce prosecutor of the church to one of its greatest missionaries and thinkers. Other state it has been more of a gradual process, reflecting the journey of Cleopas and his friend who'd presumably had been interested in Jesus for quite some time and more gradually having Christ revealed to them after walking, talking and breaking bread together.

Interestingly, research suggests that almost two thirds of all people come to faith gradually, taking an average of four year's time.⁷ However, no matter what way people use to describe their journey towards finding faith, we assume that faith continues to be a journey. I'll take a closer look of the Emmaus story shortly, using the image of these journeyers as a model for pastoral

² Kilpin, J. (2013). *Urban to the Core*. Leicestershire: Matador, p. 168

³ Ibid, p. 168-174

⁴ Finney, J. (1996), *Recovering the Past*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, quoted in Murray, S. (1998) *Church Planting, Laying Foundations*, Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, p. 183

⁵ Acts 9:1-19

⁶ Luke 24:13-35

⁷ Finney, J. (1992), *Finding Faith Today*, Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, p.24-25

care. But first, I would like to suggest that there are two ways of looking at the journey of faith: from a missional and a pastoral perspective. However, talking to church leaders and living with a church leading family, I soon realised that in Urban Expression pastoral care and mission often aren't as neatly separated as one would think. In relationships with people on the margins, mission and pastoral care are very much intertwined. So, in describing the two perspectives, please keep in mind that they're also very much connected.

1.1 MISSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The most straight forward way to describe faith journeys from a missional perspective is the journey from someone being a non-Christian to being a Christian. As we will see, this could mean a variety of things and the bold acclimation 'non-Christian' might not be so clear when you look into it a bit deeper. But when we're talking about faith as a journey from a missional perspective, this roughly is what we mean. How did someone come to the confession that 'Jesus is Lord', what has been helpful in growing towards that confession and what events have been crucial?

We'll return to the story of the men of Emmaus when we get to chapter 1.2.2. First, I'll look into reasons why the picture of faith as a journey now seems so fitting for a lot of people. Next, I'll look at what other people have already found as being helpful in coming to faith.

1.1.1 THE TIME TO JOURNEY

Libraries have already been written about the time and culture we live in. I do not intent to add to that multitude, I'm just looking to make some connections between what has been written and the idea of faith as a journey. Two concepts will quickly be singled out, as they are considered to give a good insight in contemporary western culture. First, I'll look at postmodernity and then to post-Christendom.

When talking about mission in a Western context, the most used concept to describe culture is probably postmodernity. Opinions differ greatly on what postmodernity is and how it should be valued. What people do agree on is that postmodernism is the successor of modernism and it is thus often described in contrast to it. Van Beusekom (2000) uses an image of travelling to describe the difference. He argues that modern man resembles a pilgrim. He has a past and a future and is on his way to a better place. His road may not be a smooth way leading to straight its goal automatically, but he will remain orientated on his ultimate destination and be drawn by the future. This goal gives his life meaning and value, and even though there is fun and pleasure on the way, real joy remains lying ahead. Postmodern man, however, is more like a happy and wealthy drifter. He has no travelling-plan, no starting point and no destination. His stay is temporary and without planning. He doesn't have a yesterday, nor tomorrow, he is the present. To him, life is an adventure, it's looking for new and surprising turns of events that move or shock him.⁸

Of course, this is but a rough sketch, but it does show the shift between the two. Modernism was characterised by the Enlightenment, reason, optimism and the ideal of the whole cosmos,

⁸ Beusekom, G. J. van (2000). Ontstaan en betekenis van het postmodernisme. In W. Dekker, & P. Visser, *Uitgedaagd door de tijd* (pp. 13-31). Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, p. 13

culture, society and individuals progressing in a purposeful movement of reason.⁹ It typically tried to rationally heap together all phenomena and reduce them to one basic idea or paradigm and thus enforce one absolute and totalitarian concept of man and the world.¹⁰ Postmodernism, however, is typified as endorsing the resurgence of spirituality (whereas modernity had replaced religion with reason), having lost confidence in rationalism and science and insisting on the pursuit of authentic humanity. All meta-narratives, all-embracing explanations and truth claims, are dismissed as being inherently oppressive. It's relativistic, pessimistic, sceptical, yet playful.¹¹ Postmodern man is characterised by a sense of searching, of wandering. He is a *homo viator* (G. Marcel), often unsure of the direction of the journey and the goal of it.¹²

The second concept I'd briefly like to single out is post-Christendom. There are some similarities between postmodernity and post-Christendom, but they are distinct. Post-Christendom refers to a culture in which the Christian faith and story used to shape and dominate society, but where this faith and its institutions are now (strongly) declining in influence.¹³ It refers to a society in which the Christian story is unknown and churches have no connection to most members of society. It is important to note that post-Christendom does not mean post-Christian or post-Christianity¹⁴. Post-Christendom indicates the end of the Christendom era, in which the church and Christianity were the dominant influence on society, starting from the fourth century onwards, after Emperor Constantine made Christianity state religion. But even though the dominant influence of the Christian faith no longer exists, in post-Christendom there might very well be Christian communities, churches and individuals. "Christendom is dying, but a new and dynamic Christianity could arise from its ashes."¹⁵

The image of faith as a journey links in perfectly to both postmodernity and post-Christendom. The word journey implies movement, searching, exploring. It's a very open and dynamic word that allows change, multiple interpretations and imagination. This is all typical for postmodern philosophy and culture. It's important to note that even though Christians might still hold some of the modern preferences toward the Christian meta-narrative and the Church as an overarching institute, but they are like everyone children of their time and also deeply postmodern. So it is not just non-Christians who are postmodern.

In Christendom Christians were very much at home in the culture that was largely shaped by their story. They were able to settle into it. In post-Christendom however, Christians are more like aliens, exiles and pilgrims. They're no longer at home in a culture abandoning Christian influence.¹⁶ This means Christians are much more of a journeying people themselves,

⁹ Beusekom, G. J. van, (2000), p. 14-16

¹⁰ Meulen, H.C. van der, (2004). *De Pastor als Reisgenoot*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, p. 25

¹¹ Murray, S. (2004). *The end of Christendom*. Retrieved from Anabaptist Network:

<http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/endofchristendom>

¹² Meulen, H. C. van der, (2004), p. 96

¹³ Murray, S. (2004)

¹⁴ Note for Dutch readers: In Dutch we use the word *christenheid* to refer to Christendom (the territorial, institutional, predominant influence of Christian religion on culture and society). We use the Dutch word *christendom* to refer to what the English call Christianity (the Christian faith, traditions and lifestyle). The Dutch translation to post-Christendom would thus be *post-christenheid* and not *post-christendom*.

¹⁵ Murray, S. (2004)

¹⁶ Ibid.

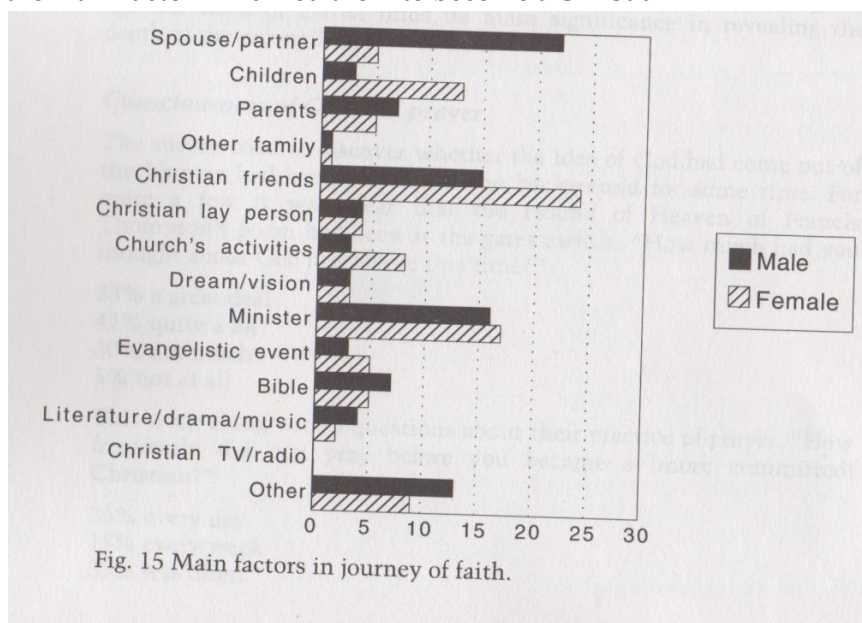
discovering what the Christian faith means in this new environment. It's good to realise this, as it's one of the ways in which faith journeys are mutual for both Christians and new enquirers. Both people who are (relatively) new to faith and people who've been believers for a long time keep on exploring what following Christ means in these new surroundings.

1.1.2 FACTORS LEADING TO FAITH

Faith journey is explicitly seen as continuing throughout someone's life. It's not just their way leading up to faith or someone's development as a Christian. Both are included. However, as Urban Expression is a church planting agency, focussing on under-churched or un-churched areas they are certainly involved in people coming to faith from a non-church background or from having grown up in church but left. That's why I'll also briefly look at what is known about circumstances that are helpful for people to come to faith.

The title of this paragraph '*Factors leading to faith*' might seem to explain faith finding only by sociological and psychological factors. This of course is only part of the explanation. The most important and defining factor leading to faith is Gods Spirit. However, in this paragraph I'm looking at situations, circumstances etc. that God appears to use to draw people to Him. Furthermore, especially in describing faith as a journey the role of sociology and psychology cannot and should not be denied. In joining a faith community these aspects are greatly involved, and when we believe in a Creator God, we also believe he is able to work through creation, including mechanisms in social environments and the human psyche.

In 1992 a research was published in which people were asked what they considered to be the main factor and supportive factors in their coming to faith. I'll briefly sketch some of the found results and reflect on how these link in with what I have found talking to Urban Expression people. The diagram below shows the most important findings on what people consider to be the main factor which led them to become a Christian.¹⁷



¹⁷ Finney, J. (1992), p.36

As the diagram shows Christian friends, spouse/partner and ministers are the most frequently named main factors for people to become a (more committed) Christian. Later in this paper you'll see that especially ministers (and their family) and Christian friends have played an important role in the faith journeys of the interviewed church people of my research as well. Particularly often mentioned is the support given by both leaders and other friends around difficult life events. This has made them feel very much welcomed into the church.

These factors were kept in mind during the research, but deliberately not explicitly mentioned in the interview questions in order to avoid being too directive.

1.2 PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

The value of believing that faith is a journey does not only refer to someone's coming to faith. It also explicitly takes notion of the continuous developing of someone's faith after they start calling themselves a Christian. Supporting people on this continuous journey is closely connected to what one might refer to as pastoral care.

Ganzevoort and Visser define pastoral care as: "caring for people's story in relation to God's story."¹⁸ They suggest pastoral care happens at three levels. The most basic level of care is that of a meeting between people that isn't explicitly meant as care. This is what in church would be called *koinonia* and is a sense of community that cannot be organised, but rather needs to be stimulated. A second level is the pastoral dimension in church meetings, sermons, leadership etc. Whenever these aspects are concerned with people, there's a pastoral dimension. A third level is when volunteers are engaged in visiting people or structurally providing pastoral care. At this level training and coaching is possible, as is providing a structural organisation. In my research, for example, I've come across this level in the mentoring of church partners, volunteering at a youth ministry at school and volunteering at a weekly meeting community for socially isolated people. These are more well thought-out ways of providing pastoral care and can be supported by training. They put growing in faith at this level, so *helping people move forward* on their faith journey would also fit in here. The fourth level Ganzevoort and Visser describe is pastoral counselling; specialised and professional care for people with pastoral questions.¹⁹

As we are talking about faith journeys, it might be helpful to define pastoral care in using these words as well. Van der Meulen (2004) suggest a hermeneutic model of pastoral care based on the story of the men of Emmaus. I'll explore his image of the pastor as travelling companion in chapter 1.2.1. In chapter 1.2.2 care I'll return to Ganzevoort and Visser to look into what they write about narrative pastoral care and try to apply that to the image of faith as a journey. Both the model of the pastor as travelling companion and the narrative approach to pastoral care fit into the hermeneutical pastoral care. Let's first explore what this implies.

Hermeneutical pastoral care is an attempt to honour both psychology and theology as equal partners in pastoral conversation. Hereby it seeks to surpass the antithesis between kerygmatic and therapeutic pastoral care and tries to connect God's revelation and man's experience. The kerygmatic approach focuses primarily on proclamation and lets the message of the gospel and

¹⁸ Ganzevoort, R., & Visser, J. (2007). *Zorg voor het verhaal*. Zoetermeer: Meinema, p. 26

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 26

the commandments determine the whole conversation. Prayer is the centre of pastoral care, especially prayer for the Holy Spirit to work and open both the mouth of the pastor and the ears of the person listening.²⁰ Therapeutic pastoral care focuses more on taking people's emotional life seriously and takes this as its starting point. Whereas kerygmatic pastoral care accents the difference and distance between God and man, therapeutic pastoral care stresses the connection between them. The centre of pastoral care here is healing, wholeness and new life.²¹ The hermeneutical approach tries to value both the story of man and the story of God and seeks to bring both of them into conversation.²²

1.2.1 THE PASTOR AS TRAVELLING COMPANION

One of these hermeneutical models is suggested by Van der Meulen (2004). He uses the image of the pastor as travelling companion, highlighting that pastor and congregation are journeying together. It's a journey of searching and exploring together, the way of collective learning.²³ This is strikingly similar to how Urban Expression uses the value of journeying and so it's interesting to see how Van der Meulen fills this in and how his theory links in with the value.

First of all, Van der Meulen explains that the pastor as travelling companion takes the lead in the learning process. He is responsible for creating the right conditions for people to learn and grow. This doesn't mean that he sets out the entire journey and plans everything. He shapes conditions for the congregation to undertake their own journey. At the same time, he doesn't leave it all to the congregation to figure it out for themselves. This is reflected in what one of the interviewed church leaders says: "Perhaps what I offer is a catalyst to think about that faith side, that spiritual side of life. Without imposing that on somebody else. Being a facilitating opportunity to consider that aspect of our life." So this idea of mutuality, of journeying together is very important. That's why it is stressed that the pastor is one of the men of Emmaus and not the Third who joins them. They are both discussing together, trying to make sense of what has happened.

However, the pastor does take the role of representative of, and reference to, the Third. This is to ensure the journey keeps its goal and doesn't become travelling for the sake of it. These two roles of co-traveller and representative of Christ are also visible in reactions from church leaders. Some focus during the interview more on the aspect of mutual learning, of being a fellow journeyer, whereas others talk more about helping people to articulate their journey and recognising there is a God and exploring what He is like. By addressing the pastor's role as representative of Christ Van der Meulen ensures to do justice to the pastor's expertise and interpreting role, whilst by affirming the pastor as co-journeyer he stresses the mutuality of the learning process. Following I. Baumgartner van Der Meulen suggests five stages in pastoral care,

²⁰ Meulen, H. v. (1999). *Liefdevol oog en open oor*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, p. 12-13

²¹ Ibid, p.13-15

²² Ibid, p. 18-19

²³ Meulen, H.C. van der, (2004), p. 50

derived from the Emmaus story.²⁴ I'll quickly pass these stages by and see how they link into faith journeys and Urban Expression.

*... As they talked and discussed these things with each other,
Jesus himself came up and walked along with them...*²⁵

The first stage is that of coming up and walking along as Jesus does. Finding the other where he or she is at and walk along with them. This seems easy, but it requires the ability to become personal, to really meet with someone. This is essential to truly listen to people, find out what is going on in their lives and connect to them. It is reflected in what one church leader describes as his role in people's faith journey: "Firstly, to listen to people..."

*... He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"
They stood still, their faces downcast...*

The second stage is standing still by what causes the travellers to be downcast. This standing still is a very important part of the journey as it allows space to acknowledge sorrow and loss. Again, this is listening to people and valuing their story. The pastor will need to stand still with the traveller and not hurry along. In Urban Expression this is not only seen in the faith journey of individuals, but also in wider community. They are committed to standing still by what causes communities to be downcast, to see in what ways injustice is being done in communities and to acknowledge that. Also, I would like to suggest that standing still could mean visualising the faith journey. That would not necessarily be standing still by what causes someone to be downcast, but standing still by what is happening on someone's faith journey and/or life journey. This could be both individually, but also in the church community.

*... And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to
them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself...*

Whoever walks along, truly listens and stands still by what's on someone's mind, will eventually have the opportunity to "expound" Scripture, according to Van der Meulen. Sooner or later the moment will come to share the Word of God. Defining is that the proclamation is first and foremost Good News. We'll come across this in Chapter 2.2.4. and see how pastors need to know which of Jesus' characteristics to emphasise in conversation with different people. I would like to suggest that even though the moment to share Jesus' story might inevitably come, that again the pastor as co-journeyer has a role in shaping conditions for this moment to occur and to respond when God gives these opportunities. Also, the fact that the Word of God is first and foremost good news doesn't mean it cannot be challenging. This is expressed by a leader who says part of his role is "to challenge people with Jesus".

*... When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it
and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him...*

²⁴ Baumgartner, I. (1990), *Heilende Seelsorge. Konkretionen und Reflexionen zur mystagogisch-therapeutischen Dimension der Seelsorge*, in: Fürst, W. & Baumgartner, I. (1990), *Leben retten. Was Seelsorge zukunftsfähig macht*, München, p. 89-123. Quoted in Meulen, H.C. van der (2004), p. 53-61

²⁵ This and the following quotes are from the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35

It is suggested that it's not the argumentation and discussion, even as it causes hearts to burn, that enables people to recognise the Risen One, but liturgy and symbols of faith. It is only when Jesus breaks the bread that the men of Emmaus recognise Him. In symbols there is direct, irrational, communication with a different or higher reality. Again, symbolism needs to be used at the right moment and in the right way. It is important to use the same symbolic language as the discussion partner is using, so that it might connect with them.

One example I've seen was when we met for Good Friday, in a dark living room, lit by only a few candles. In reading the story of Good Friday, praying and worshipping around it, there was a returning line saying: "The light grows dim, the darkness deepens." After these words one of the candles was blown out, until we blew out the last candle when Jesus died. We remained in darkness to pray and leave when we wanted. The symbol connected, because there was so much darkness to be seen in the life of church members and in the world. This realisation of the darkness around Christ's death was comforting. Another symbol is described by Juliet Kilpin when she writes about how people could bring a stone with a date on it to remember the date they (again) decided to let Jesus be their Rock.²⁶

... They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem...

The last stage is the return to Jerusalem. After this transformative meeting with the Risen One, the men of Emmaus return to life and their community to share their experience with them. This return to the (church) community is indispensable as it is part of the *koinonia* that signifies the life of the church. This return is probably most visible in the multi voiced character of many church meetings. As we will see dialogue is an essential part of these meetings, and this is an excellent opportunity for people to 'return' and share their journeys. It is also in the returning that the pastor again fully becomes travelling companion and can experience a meeting with God in the other and learn himself.

1.2.2 NARRATIVE PASTORAL CARE

Next, I'd like to sketch a narrative approach to pastoral care. Like the model of the pastor as travelling companion this narrative approach fits in the hermeneutical school and so it tries to connect God's story with the story of people. As we've seen, Ganzevoort and Visser (2007) define pastoral care as "caring for people's story in relation to God's story." In accordance with this definition they propose their narrative pastoral care.

Narrative seems to be connecting with (some of the) Urban Expression churches very well. One of the leaders mentions narrative as being very helpful in finding connecting points with people. She states that it's very foreign for us to start from narrative, we'd rather start from what we should do or believe, but narrative is more closely connected to people and makes faith more accessible. Another leader mentions a bible study method they're using that begins with people's story and from there move to the studied text instead of starting with a Bible text. Narrative is thus already included in some of the churches. In this study I'll try to apply the narrative approach to pastoral care to the idea of faith as a journey.

²⁶ Kilpin, J. (2013), p. 172

Central in narrative pastoral care is for people to learn to retell their life story starting from God's story²⁷. God's story with people is an invitation to see the same life, the same social environment in a new perspective.²⁸ Narrative, poetry and symbols have the potential to call out in-depth perspectives and possibilities of human existence that remain hidden when a more objective language is used.²⁹

Ganzevoort and Visser make use of Ricoeur's hermeneutical circle to sketch the background of their pastoral model. It is suggested by Ricoeur that the relationship between story and reality, including our life story and the reality of our existence, consists of three moments: prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. Prefiguration is the world prior to the story, the world in which the author lives and from which he draws to write his story. Configuration is the world within the story, with its own time, logic etc. Refiguration is the world evoked from the story, the image arising in the reader's mind. The reader or listener can now imagine himself in the story, identify with it and decide whether or not the life depicted there appeals to him. This opens a world of opportunity to the reader, open to try out. This is important for pastoral care, because it shows everybody tries to fit everything that happens to him into a coherent connection, their life story. Pastoral care is thus endeavouring to re-interpret and re-actualise the reality evoked by the ancient stories.³⁰

The stories people tell don't coincide with reality and don't necessarily provide with information about the world outside of the storyteller. What they do offer is a crucial insight in where people are in their lives. In that way stories are windows on their narrator, not necessarily on the world he or she is telling about. Also, stories seek to achieve something, to have an effect. It might even be suggested that they rather create reality than represent it. It's a way of influencing relationships with people around us. It is this communicative dimension, the configuration of the world within the story, that oftentimes keeps pastors most occupied.³¹

So, narrative pastoral care focuses on stories and realises that these stories are always connected to someone's life story. By next putting these stories in the light of God's story, people can learn to re-interpret and retell their story in a new way.³²

The narrative approach can fit in very well with the above sketched model of the pastor as travelling companion. The first stage, coming up and walking along, could be compared to the what Ricoeur calls prefiguration, the world prior to the story from which the author draws to write his story. We could connect this to the Urban Expression value of being an active member of the local community, where the pastor becomes part of this world in which the people he meets live.

In the second stage of standing still by what causes the journeyer to be downcast, narrative will inevitably be used to make clear what it is that is on the journeyer's mind. This brings us to what

²⁷ Kamp, P. van de, (2013, October 4). Levensverhalen en Gods grote verhaal. *De Reformatie*. Retrieved June 8, 2015, from De Reformatie:

http://www.dereformatie.nl/content/files/Bijlagen/89/89_01_Peter_van_de_Kamp.pdf, p.2

²⁸ Ganzevoort, R. & Visser, J. (2007), p. 102

²⁹ Ibid. p. 105

³⁰ Ibid. p. 106-107

³¹ Ibid. p. 109

³² Kamp, P. van de, (2013, October 4), p.2

Ricoeur calls configuration, the world inside the story. It reflects the one who's telling the story and thus it requires for the pastor to listen carefully to both the content of the story and what it implies about its narrator. It might be associated to the Urban Expression believe of "all people are loved by God", this believe requires church leaders to value people's stories and to really listen to them.

Refiguration takes place in the third and fourth stage of expounding Scripture that causes the heart to burn and liturgy and symbol enabling the recognition of Jesus. This is what enables people to re-interpret their story in the light of God's story, to see the new possibilities evoked by God's story and to change the way they tell their own story.

The last stage of return to Jerusalem doesn't neatly fit into Ricoeur's hermeneutical circle, unless you force it into the stage of prefiguration, starting a new circle for the people in church. Rather, I would suggest that this is what completes a pastoral process. Ricoeur's hermeneutical circle is, when adapted to pastoral care, a quite individualistic thing. But in church we confess that even though we all have our own journey with Christ, we also journey together. Could I propose that a pastoral process isn't finished until it is celebrated with the whole body of Christ? Especially in Urban Expression, where the focus on community, on church as family, is so strong this is a great way of marking something of someone's moving forward on his or her journey of faith. I recall one of the leaders saying: "It's not just me and Jesus, but me and all of these people and Jesus."

As we've seen before, the theme of journeying links in perfectly well with postmodernity and post-Christendom. The same goes for narrative. Story is very open and invites people to engage. It calls on people's creative imagination and allows them to interpret the story for themselves. This affirms postmodern man in their tendency to search, explore and move. It is the natural way for people to communicate about their life and interests. Also, in terms of post-Christendom and mission, narrative could be a great way to share the Christian faith, appealing to the postmodern nature of people and the post-Christendom unfamiliarity with the Christian stories. Whereas in modernity dogma and rational explanation of what 'things were like' connected to people, in postmodernity this puts people off (the rejection of meta-narrative). The more open structure of story is now more likely to connect.

CHAPTER 2: RESULTS

This research seeks to map out the concept of ‘faith as a journey’ within Urban Expression churches. Above we’ve seen that this is one of the Urban Expression values that the teams commit to and this research looks at the practical outwork of this and some other values in local churches. The fieldwork of this project was done in two churches in (East) London and one in Havant, near Portsmouth. These churches have been researched by means of interviews with both church leaders and regular church members³³. During my three-month stay in London I’ve been regularly been a part of the meetings of one of the researched churches. General observations from these occasions are also taken up into the results whenever relevant.

The results are structured around the themes that have been used in the interviews, both with church leaders and regular members. That means I will start describing and defining ‘faith journey’ in chapter 2.1. Each interviewee has been asked to define the words ‘faith journey’. Subsequently, the church leaders were asked to describe what they see as their role in supporting people on their faith journeys. Also, we’ll be looking at what it means when people move forward on their journey, which starting points have been found and what the impact of the church has been on people’s journeys.

The second part of the interview was based on several of the Urban Expression values. Leaders were asked to name helpful and challenging values and everyone was asked about how they see certain values embodied in their local church.

Before I describe the data I collected concerning people’s faith journeys, I would like to reassert that I’ve spoken to only so many people and that these results aren’t representative for the whole of the Urban Expression churches. In order to compare these results with the whole of the Urban Expression churches further research would be required.

2.1 DEFINING THE JOURNEY

2.1.1 WHAT DOES ‘FAITH JOURNEY’ MEAN?

In order to get me on the same page with the interviewees I’ve asked them to define the words ‘faith journey’. Below we’ll first look at what church leaders mentioned and then look at some of the replies from other church members.

Interestingly, many of the interviewed church leaders state their understanding of what faith journey means has significantly changed over the years. Typical statements are: “I now think of faith in a broader sense than I used to.” “When I was younger I wouldn’t have thought of faith as a journey, would have seen it as more black and white. Either you’re a Christian or you’re not, either you’re saved or not saved.” This change in the way these leaders look at faith journeys

³³ It might be worth noting that ‘church member’ isn’t a term often used by Urban Expression church leaders. It bears too much of a sense of ‘you’re in and you’re out’. They rather talk about ‘people from church’, ‘friends’ ‘church partners’ etc or call everyone a member. However, for the sake of legibility I’ve chosen to use this term to refer to the people I’ve been interviewing. My usage of the term doesn’t (necessarily) imply any formal membership, it implies someone’s regular involvement with the church, whether that be through attending meetings or (just) relationships and a sense of connection.

also involves a move towards the believe that everyone is on a faith journey, whether you're a Christian or not. "...now I more have a sense that all mankind is on a faith journey and that God is actively involved in every life encouraging people to draw towards Him." This journey of faith is very closely connected to life journey in general. Some even state that it is pretty much the same thing and cannot be seen separately. They also stress the fact that talking about faith as a journey means that it continues throughout your whole life, that it's not just one moment of starting to believe, or even one period of time in which faith has a more prominent role. One leader points out the connection to following Jesus. Following always has elements of journeying, of moving forward, of ups and downs. The analogy of journeying also allows certain flexibility in describing the progress along the way. Faith journeys aren't always (or rather, are maybe never) pretty, straight forward and predictable. Even as people are following Jesus, they tend to sometimes move closer to him and sometimes move away again. Using the analogy of journey recognises this and allows it to be part of someone's faith.

When asking regular church members about their perception of the words 'faith journey', people tend to give quite short and dissimilar answers. It includes learning more about being a Christian, believing in God, dedicating to a church and becoming part of a community. Also people mention helping people out and being nice to others. One of them mentions that to him the confession of believing in God is something that progresses throughout his life and that this faith consists of lots of little moments that define his journey. Upon my introduction that I was researching faith journeys one lady started telling about her faith and how this had influenced her life and decisions. To her faith journey clearly meant her life with the Lord. So, faith journey to people in church often means the way they're learning and living with God.

Next, we'll look at what church leaders see as their role in the faith journeys of people in their community.

In accordance with what Juliet Kilpin wrote³⁴, church leaders stress the realisation that they themselves are on a journey of faith as well. They emphasise that part of their role in other people's faith journeys is to keep journeying themselves and/or journey together. One person called it: 'to be the best kind of follower I can be myself'. Also prominent is the sense of humility and openness to learn expressed by these leaders. They value other people's experiences and expect to be able to learn from them. Furthermore, they highlight incarnating into the community, building community, and helping others become part of the community. By this they refer to both the church community and the wider local community. Another part of what they see as their role in other people's faith journey is pointing out that there is a faith journey or helping articulate it, helping people see God's goodness and offering a catalyst to think about the religious aspect of life.

Summarizing, church leaders state that their understanding of faith journey has broadened. It isn't black and white and it isn't straight forward. It's about following Jesus, with ups and downs. They also believe everyone is on some sort of faith journey whether they're Christians or not and that faith journeys are closely connected to people's life journeys. Church members describe faith journey in terms of believing in God, learning about being a Christian and being part of the church community. To them it seems to be much more of a Christian concept, rather than for

³⁴ See above or Kilpin, J. (2013), p. 168-174

everyone. Talking about their role in other people's faith journeys leaders stress the importance of continuing to journey with Christ themselves. Also, they think of themselves as being a catalyst in people's exploring of faith and interpreting their life and faith journey.

2.1.2 MOVING FORWARD ON A FAITH JOURNEY

The Urban Expression value about faith journey doesn't only state that faith is a journey, but also that *"we are committed to helping people move forward, wherever they are at present"*. In order to define what 'moving forward' looks like church leaders have been asked to define this.

Rightly does one of the leaders state that moving forward depends on where people start on their journey of faith. Moving forward can therefore be different in every situation. It might be noteworthy that the people that I've talked to all state that a substantial part of the people involved in their churches have some kind of connection to church from childhood on or even into adulthood. Others come from a non-religious background or have some kind of spiritual experience, such as consulting a medium. The descriptions church leaders give of what moving forward on faith journeys means are varied. Something that keeps coming back is a sense of growing in love for God and your neighbour. This is often seen as an indication of moving forward. One leader mentions increased fruit of the Holy Spirit, increased confidence in the grace of God's work in someone's life and increased order out of chaos. Having said that, he adds that he is now more weary of using the latter as an indicator of spiritual growth than he used to. When you come from a well balanced background, including a loving relationship with your parents and a successful experience in education, it is a lot easier to find balance in your own life. Judging spiritual growth (only) by the degree of order in someone's life, misses a lot of the point of what Christ does in people's lives, he argues.

This is reflected in what other leaders say as well. They tend to stress the observation that 'moving forward' isn't always the case. Faith journeys aren't straight forward and aren't an always ascending ladder. They stress that these journeys take a lot of time, that you don't always move forward but sometimes get stuck and that change happens phenomenally slow. One of them suggests it might be as much about journeying with Christ as it is about the changes he brings about in our lives. Moving forward has, for these leaders, a lot to do with being part of the (church) community. It is about sharing your life, struggles and worries, supporting each other in that, praying for one another and starting to increasingly see God in your own life and the life of those around you. Someone also adds growing in confidence and regarding yourself as loved, valuable and worthy as part of moving forward on a faith journey.

To survey the meaning of moving forward on a faith journey for church members, I've asked them to describe their faith before they became involved in their (Urban Expression) church and their faith at present. Also, they were asked what they've found helpful and what has been challenging on their journey to where they are at present. All interviewees describe their faith journey from before they became involved in church to where they are now in moving from little to no faith to a strong faith at present. The people in church, both friends and leaders (who are also described as friends) have been very supportive for them on that journey.

Everyone I've talked to had some connection to church and/or Christianity before they became part of the Urban Expression church they're now part of. Most of them were raised a Christian

and went to Sunday School as a child. Similarly, most of them told the church farewell at some point or state that even though they went to church, they “didn’t really have a faith” or did have a faith but didn’t express it. They all state that their faith has grown or become much stronger since they’ve been part of their church. When asked what has been helpful on their way from where they were to where they are, they greatly value the support given by people from church, both leaders and other members, in living through both beautiful and hard times. This support is often reciprocal, as expressed by one lady: “I pick people up and they pick me up”. Another often repeated remark is that the interviewees find that even though they’ve already learned a lot, there still is a lot for them to learn. This learning concerns both the Bible and Gods character as the practicalities of following Jesus in day-to-day life and becoming more Christ-like. The shared prayers, Bible studies and other conversations have been very valuable to most interviewees, but some find that the difficulty of the Bible was something that made their growth challenging. For someone else world problems, like wars and natural disasters, and personal losses were a challenge in growing in faith.

Church members were also asked how they became involved with the church. For all of them it was through a relationship with someone in church. For some people it was because of the children’s activities and because their children were friends with the minister’s children or other church children. One couple became involved after the church’s minister took their father (in-law)’s funeral and they wanted to find out what’s been so important for their father. Other people were invited by friends or acquaintances.

Next, they were asked to describe what made it easy and difficult for them to become part of the community. Interestingly, but maybe little surprising, they found the people of church to play a key role in that. They were welcomed, accepted and they got to hear different people’s opinions, which were all valued. One man describes the church as having a friendly atmosphere and feeling like family. A lady from the same church affirms this, saying: “[The first time] I walked in [one of the church leaders] welcomed me with open arms and kissed me on both cheeks and it was just the family atmosphere of that group of people in her living room that was really appealing to me. The way that they were a big extended family that loved each other despite all the oddities of them and they were such a eclectic bunch that I was just like “I love these guys!” There was a real family vibe. It’s really indescribable.” Another thing that made it easy for people to become part of the church community was the possibility to ask questions and to discuss different subjects.

At the same time it’s also the people making it difficult to become part of the church. For one lady struggling with depression, it was difficult to be around people anyway so church was no exception. Another lady found that where other people’s openness and vulnerability was very appealing to her and made her feel very much at home, opening up herself and being vulnerable herself was very difficult. Other than the people no real difficulties are mentioned, people seem to have blended in really easily.

One of the important implications of the value of faith as a journey is the mutuality in learning between both church leaders and other people. That’s why church leaders were asked about what they’ve learned from their community and in what way they’ve been helped move forward on their journey. Interestingly, the leaders were all very capable of naming occasions when they’ve learned from their communities. This includes moments when people were modelling faith whilst living through difficulties, being great examples of celebrating life events and

trusting in God. Someone stated that his community has taught him that holiness doesn't necessarily mean behaving well, but that following Jesus can be very radical and revolutionary. The community has also caused his understanding of God and church to grow bigger.

Church members were also asked to think of an occasion when they helped someone else grow in their faith. They mention friends they have invited to come to church, teaching (their) children or young people about God and people at work who know that they are Christians. One person mentions that his church leaders often find his remarks: "absolutely incredible". Somebody else talks about how they all learn from each other in church and how learning in her church is always mutually.

In one of the preparing conversations with Oeds Blok, coordinator of Urban Expression in The Netherlands, he proposed the hypothesis that faith journeys mightn't be very well visualised or articulated in churches. This was taken up into the research by including a question for church leaders about it.

They indeed state that they don't explicitly visualize people's faith journeys very well. One of them doesn't find this strange, because they live so close together that it is difficult to see the change from that close. He compares it to a family in which you don't really talk about growth, because you're such a close witness of it. The opportunity of dialogue in weekly meetings also provides a place to share about your faith or life journey. Somebody else thinks they could and maybe should visualise journeys better. At present the only marking points on someone's journey in his church are baptism and church partnership. This church partnership is a sign of commitment to certain tasks in the church community such as helping make decisions, working through conflicts well, worship together regularly etc. Another church doesn't work with membership or church partnership, but draws from the Baptist tradition of having an annual renewable covenant. Every year they call a meeting during which they talk about their life as a community and commit themselves to God and to journeying with God and one another for another year. So deliberate visualisation of people's journey in the church community are mostly limited to baptism and church partnership or an annual commitment to the church. More often people are individually encouraged about their faith journey and thus this journey is informally and individually acknowledged.

So, we've seen that moving forward on a faith journey is described in terms of growing in love for both God and one's neighbour, growing in fruit of the Spirit, increased confidence in God's grace and increased order out of chaos. However, moving forward isn't always the case. The journey is with more ups and downs than a smooth straight line. Some suggest it's more about journeying with Christ (whether that be forward or not) and sharing your life with the (church) community.

People became involved in church through relationships with ministers and other church people. Often children have played a role in that, either through friendship or activities organised by the church. It's also the people that made it easy for people to become part of the church community by offering a warm welcome and a space to ask every possible question. At the same time meeting people and opening up to them can be difficult in becoming part of a church. Still, people are mostly very positive about the welcome in church and the sense of feeling at home there.

2.2 URBAN EXPRESSION VALUES

The second part of the interviews was about the practical visibility of some of the values in Urban Expression churches. First church leaders were asked to name values they found helpful in helping people move forward on their faith journey and which values they found challenging. This was the only question that was added for the church leaders. All the other themes were discussed by both leaders and church members. Subsequently, we'll look at how some of the Urban Expression values are embodied in the researched churches. These values were included in the research because I thought these would be most linked to faith journeys and to people becoming part of the church communities.

2.2.1 HELPFUL AND CHALLENGING VALUES

The leaders all named different values they've found helpful. One found the permission to fail value most helpful. Even though he, in his own words, "hates failing", it is an important and helpful value. For somebody else the underlying idea of following Jesus was most helpful and the values they as a church had defined. These values are based on the Urban Expression values, but not exactly the same. A third leader found the incarnational value most helpful, especially since he'd seen different people trying to plant churches in his area and not really integrating into the community and thus not really connecting with the local community. The value of incarnating into a community helped this leader and team to really engage with people that would probably not have engaged with any other faith community. Linked to that is what someone else mentions as the believe that God is already at work in a community and that teams are moving in to find out what He is doing and join in.

They don't find any value particularly unhelpful, but there are values that are more challenging. One of the leaders talks about challenges in working with other churches. They've tried hard to build relationships with churches around them, and that's mainly worked out quite all right. But the area they're in is difficult for churches and some (established) churches feel the challenge of "keeping the show on the road". This challenge in some cases translates into feeling threatened by new churches. Another challenge is the value of 'we know we are not indispensable'. This value is appreciated, but sometimes difficult to live out as there are "few people that can be relied upon". The level of chaos in a lot of people's lives prevent them from being able to uphold consistency in what the church is doing. This is reflected in what another leader says about developing local leadership. I'll return to that in chapter 2.2.5.

Another leader notes that the extreme of every value is unhelpful. He especially mentions the value of humility and its extreme of cynicism. Humility is very good, he says, but the danger is that you become cynical and don't value what is going on. They are very aware that they are a small and fragile community, even insignificant in a sense. They value this smallness, but also need to look out for becoming cynical. This leader also notes that the value of faith as a journey can itself be challenging for people's faith journeys. It might make "bold proclamation" difficult, because of the focus on walking with people and building relationships. The sense of urgency and challenge can be lost in the value of being relational and is thus can be difficult.

So, there wasn't really any consensus about helpful or unhelpful values. Probably all values have their weaknesses when taken to the extreme or when they're isolated.

2.2.2 “ALL PEOPLE ARE LOVED BY GOD”

We believe all people are loved by God, regardless of age, gender, education, class, ethnicity, sexuality or physical/mental health.

Both church leaders and other members were asked to describe how they saw this value reflected in the everyday practice of their church. Firstly, leaders all note that people with all the different characteristics mentioned are, or have been, part of their churches. This does not mean, as one of them states, that they have the embodiment of this value sorted, but it does indicate that they are a welcoming place for all kinds of people.

One of the ways this value is expressed is through a sense of humility. A leader mentions how they are “very light on telling people what the Word of God says about their life”. They much rather invite individuals to explore it themselves and see what they feel the Word of God might say to them. This humility is also displayed in their tendency to “move away from the idea that the central leadership of the church knows the truth and the laws and the right things to do”. Dialogue and the ability for everyone to speak are also mentioned as indicators of this value. Most importantly, leaders emphasize the importance of being an accepting, open and welcoming community, listening to people and valuing them and their opinions. One very specific example of what this looks like is given by one of the leaders who mentions a Bible study method they use. It’s called Unlock³⁵ and is especially designed for people with low literacy. Unlike most methods, Unlock starts with the story of people and then moves to Scripture in order to connect their story to Jesus’ story as an attempt to be more accessible to people with different educational backgrounds.

Another attempt to show this value is the tendency of the researched churches to keep their boundaries blurry. They don’t talk about church members, because that sounds “too much like you’re on the list or you’re not”. One church enables people to become church partners another uses an annual renewable covenant to indicate commitment, but not exclude anyone.

The leaders affirm that this value is helpful for people to move forward on their faith journey because change is only possible in an environment where you know yourself to be loved, both by God and other people.

The church members most significantly notice the effect of this value in the love they experience from other people in church. They are supportive, welcoming, understanding and the relationships aren’t limited to the time of meeting, but lasts throughout the week. Striking is the number of times church is referred to as family. People find that church “doesn’t give up on you” and “understands what you’re going through”. For one lady this was expressed by a visit from a church leader after her husband had unexpectedly left. The minister was on holidays when this happened, but came to visit her straight from the airport, jetlagged and all. To this lady it was an expression of the love shown by the church. People talk about how the people from church are always available to help or comfort. Another lady recounts how this value also turned upside down the teaching she experienced growing up in a church where God’s love seemed limited to

³⁵ See: *Unlock Resources*. (n.d.). Retrieved from Unlock: <http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk/resources.php>

people that did good and were good. She now learned that God's love really is for everyone, that it's unquestionable. "It is that unfairness of grace, that upside down nature of grace, that everyone is equal."

Another notable observation is that people, both leaders and other church members, mention the possibility to disagree. They highly value the different opinions and views that are held by the church members and see these opinions as great opportunities to learn. Likewise they value the way they argue in church. It's alright to disagree, but the discussions or conflicts are worked through well.

So, this value is embodied through humility on the part of church leadership, not putting down lots of rules and affirming their own need to keep learning. Dialogue is also very important in this, it allows everyone to speak during meetings and all opinions are valued. Churches try to keep their boundaries blurry and thus be open and welcoming for everyone. Remarkably often people refer to church as family, this sense of togetherness is seen as an embodiment of this value. As is the diversity of people in church. The fact that all kinds of people are present in their churches shows this value as well. Lastly, this value is seen in the possibility to disagree. All opinions are valued and respected, this is another sign of the belief that God loves all people. This value helps people move forward on their faith journey, because an environment of love is imperative for people to change.

2.2.3 LOCAL COMMUNITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

We believe that, in Jesus, God is revealed locally, and that we should be committed to our local community or relational network and active members of it.

We believe that the gospel works through relationships and that serving God consists largely in building life-giving relationships with others.

These values were included in this research because a very important distinctive of Urban Expression is their focus on locality. So it would be interesting to see what this looks like in practice and how it affects people's faith journeys. The belief that the gospel works through relationships and that building relationships is a vital part of serving God is included pretty much for the same reason as the value discussed above in 2.2.2. was included. It's easily assumed that these values are important for people to feel welcomed into a church community and a central part of starting to move forward on their faith journey. During the interviews it turned out that these values were so closely connected that either people found it difficult to answer both questions or that I felt like they had already answered both questions so I only asked one.

To the interviewed leaders commitment to the local community is indispensable for faith journeys. One of them explains it like this: "If we see the faith journey as not being just about the Christian, but encompassing everyone, making disciples of everyone, then you have to be part of a community other than the community of saints." Someone else says "It's about living alongside people and seeing them in their day to day. That makes it possible to do some of the other things and seeing God at work in people's lives and pointing that out." If you don't live alongside people of the community it is impossible to see God at work in their lives and to point that out. Someone else points out that locality, the culture and people of a certain community, can teach us about

God. All researched churches are very actively involved in local politics and local projects such as youth clubs, counselling at local schools, practical assistance in gardening, DIY, etc, and social care.

When asking church members about the local community they started to name all sorts of different activities the church is involved in. They collectively agree that this is a very significant part of what they do and are as a church. Someone says that because she's lived in the community all her life, it feels good to put something back into the community through the church. In some interviews I've added the question if the involvement in the local community has taught the church members anything about God. One of them says: "That's what God did. He was there helping people in the towns, wasn't He?" Someone else says it has taught her that God wants us to reach out to people and to encourage them that there is a God. A lady states that helping out in the community has made her understand vulnerable people better and has helped her pray for them. One lady explains how people she has met have pointed her to God, even people who aren't Christians. She has seen that all people are made in God's image and seen God's nature in the way people love each other. She sees an element of God in people she's working with. It's "that wanting to have every voice heard and that loving and respecting everyone that's involved, in that regardless of their background, that I can see God in the most. It's caring for marginalised, making sure they're being heard, it's standing up for that old lady who isn't brave enough to tell people to stop berating her about loans and things like that. It's that bit that although we have different faiths and backgrounds, that shared compassion and care for people who are downtrodden, who are in difficult circumstances, where I see God."

One leader concisely states that "the only way the gospel works is through relationships!" He sees this in the way people are supporting each other when they're going through a rough time, how they're laughing and eating together, "even" praying together. Someone else gathers it under "loving your neighbour". She sees it in the way people are living at peace, sorting out conflicts well, building up friendships with people who are different in terms of faith and ethnicity. She sees it in people's generosity when they're sharing even though they don't have much themselves. She refers to the gospel as being the good news of shalom in the place where we are, she sees it in a level of trust, vulnerability and generosity among people in the church and community.

Church members start telling all sorts of stories when talking about how they see the gospel working through relationships in their community. Someone refers to the way people are practically looking out for each other by providing physical or social support. Someone else suggests that through the involvement of church members in the community people can see that what the church does is actually good and thus these relationships help overcome prejudices against the church. This is one of the ways someone else sees the gospel work through relationships: through these relationships she's acquired more compassion for the people around her and feel for them, rather than judge them. This, to her, is part of what the gospel is. A lady shares that when she swears she always says "forgive me Lord". One of her friends, even though she is not a Christian, has now started to copy her in that. Likewise, she has always wished their children God's blessing when they left the house or went to bed. Her children are now doing this as well. These are ways she sees the gospel work through relationships. Linking in to the next chapter, she also mentions a friend who would always mention the Lord, but never in a preaching way. This has sparked her interest in God and helped her explore faith. This

seems to be a way of seeing the gospel work through relationships for more people, there's several stories of people who have been invited by friends or acquaintances to come to church.

So, commitment to the local community and seeing the gospel working through relationships are indispensable for faith journeys according to the interviewees. If we see faith journey as encompassing everyone we need to be part of communities other than Christian communities. We need to walk alongside people to see what God is doing in their lives and to help articulate their journey. Also, locality can teach us about God, about his character and about the people he has created. Someone points out that it can also help people in the community overcome prejudices against the church, when they see what the church does for the community.

It's easy to see how churches embody these values as they're often very active in local community through politics and all sorts of activities. It's also, again, visible in the support people give each other in the church and community. Seeing the gospel working through relationships is often through friendships, people sharing about God and people starting to copy behaviour.

2.2.4 COMMUNICATING JESUS APPROPRIATELY

We focus on under-churched areas and neglected people, trying to find ways of communicating Jesus appropriately to those most frequently marginalised, condemned and abused by society.

Urban Expression is committed to people on the margins and planting churches that connect with them. Naturally, communicating Jesus appropriately is a vital part of that and essential for people to move forward on their faith journey.

For one of the churches dialogue is clearly a key element in communicating Jesus appropriately. Their meetings consist of mostly dialogue and this gives people the opportunity to learn. One of the leaders suggests dialogue is the only place where people change. "Dialogue is where people change. Mostly when we read the Bible we read the things we already know are in there, but not particularly the challenges. Similar to when we listen to preaching it's rare that we actually change our perspective. Either it re-enforces our position or we say we don't agree with it."³⁶ Another leader from this church agrees it's about dialogue, conversation and offering thoughts. He sees himself as someone who could be a catalyst for people to explore who Christ is. In this whole process of dialoguing mutuality is very important. Each participant partakes as a learner, not just as a teacher.

The same church is now exploring afresh what it means to communicate Jesus appropriately. They've recently changed the way they're doing church and in a process of exploring how to move ahead. Previously, they had been meeting in a child centre. One of the reasons this worked effectively, was that it was a shared community place, a third space. This neutral place made the church more accessible for people in the community.

Another part of communicating Jesus appropriately is having low, or no, hierarchy. This allows people to fully participate in what's going on in the church. This also links in with the value of

³⁶ This is part of his answer to the question about the "all people are loved by God" value, but it closely links in to this subject and what he shared in answer to this question as does it resemble what the other leader from this church notes on the subject.

being part of the local community. One of the leaders states that in order to communicate Jesus appropriately, you need to know who you're talking to. That way you can aptly choose which of Jesus' characteristics to focus on. She gives three examples of people she meets in her community: When you're talking to Muslims it helps to talk about following Isa, and about who he is. They remember him from the Qur'an and that gives you an easier starting point. When talking to someone from a fairly well balanced background, she would focus on the radical nature of following Jesus and how he subverted the status quo. A third group of people to address are people from a poorer white working class background. To them the message of how Jesus was often found with people who were on the margins of society might link in.

While interviewing I quickly discovered that 'communicating Jesus appropriately' was a somewhat abstract phrasing to which people sometimes didn't really respond. On several occasions I have therefore elaborated on the question by asking about how people had heard Jesus stories in church and what they had learned about Him.

One lady talked about her friend who would always mention the Lord to her, but never preached. This was very important to her. Other people also express their dislike of being preached at. The interactive nature of many of the church meetings and the opportunity to ask questions are highly appreciated, as are the different opinions that are displayed. For one person reading the Bible together has been a good way to tell her about Jesus, and another talks about both showing the practical love of God and the church and pointing out Heaven in people's lives.

So, in communicating Jesus appropriately dialogue, interactive meetings and the opportunity to ask questions are very much appreciated. For one church it used to be important to meet at a 'neutral' place. Low or no hierarchy is also a way of communicating appropriately. Most importantly, to communicate Jesus appropriately you need to know who you're talking to.

2.2.5 LOCAL LEADERSHIP

We believe in discouraging dependency and developing indigenous leadership within maturing churches that will have the capacity to sustain and reproduce themselves.

This value is included because taking leadership roles can be a sign of, or create the opportunity for, moving forward on someone's journey of faith. And again, this is an important characteristic of Urban Expression, desiring to plant grass-roots churches rooted in local culture and community. However, even before I started interviewing I had been told that local leadership was a challenge throughout Urban Expression.

Leaders express a passion for developing local leadership, but at the same time they're struggling to bring it about. One of them makes clear that they haven't found enthusiasm to lead things. They find people struggle with low confidence and just don't think they can do it. At the same time she doesn't want to blame it only on people's lack of confidence or readiness. She adds that they have not known how to go about it and that there don't seem to be a lot of people talking or thinking about it. Most churches have the most able, obvious, confident and gifted people to lead, not people who might have the right gifts but have them more hidden. Someone else describes how people in his community live very chaotic lives, so they have their hands full with that.

One leader thinks aloud when she suggests that people don't feel able to lead church meetings because of the way they are now shaping meetings. Often someone would first share something after which people have the opportunity to respond and talk about that. She thinks people might not feel comfortable with doing that themselves.

A very important way that these leaders do try to develop this local leadership is a very low hierarchy and decision making based on dialogue. Everyone has, at all points, the possibility to speak their mind about things going on in the church or community and their say is valued. One leader expresses this as follows: "Being a multi-voiced church is very important. What you're essentially saying is: 'What comes out of someone's mouth when we're meeting, whether that person be ill, broke, or whatever, that might very well be God's voice'."

Another means used to help develop local leadership is ensuring someone has a back up. For example, if someone is assigned to cook for a meeting, they will always make sure there's someone available to step in should the first person for some reason not be able to make it. This works quite well, but it does mean you need some extra preparation, since you need to find two people for every task rather than one. It shows that this value of developing indigenous leadership is something they're really passionate about, but needs intentional planning and organization.

Through the interviews with church leaders two examples of indigenous leadership came forward which I would like to share here. The first is from a lady who's now involved in leading the monthly practical support the church gives to people in the community, such as gardening, painting and other DIY-jobs. Before the day when the jobs are actually done, she visits the people they're going to help to get an idea of what is needed. She then calls or messages people from church to see if they're going to be helping and makes sure there are enough hands. One of the team members is available for help and support and joins her in visiting. This task was assigned to her because effectively, she was already leading when they were doing these jobs. She's hardworking and encourages others to do so as well. She leads by example and she was committed to helping before she was leading. People would follow her, because she was already leading by doing.

Another example is from a couple who have lived on the same estate all their lives, and are now part of the church's core team. When they became part of the church they were "perhaps more time rich, but economically poor and being part of the church community has meant that they've got some things together in life." Recalling how she became part of the church leadership she tells me how they were always actively involved in church, helping with tea and coffee, clearing up afterwards etc. Very importantly, she shares, they had the time to get stuck into it. Now it's more difficult due to their fulltime jobs.

When talking to church members about local leadership there's different responses. Two of them confirm that church leaders have been talking about that to them, but that they aren't sure about it. Three others explain how they see local leadership and how they're involved in that.

One lady starts laughing when I mention local leadership and confirms that church leaders have been talking to her about doing a leadership course, but that she doesn't want to do it yet. She wouldn't mind doing it, but just not yet. She says: "I don't think I could give as much to God as [the church minister] can. But, I think with the right training I should be all right." On my

question what she would want to give and she feels she can't give right now she answers that she's not confident enough. Also, she feels she needs to know more about God and Jesus and things that have to do with the Bible. "I just need that bit of confidence and understanding to do it." She feels that more knowledge of the Bible would give her more confidence. She adds: "and trust in God, He obviously knows what I need."

The person I've mentioned above, who's involved in leading the practical help to the community, states that at first she would panic over leading at that. Now she doesn't do that anymore, because she has experienced that she can talk to other people about it for help and be sure for people to respond to that.

From another church someone states that the most obvious distinctive of local leadership is the low hierarchy and transparency in church. Everyone is involved in decision making and are encouraged to lead. The church leadership really acknowledges everyone's skills and gifts and champion people in using them.

So, where developing indigenous leadership is a challenge among Urban Expression churches, dialogue, low hierarchy and providing support and back up seem to be helpful in developing it.

2.3 ADDITIONAL REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

When using semi-structured interviews and participating observation there's always things you find out but weren't looking for. Interviewees start walking side tracks and tell you all sorts of stories you didn't expect, but sometimes can be very illuminating. Also, during my three month stay in London I've been a part of one of the researched churches, attending weekly meetings, monthly gardening jobs and a weekend away etc. As such I feel I've caught a good glimpse of what this church looks like.

My first observation from the interviews is how often people refer to dialogue and discussion as one of the most valuable parts of church and how they appreciate different opinions. One church member describes it as follows: "I go to a Bible study on Thursday evenings and even though we don't always agree about everything, it's never hostile. I've learned from other people's opinions. That's why I like to talk to people about faith, because you can always learn." According to what I've been told, in all three churches there can be heated discussions but a very important part of expressing the value that all people are loved by God and seeing the gospel work through relationships is sorting out conflicts well. So, conflicts aren't avoided when they arise, but they do place great emphasis on sorting them out well.

Secondly, I noticed that planters from all three researched churches have been living with the same community for at least 10 years and some of them even longer. Again, I don't know if this is similar throughout Urban Expression, but it's interesting. It seems these leaders find this long term commitment important. One of them refers to church planters he's seen coming and going over the years and stresses that it takes a long time to really build relationships and to get to know a community.

Thirdly, I would like to point out the role of children in the church I attended in London. The meetings are often very interactive; people have the possibility to share prayers, experiences from the past week, questions etc. In all this the children have the same opportunities as adults

to contribute and often use this opportunity more than adults. Allowing the children to make a contribution to the meetings has created a great opportunity for everyone to see what it means to “believe like a child” and to learn from them.

Lastly, it is striking how often people refer to church as family. They take care of each other when they’re having a hard time, they pick each other up when they fall. People express that they can always count on the church to be there, even though you might not have seen them for weeks.

2.4 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

2.4.1 WHAT DOES ‘FAITH JOURNEY’ MEAN?

Church leaders mention that their understanding of ‘faith journey’ has significantly changed compared to how they used to see it. Some of them wouldn’t have thought of faith as a journey in the first place. Others only saw it as only learning and growing as a Christian. Now they tend to stress everyone is on a faith journey, whether you’re a Christian or not. They also state that faith journey is very closely connected to life journey, going through every aspect of life. Church members describe faith journey more in terms of learning about being a Christian, believing in God, committing to a church, helping people etc. For them as well it goes through their whole life.

In their relation to other people’s faith journey leaders underline that they need to keep journeying themselves and that this is a joint activity with other people in church and the community. Building community is another part of what they see as their role as is pointing people’s faith journey out and offering a catalyst for people to consider the religious aspect of life.

Moving forward on a faith journey isn’t always the case, sometimes it’s more about journeying with Christ than actually making progress. It goes with ups and downs. Generally, moving forward can be seen in growing in love for both God and one’s neighbour and increased fruit of the Spirit.

Relationships have proved to play an important part in both people becoming involved in a church and moving forward on their faith journey. The warm welcome offered to new people and the support provided in both good and bad times makes it easy for people to become part of the church.

2.4.2 HOW ARE THE VALUES EMBODIED?

The belief that all people are loved by God is mostly embodied in humility and dialogue. It means that leaders don’t suggest they know everything and that they invite people to explore what God wants for their lives, rather than giving their own suggestions. Dialogue is a great means to provide people with the space to ask questions and show them they’re loved and valued. Another way this value is embodied is by keeping boundaries blurry, so that everyone who would like to become involved can do so. People often refer to church as a family, this sense of connectedness also shows the belief all people are loved, as does the diversity of people in church. Lastly, the possibility to disagree is also seen as an embodiment of this value. It helps

people move forward on their journey of faith, because an environment of love is the only place where people change.

Commitment to local community and seeing the gospel working through relationships is visible in the variety of ways in which churches are actively involved in their communities. It's found to be important because it's the only way to witness people's faith journeys and to know how to connect to them. Also locality teaches about God and enables people to see Him in their own lives and lives of people around them.

Communicating appropriately is closely connected to commitment to local community and relationships, as it is vital to know who you're talking to in order to communicate Jesus appropriately. Again dialogue, interactive meetings and the opportunity to ask questions are ways of ensuring this. For one church it meant meeting in a neutral place, held by the community. Low hierarchy also seems to be a way to ensure appropriate communicating as it prevents people from feeling like they're being preached at.

Low hierarchy is also a way of developing local leadership, by letting people have a voice in decision making. Church leaders have a passion for local leadership, but are struggling to really build it. What does help is ensuring there's a back up for people when they're leading and providing support.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR A SURVIVAL GUIDE

Having seen all of the above, how could the main question for this research be answered and what suggestions for a Survival Guide for Urban Expression teams come from it? Let's first look at some short conclusions:

- Faith journey isn't necessarily Christian. Everyone has a faith journey. Moving forward on someone's faith journey is seen as more distinctly Christian.
- Church leaders tend to define faith journey broader than other church people.
- People and relationships are vital in both people joining church and moving forward on their journey of faith. You need to know the people you're talking to in order to communicate Jesus appropriately.
- Both leaders and other members lay great emphasis on learning. They all find that there's always new things to learn in church and are very eager to learn.
- Moving forward on faith journeys is mostly marked by big steps like baptism or church partnership. Smaller steps are discussed weekly, but often not explicitly visualised or celebrated. An annual renewable covenant seems to be a possible way of regularly marking faith journeys.
- Dialogue is vital in both becoming part of a church and moving forward on a faith journey, as is sorting out conflicts well.

3.1 ANSWERING THE QUESTION

What do Urban Expression teams need, in terms of embodying the Urban Expression values, in order to be equipped in supporting people on their journey of faith?

Based on both the field research and studied literature there's several answers to this question. Of course, I've only included a few values in this research, so there could be much more.

The first answer is that the teams need to continue to journey themselves. They need to be a travelling companion who continues to be open to learn and grow in faith. As travelling companion s/he is also representative of Christ and needs to listen to people's stories and help them retell their story in the light of God's story.

Secondly, they need the other people in church, since interview results suggest that the diversity and possibility to discuss different opinions are vital for people to move forward on their faith journey. So they also need possibilities and the ability to create dialogue and to have conflicts sorted out well.

Thirdly, leaders seem to have a great passion for developing local leadership, but find it difficult to structurally bring it about. It might be worth looking into this in more detail as it seems to be a challenge throughout Urban Expression. So far, I have seen that low hierarchy and having a voice in decision making is a way of having local leadership on a small but very achievable scale.

Also, when asking people to start taking up leadership roles it is very helpful to ask them to do something they're already doing, but expanding that. Providing with back up and someone to talk to when troubles arise are essential.

3.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR A SURVIVAL GUIDE

Urban Expression is working on a Survival Guide for (future) teams. This research aimed to provide suggestions on what to include about faith journeys. The conclusions I've drawn aren't exclusively about the value of faith as a journey, but I'll focus on that for the Survival Guide suggestions as was agreed. However, some minor remarks on the dialogue and diversity and local leadership conclusions will be included.

3.2.1 CONTINUE TO JOURNEY

Leaders have stressed the necessity of continuing to journey themselves. Obviously, everyone has their own way and preferences of doing that, but here are some suggestions. Staying in the theme of journeying one could revive the ancient tradition of pilgrimage, prayerfully journeying towards a sacred place. There are all sorts of different routes to walk and places to visit, but why not go on a pilgrimage in your own neighbourhood? Revisit places where you've experienced God's love, where you've witnessed a miracle big or small, places where you've felt God's compassion for your neighbourhood, places where people you've met (used to) live. Thank God for his faithfulness and the things He has done and pray about things that trouble you.

Some questions to consider on this home pilgrimage are:

- What made you return to this place? What experience makes it special? Bring back as many details as you can and prayerfully reflect on them.
- What has the experience of this place taught you about Jesus? In what way does it influence your walk with Him at present? What has changed?
- Which questions are raised by (the memory of) this place?
- Praise God for the things he taught you about himself in this place and ask him to speak to you again.
- Where does this prayer and reflection lead you next?

A variation could be to visit places of significant importance for your life story and pray through those places and events that have shaped and changed your faith, especially when people state that their understanding of faith journey has changed considerably.

Another possibility is to use this as a means of visualising people's faith journey by doing this with another team member or someone else from church. Ask each other these questions and expect Jesus to join you as you walk and discuss.

As co-journeymen teams need considerable hermeneutical skills in order to help people retell their story in the light of God's story, but also to tell God's story in the first place. As we've seen narrative connects to people very well, but why not get creative with narrative? I recall a re-enactment of the Exodus story whilst being with an Urban Expression church which was very effective in bringing the story to life and opening new perspectives. Bibliodrama, retelling

biblical stories in your own words or in a contemporary context, reading stories with people from different (religious) backgrounds can all be ways to re-explore the familiar stories.

3.2.2 DIALOGUE AND DIVERSITY

Connected to the value of faith journey and emerging from this research are dialogue and local leadership. As this research focuses on journey I won't look into these themes deeply and merely suggest some directions to consider.

Diversity and hearing different opinions has been found very helpful for people to move forward on their faith journey. So leaders need to be skilled in leading dialogue and appreciating diversity. This requires an intrinsic curiosity and openness to other people. It's the before mentioned expectation to be able to learn from the person opposite you. To some extent this is an attitude you need to have, but leading dialogue can certainly be learned and practiced. The most important skill in leading dialogue is, obviously, asking open-ended questions and probing questions. Examples of these questions are:

- What was the most unusual/instructive/uplifting (etc.) thing you've experienced last week? What made it unusual/etc.?
- What's your opinion on ...?
- What is it that makes this so important to you?

A fun way to introduce the theme of questioning in the Survival Guide could be the game of 'Only Questions'. Two people, standing opposite each other, are given a location or a subject which they can only discuss by asking each other questions. As soon as one fails to return a question he's out.

Connected to dialogue and diversity and also occurring from this research is the need for conflict management and mediation. There are lots of people who've thought about this. Miroslav Volf, for example, has thought of forgiveness and reconciliation from a theological perspective. On a more practical level Joseph Grenny has thought of how to handle 'crucial conversations'. He found that essential in conversations that involve opposing opinions, strong emotions and high stakes, is the story you tell yourself about the situation. This story decides your reaction to the situation. Your ability to respond in a constructive, non-violent and non-silent, way is determined by the extent to which you're able to change the story you tell yourself.³⁷

3.2.3 LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The last subject arising from my research is local leadership. Based on what I've found I don't feel there's a lot I could suggest for the Survival Guide. I would like to propose supplementary studies by another student or Urban Expression itself. This research could look into some best practices and challenges in local churches, evaluate the importance of local leadership (for example in relation to the value that *"God's Spirit blows freely and so we will not assume our work*

³⁷ See: Grenny, J. (2012, Dec 14). *Crucial Conversations*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuJgqTs-G44>

should continue indefinitely.”) and learn from other churches and organisations developing leadership. It might be worth looking at Robert Doornenbal’s dissertation called ‘Crossroads’.³⁸

³⁸ Doornenbal, R. (2012). *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with a Special Focus on ‘Missional Leadership’ and its Challenges for Theological Education*. Delft: Eburon.

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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Assignment	: Graduate research “Faith Journeys and Urban Expression”
Version	: 1.3
Date	: 3 Feb 2015
Authors	: Juliëtte Pol
Commissioner	: Urban Expression UK (Stuart Murray) and Urban Expression NL (Oeds Blok)

1. Immediate cause

The commissioners are Urban Expression UK and NL. Contact person for the Netherlands is Oeds Blok, for the UK Stuart Murray. After our first conversations we decided to research ‘faith journeys’. It’s very interesting for both local and national Urban Expression teams to know where people are in their journey of faith and what’s helped them to get there. A lot of the people involved in UE come from a non-Christian background and somehow started their journey of faith. To UE it’s important to know how pioneers can accompany people on their faith journey and to know what is and isn’t helpful in this.

I decided to contact Urban Expression because of my interest in missional church, especially after the minor Missional Presence that I did last year. Urban Expression is creative and experimental in her approach of church and is looking for a new future for the church. Whatever my job will be in future, it’ll always somehow be connected to the church. That’s why I expect this research to contribute to new images of how church can remain relevant in a changing society. Another reason to contact UE was that I was looking for an organization working in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. I wanted to do my research for an organization working in both countries in order to compare developments and see what both contexts can learn and contribute to the other’s situation and experience. At first Bettina van Brummelen and I were going to do the research together, Bettina in the Netherlands and I in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, Bettina isn’t able to start her graduation research yet, so I’ll start in the UK and in September Bettina will do her research in the Netherlands.

As stated before the research area will be faith journeys. After Bettina and I suggested to do our graduation research for UE, Oeds and Stuart suggested some research areas out of which we chose this. Further initiative for the project is ours. Recently there has been a research in the Anglican church about reasons why people are leaving the church. The researchers compared reasons for this given by both clergy and church attendees as people who left the church. These reasons turned out to be fairly different on several occasions. Urban Expression is on the other side, where people aren’t leaving the church but joining. The Anglican research made Stuart wonder if there would be a difference between reasons Urban Expressions team would give for people joining their churches and reasons these people themselves would give. That’s one of the main questions in this research.

2. Research question and goal

With this research I’m hoping to shed some light on the relation between pioneers (UE teams) and the people they’re trying to reach. Both are on a journey of faith, but they’re at a different stage in their journey. I hope to clarify what both parties can offer each other and what they need of each other in terms of values. I’ve chosen to narrow the research down to values because UE has already formulated a set of values that articulate what Urban Expression

pioneers want to do, or rather who they want to be. These values are a great starting point for this research.

Also, I'll look into what pioneers think people need from UE and what these people themselves need from UE.

The main question for this research is:

What do Urban Expression teams need, in terms of embodying the Urban Expression values, in order to be equipped in supporting people on their journey of faith?

This research aims at providing UE with information and a resource to improve their support of people on a faith journey. This information will be gathered in a survival guide for UE teams explaining what could/should be their focus in supporting and providing some ideas to put this into practice.

Relevant key concepts are:

Urban Expression: Urban Expression is a mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams, pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian church in under-churched areas of the inner city.

Urban Expression is committed to incarnational ministry on the margins and amongst the poor, and encourages teams to move into urban neighbourhoods to work with others to pioneer exciting, grass-roots, transformative way of being church which seek God's kingdom of justice and peace.

Urban Expression invites team members to move in and get involved; to build relationships, listen carefully and learn from others; to discover what God is already doing and join in!³⁹

Urban Expression values and commitments:

NOTE: I'll make a selection of values and commitments to research.

Humility

We acknowledge our dependence on God and affirm our continual need of prayer and God's empowering Spirit.

We believe that all people are loved by God, regardless of age, gender, education, class, ethnicity, sexuality or physical/mental health and that God works through all believers – and others besides.

We respect others working alongside us in the inner city and are grateful for the foundations laid by the many who have gone before us.

We want to learn from others, seeking to shape what we do in light of the experiences, discoveries, successes and mistakes of fellow-workers.

We are careful not to drain other local churches of their often limited resources, but hope to be an encouragement and support to them.

We realise the importance of living uncluttered lives, holding possessions lightly and recognising that all we have is to be at God's disposal.

³⁹ Website Urban Expression UK <http://www.urbanexpression.org.uk/>

We know we are not indispensable and what we attempt to do is part of a much bigger picture, so will try to keep ourselves in perspective.

Relationship

We believe that, in Jesus, God is revealed locally, and that we should be committed to our local community or relational network and active members of it.

We believe that the gospel works through relationships and that serving God consists largely in building life-giving relationships with others.

We recognise that Christian faith is a journey and we are committed to helping people move forward, wherever they are at present.

We focus on under-churched areas and neglected people, trying to find ways of communicating Jesus appropriately to those most frequently marginalised, condemned and abused by society.

We challenge the trend of some Christians moving out of the cities and encourage Christians to relocate to the inner cities.

We believe in doing things with and not just for communities, sharing our lives with others and learning from others who share their lives with us.

We see teamwork, networking and mutual accountability as vital, recognising that individuals and churches need each other.

Creativity

We recognise the importance of taking risks and the demands of mission in the inner city, and we believe that it is acceptable to fail.

We value courage, creativity and diversity as we try to discover relevant ways of being church in different contexts.

We believe that questions and theological reflection are important as we learn together and so discern the way forward.

We aim to be catalysts, encouraging and releasing creativity in both church and community as we seek and share God in the inner city.

We believe in discouraging dependency and developing indigenous leadership within maturing churches that will have the capacity to sustain and reproduce themselves.

We are excited that God can be discovered in the heart of the city and commit ourselves to explore various forms of prayer and worship that are appropriate here.

We realise that God's Spirit blows freely and so we will not assume our work should continue indefinitely.

Commitments:

We are committed to following God on the margins and in the gaps, expecting to discover God at work among powerless people and in places of weakness.

We are committed to being Jesus-centred in our view of the Bible, our understanding of mission and all aspects of discipleship.

We are committed to seeking God's kingdom in the inner city, both by planting churches and by working in partnership with others in mission.

We are committed to a vision of justice, peace and human flourishing for the city and all its inhabitants.

We are committed to uncluttered church, focused on mission, rooted in local culture and equipping all to develop and use their God-given gifts.

We are committed to unconditional service, holistic ministry, bold proclamation, prioritising the poor and being a voice for the voiceless.

We are committed to respecting and building relationship with other faith communities and averse to all forms of manipulation or erosion of liberty

Faith journey: This term is used to show that everyone keeps on developing their faith. There's not a point in life when you can say you're there in faith. There are, however, different 'stages' of 'phases' in faith journeys. This research focuses faith journeys prior to people identifying themselves as followers of Jesus.

Survival guide: How do I survive Urban Expression? A guide for UE teams advising them in supporting people on their journey of faith. The term 'survival' suggests a minimum. The guide seeks to provide the bottom line for Urban Expression, what is absolutely necessary in terms of missional values? We can do with more, but we can't do with less. Urban Expression is already working on this guide. This research will provide with some information for the teams on faith journeys.

Sub questions:

- What's the vision of UE teams on faith journeys? Which role do they wish to play in people's faith journey?
- What do UE teams do to support people on their faith journey?
- In what way does the pioneer believe he/she can support people on their faith journey? - How do people view Urban Expression?
- What are similarities and differences between pioneers' view on their faith journey and non-pioneers' view on their faith journey? What consequences does this have on the way UE works?
- What does someone on a faith journey need from UE?

Osmer

What is going on?

Why is this going on?

What ought to be going on?

How might we respond?

3. Results

The end result of this research will be a research report and section of the survival guide for UE teams (that Urban Expression is already writing) on supporting people on their faith journeys. This report will be directed to Oeds Blok and Stuart Murray, both national leaders of UE. The survival guide will be for UE teams locally in both the United Kingdom and Netherlands. This should be a very practical, hands-on document. Everything will be written in English.

4. Activities

The project will be divided into five different stages.

Definition

Graduation course at the Christian University of Applied Sciences Ede

Orientation on project and subject.

Start writing a research proposal

Design/Preparation

Preliminary investigation to Urban Expression and their setting. For example by reading "Urban to the core" by Juliet Kilpin, conversations with Oeds and Stuart, studying the website, UE values etc.

Finishing the research proposal

Literature research on faith journeys and (relevant) Anabaptist theology

Design interview questions

Execution/Realization

Interviews with pioneers, people on faith journeys, etc.

Research to answer sub questions

Draw conclusions

Start writing survival guide

Consolidation

Discuss results

Offer survival guide.

In consultation with Henk Bakker, my research coach, I suggest to choose 3 to 5 places to focus my research on. There I will interview both pioneers and people on a faith journey involved in UE. Depending on the size of the community I will interview 1 or 2 local Urban Expression team members and 2 or 3 other people involved.

5. Time

Even though preparations already started in September, the project will run from mid February until the end of May. The first few weeks will be used for orientation on living in London, Urban Expression as an organization and getting acquainted with the way UE works. I'll fly to London on February 21st and start the research on 23 Feb.

March and April will be used for the actual research; interviewing and literature studies etc.

In May I'll focus on appropriation account and drawing conclusions. Also this will be the time when I'll work on the survival guide.

Deadlines:

March 20	literature (faith journeys, Anabaptist theology, church planting?)
March 27	Interview design
April 17	Interviews + interview coding
May 1	Additional literature
May 8	Conclusions
May 22	Guide + complete document (final deadline)
May 29	Return home from London

Please find my planning in diagram below at page 7.

For Christian University of Applied Sciences Ede

Apply for graduation	Week 23: June 4 2015
Concluding conversation/ Personal Development Conversation	Week 24
All grades in IRIS (240 ec)	Week 25
Graduation	July 2 2015, 19.00-20.30

OR

Deadline end results to assessor	Week 32: Thursday 6 Aug 2015
Apply for graduation	Week 36: Tuesday 1 Sept 2015
Concluding conversation/ Personal Development Conversation	Week 37
All grades in IRIS (240 ec)	Week 38: Thursday 17 Sept 2015
Graduation	1 October 2015, 19.00-20.30

Planning

	March					April					May			
	wk 9	wk 10	wk 11	wk 12	wk 13	wk 14	wk 15	wk 16	wk 17	wk 18	wk 19	wk 20	wk 21	wk 22
literature														
interview design														
interviews														
coding														
conclusions														
guide														
presentation														
TEAMSDAY										Family over				

6. Money/hours

Expenses made for this project will presumably mostly be for travelling to and from the different Urban Expressions in the UK. We haven't talked about whether these are on my account or on Urban Expression. There is no allowance for this project.

I've got assigned 630 hours for this project and there should be 12 hours of coaching and/or support from the commissioner. Also, I'll be talking to people both volunteering and working for UE, so I'll ask some time investment from them too.

7. Quality

The results of this project will have to meet the graduation standards, as stated in the university documents. This, among others, means that the complete document cannot exceed 45 pages, language should be professional and the document should be complete. Further quality requirements that need to be met are in the area of (professional) knowledge and insight and the correct usage thereof, attentively taking and substantiating a stand, purposefully, adequately and relevantly gathering and processing data, and being able to draw reliable and relevant conclusions.

Also, communication about the research with the commissioners, coach and other people involved and my own learning process are areas in which I'll need to safeguard quality.

Evidently, an important quality requirement is that the research will have to meet the standards and expectations of Urban Expression, represented by both Stuart Murray and Oeds Blok. One of the quality demands they make is that the end result needs to be practically useable for local Urban Expression teams.

8. Communication

Our first inquiries were through Skype and email. This will probably be the case for the entire project. In the UK there will be possibilities for me to meet with Stuart and other Urban Expression people.

Communication with the research coach from school, Henk Bakker, will also mostly be through Skype and email.

9. Organisation

I am responsible for this project and I'll take the lead in the process. In the UK Stuart Murray is available for support and help and Henk Bakker is research coach.