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Being Good Neighbours

Placing Methodist Manses for Ministry

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Abstract

The role and contribution of manses to mission and ministry in contemporary Methodism are largely ignored or taken for granted. This situation may have arisen because manses are primarily private spaces, providing a home for ministers and their families. Such a focus limits consideration of decisions on where best to place manses and the implications for community ministry. This paper examines the locations and neighbourhoods of manses in England, and considers whether and in what ways they allow or constrain mission and ministry. Findings indicate that most manses are not well placed to address Methodist priorities towards communities experiencing poverty and social marginalization.

Keywords

Community Engagement, Marginal Places, Ministry of Presence, Social Distancing, Stationing

'Where are you?'[1]

Introduction

Many religious organizations provide housing for their clergy and Methodist manses are, first and foremost, private homes for ministers and their families. For that reason, guidelines for manses express the Church's care and support for ministers' households and their day-

[1] Gen. 3.9. Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the NRSV.

to-day lives.[2] Manses are also places of work and should include a study, space for the minister to meet with colleagues and conduct pastoral counselling and marriage preparation for example, as well as parking for visitors. In these ways, manses make an important, often hidden contribution to local church life and ministry. Methodist manses also play a key role in facilitating an itinerant system whereby ministers and their families can move, relatively smoothly, between appointments. As far as is known, however, little has been written about manse living or its relevance to mission and ministry.

One line of inquiry, following Winston Churchill's oft-cited comment 'We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us', might explore the views and experiences of ministers and their families as they occupy different manses over the course of their active ministry.[3] Dan Pierce, for example, reflects on what might distinguish the domestic life of Christians from that of other faith traditions, and how faith might be expressed through home-making.[4] Churchill's observation can be generalized to community or neighbourhood settings and rephrased to read: 'we shape our places and our places shape us'. This aphorism offers a wider context for consideration and draws attention to everyday experiences in city neighbourhoods, suburbs, housing estates, and villages.

Residential decision-making – the choice or lack of choice about where to live – is a key process in the formation and transformation of places, communities, and personal identities, most strikingly seen in processes of gentrification, immigrant settlement, urban flight, and White exodus from racially mixed suburbs. Such decisions express who we are by where we live and with whom we share our neighbourhood, segmenting residential areas along socio-cultural, economic, and ethnic lines, particularly in urban settings.[5] One consequence is that households in affluent and poor areas lead increasingly separate lives.[6]

We might have expected place-based theologies to reflect on the differentiation of residential neighbourhoods, the ways in which they are constituted and reconstituted, and the impact on communities living there. Christian theology is necessarily contextual because of the particularity in time and place of God's revelation and incarnation in Christ. Understanding the particularity in time and place of human experiences and communities – relationships, customs, identities, activities, and meanings – also has practical relevance for shaping ecclesial and missional endeavour, especially in polarized societies. A particular consideration for religious organizations is whether housing for their clergy is in the best place to fulfil their priorities and how the placing of manses might allow or constrain ministry.

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[2] The Methodist Church, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, Volume 2* (Norwich: Methodist Publishing, 2020), 621–23; The Methodist Church, *Property Handbook: Guidelines for Manses* (London: Methodist Church House, 2018).

[3] House of Commons Debate, 28 October 1943, Vol 393, Col 403 http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1943/oct/28/house-of-commons-rebuilding, accessed 10 June 2021.

[4] Dan Pierce, 'At home with God: towards a Christian theology of home-making', *Theology and Ministry* 3 (2014).

[5] Tim Butler, 'For gentrification?', *Environment & Planning A* 39 (2007), 162–81.

[6] Danny Dorling, *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Still Persists*, revised edn (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 200–4.

Despite a flurry of books on theologies of place since Walter Brueggemann's *The Land*, the placing of clergy housing and the significance of urban residential patterns for mission and ministry are not widely referenced in theological understandings of place.[7] In his reflections on the Church of England parish system, for example, Andrew Rumsey[8] does not problematize disparities between wealthy parishes and poorer parishes in the distribution of stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy, paid and unpaid lay workers.[9] Nor does he consider the preferences of Anglican clergy for parish appointments in the south of England rather than those in the north.[10] Yet such inequalities are difficult to square with the Apostles' commendation to care for poorer congregations (Rom. 15.25–26; 1 Cor. 16.1–4; Gal. 2.10) or with the Church of England's commitment to redistribute its resources, including ministerial resources, towards areas of significant socio-economic deprivation.[11]

The deployment of clergy may have unintended missional and pastoral consequences for mainstream Christian denominations.[12] Neil Cockling contends, for example, that financial considerations for stationing Methodist ministers may lead to contrary outcomes for the positioning of ministerial resources.[13] Although the Methodist Church operates a Connexional or national approach to ministerial deployment, stationing decisions are largely determined by the health of Circuit finances and the needs of congregations that will become the prospective minister's pastoral charge.[14] As a consequence, ministers are stationed where they can be afforded and concentrate their duties accordingly, rather than being deployed where they are needed most to fulfil the Church's mandate to reach out and nurture discipleship.

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[7] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (London: SPCK, 1978); Craig Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Leonard Hjalmarson, *No Home Like Place: A Christian Theology of Place*, 2nd edn (Portland, OR: Urban Loft, 2015); John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (London: Routledge, 2016).

[8] Andrew Rumsey, *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place* (London: SCM Press, 2017).

[9] Tom Atfield and Jayne Parry, 'The poor will always be with you: an assessment of the re-distribution of resources within two Church of England Dioceses', *Practical Theology* 5 (2012), 321–39.

[10] Madeleine Davies, 'Clergy flock to fill posts in "wealthy" South-East', 2014 https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/7-february/news/uk/clergy-flock-to-fill-posts-in-wealthy-south-east, accessed 10 June 2021; Joanna Moorhead, 'Vicars needed: the Church of England's fight to fill its vacancies in the North', 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/15/vicars-needed-church-england-fight, accessed 10 June 2021; Olivia Rudgard, 'Bishop: Church "abandons" the poor because clergy won't leave middle-class areas with trendy coffee shops', 2017 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/03/bishop-church-abandons-poor-clergy-wont-leave-middle-class-areas/ accessed 10 June 2021.

[11] Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985). Commission on Urban Life and Faith, *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

[12] Michael Hirst, 'Clergy in place in England: bias to the poor or inverse care law?' *Population, Space and Place* 23 (2017).

[13] Neil Cockling, 'Has the stationing of Methodist presbyters within circuits become a legal fiction?', *Theology and Ministry* 5 (2018).

[14] The British Methodist Connexion includes England, Scotland, and Wales, plus the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, and Shetland. Local Methodist churches are grouped into Circuits which are arranged into Districts, https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/structure/ accessed 10 June 2021.

Unintended or contrary outcomes in the deployment of Methodist ministers may have knock-on effects for the purchase and upkeep of manses. A particular question, and the focus here, is the placing of manses within Circuits, the types of neighbourhoods chosen, and the implications for ministry. Pierce suggests a challenging approach to discernment of residential locations when he notes that we should not 'work from the assumption that God wants us to possess more and better things, live in a four bedroom detached house in a leafy suburb or even have a home anywhere at all'.[15] His observation echoes scriptural warnings against regarding 'fine houses' as normative or merited, and also references the costly positioning associated with Christian vocation and discipleship (Deut. 8.12–14; Isa. 5.8–10; Matt. 8.18–22). Pierce's focus is the home environment rather than residential location. However, his approach to home-making, which asks questions about domestic spaces and household goods in light of the incarnation of God in Christ, could be applied with equal relevance to asking questions about where we choose to live and the socio-economic and socio-cultural forces shaping our choices. As we reflect on room decoration, furnishings, and furniture, so too are residential location decisions open to what they 'might portray or betray in terms of our doctrines and pedagogy'.[16] Such considerations provide a context for exploring the placing of manses and their neighbourhoods.

Local understandings of residential neighbourhoods can be examined from various perspectives. Mike Pears shows how our conceptions and experiences of place are complex and dynamic: 'deeply complicit in the shaping of everyday life, its values, behaviours, senses of identity and belonging, and even ethical norms.'[17] The aim here is to investigate manses in relation to three aspects of place: first, place understood as proximity, as specific locations near to other particular locations; secondly, place understood as deprivation and marginality, producing and reproducing differences between 'haves' and 'have-nots'; and thirdly, place understood as dominance and social exclusion, creating and reinforcing distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

In the next section, Methodist manses in England are examined using proxy measures of these understandings and experiences of place. The measures were chosen for pragmatic reasons because they capture a range of socio-economic circumstances and everyday interactions that shape perceptions of and experiences in different places, and touch on how these might influence the lives of those who live there, the responses of other people, and the actions of public and private agencies. These measures are available for small areas, thus enabling analysis of geographical variations in residential neighbourhoods; there is no suggestion, however, that such areas represent local understandings of place or community. Findings are then considered in light of Methodist priorities and theological

[15] Pierce, 'At home with God', 5.13.
[16] Pierce, 'At home with God', 5.2.
[17] Mike Pears, 'Place and marginality: the formation of redemptive places', in Paul Cloke and Mike Pears (eds), *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 37.

sensibilities, and implications drawn for the Church's strategy for evangelism, growth, and inclusiveness.

Place as Proximity

Manses must be placed somewhere and considerations of physical access often influence residential location decisions including nearness to public transport, employment, shops, schools, and family. Additionally, Methodist guidelines recommend that manses should be "close or not too far away from the main church over which the occupant will have pastoral charge (within 1.5 miles or 15 minutes' walk)".[18] It's not known whether the originators of this guideline had in mind church neighbourhoods defined by walkable distances to give ministers scope for engaging with residents living within the vicinity of a church. Methodism has never operated a parish system with responsibility for the whole population in a particular locality. Nonetheless, church neighbourhoods may be a focus for community ministry including for example: youth work, family support, luncheon club, credit union, and food pantry on church premises.

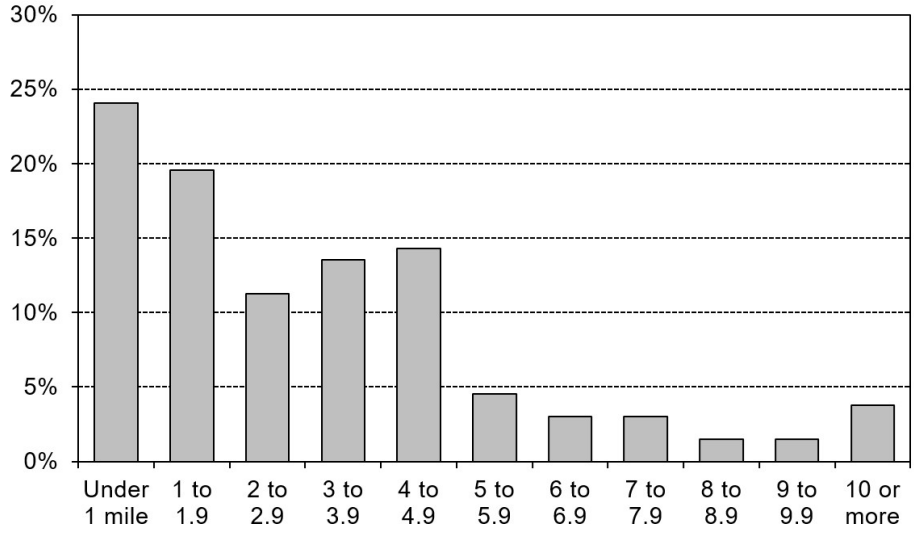
Nearness to churches over which pastoral charge is exercised is a relevant consideration because, as noted above, this role tends to concentrate ministers' duties (which include oversight, direction, discipline, order, and pastoral care) even where they lead worship in other churches and have Circuit-wide duties.[19] Information about ministers' pastoral responsibilities is not collated across the Connexion so the guideline on manse location is explored here in one District where the author was given access to such details. In doing so it is worth noting that not all Methodist ministers reside in a manse provided by the Church but live in their own house or one provided by another body, but it was not possible to distinguish these situations in the available sources.[20]

Figure 1 shows travel distances between manses and churches where a Methodist minister exercised pastoral responsibility in the Manchester and Stockport (M&S) District.[21] Just under a third of these 'pastoral links' (31 per cent) are within the recommended 1.5 miles whereas half are more than 2.5 miles. These findings are probably more representative of pastoral links in conurbations and metropolitan areas than those in rural Districts where longer distances most likely separate churches from their minister's manse. Even so, ministers in urban areas often have several pastoral charges and living close to one church invariably means living further away from other churches in their Circuit. Of the

[18] Methodist Church, *Property Handbook*, 4.
[19] Cockling, 'Stationing Methodist presbyters'.
[20] The Methodist Church, *The Provision of Manses* (Conference Report, 2012).
[21] In total, 133 pastoral charges exercised by 39 Methodist ministers were identified. Churches in the pastoral care of non-Methodist ministers were excluded as were manses occupied by Methodist ministers who held a Connexional, District, or lay appointment without pastoral charge of a church. Road travel distances were estimated between church and manse postcodes using an online calculator; shorter distances may apply where ministers walk to their pastoral churches. 'Website of the Automobile Association', https://www.theaa.com/driving/mileage-calculator.jsp, accessed 10 June 2021.

39 ministers who held pastoral responsibilities in the M&S District in 2019, 77 per cent were in pastoral charge of between two and four churches (range 1–8) and twelve churches reported two ministers in pastoral charge. Focusing on ministers' nearest 'pastoral church' shows that 77 per cent live within 1.5 miles and two-thirds live less than one mile away (67 per cent); the median distance is 0.68 miles (maximum 10.5). Thus most manses lie within 1.5 miles of at least one pastoral church although it is not known whether the nearest church is the minister's main pastoral charge. In contrast, three out of four ministers live more than three miles from their most distant pastoral church, and a third live more than five miles from their most distant pastoral church (median 4.2; maximum 13.3), some of whom cover rural parts of Cheshire and Derbyshire within the M&S District.

Figure 1. Manses by distance in miles from pastoral churches, M&S District 2019 (n=133)



Locating manses near their ministers' pastoral churches will likely become increasingly difficult. The number of Methodist ministers has declined faster than the number of churches in recent decades: by 46 and 19 per cent respectively in the M&S District between 2004 and 2019. These trends might be expected to increase consideration of ministerial priorities and opportunities in shaping decisions about placing manses near pastoral churches.

Place as Marginality and Deprivation

A widely accepted measure of area variations in socio-economic and material circumstances is the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which identifies localities where poverty of resources, relationships, and identity accumulates, and where disadvantaged communities are concentrated including Black and South Asian ethnic groups.[22] The Index combines measures of income poverty, employment disadvantage, lack of attainment and skills, poor health, housing barriers, crime, and other indicators of unmet needs due to lack of resources, opportunity, and choice. These indicators and the resulting Index are calculated for small neighbourhoods of around 1,500 residents or 650 households called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs).[23] Manses and churches are linked to a LSOA through their postcodes.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of manses in England according to national quintiles of multiple deprivation.[24] If manses followed the national distribution, 20 per cent would be found in each quintile: the observed distribution is far removed from this outcome. Most manses are in less deprived areas and systematically so: the greater the level of deprivation, the fewer the number of manses. If manses were to be distributed evenly across the deprivation spectrum, at least 236 manses (19 per cent overall) in the least deprived two-fifths of LSOAs would have to be relocated to the most deprived two-fifths of LSOAs. Over twice as many manses (485, 38 per cent) would need to be relocated to reverse the observed pattern and produce a bias towards communities experiencing poverty and deprivation.

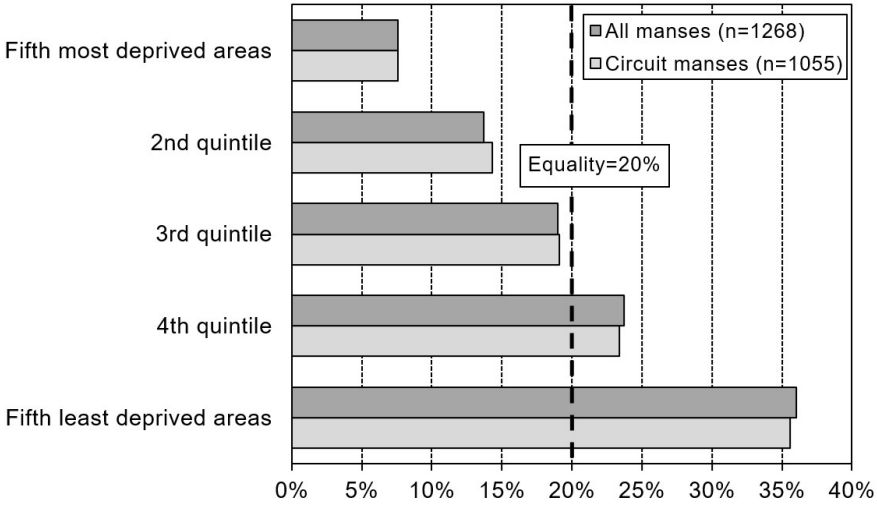
Figure 2 also shows the distribution of 'circuit manses' according to area deprivation. They include manses deemed most likely to be occupied by ministers excising pastoral responsibility for one or more churches; that is, after excluding manses occupied by ministers reportedly in District or Connexional appointments, chaplaincies (e.g. work-place, military forces, hospital, and prison), or secular employment, plus those 'without appointment' or with 'permission to study'. Although this identification process is not precise, the findings largely mirror those for all manses. For example, 37 per cent (392) of circuit manses would have to be relocated from the least deprived two-fifths of LSOAs to reverse the observed bias to one that favoured the most deprived two-fifths. In other words, the skewed distribution of manses towards less deprived areas was not attributable to the residential location of ministers without pastoral responsibility for local churches.

[22] Church Urban Fund. *The Web of Poverty: Area-based Poverty and Exclusion in England* (London: Church Urban Fund, 2011); Darren McGarvey, *Poverty Safari: Understanding the Anger of Britain's Underclass* (London: Picador, 2018); Lisa McKenzie, *Getting By: Estates, Class and Culture in Austerity Britain* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015).

[23] There were 32,844 LSOAs in England in 2019. Documentation and data on the IMD can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation, accessed 10 June 2021.

[24] Manse postcodes in England were gathered from: The Methodist Church, *Minutes of the Annual Conference and Directory* (London: Methodist Publishing, 2019).

Figure 2. Manses by area deprivation, England 2019



The analysis was repeated using the IMD's income deprivation domain which represents area variations in the extent to which people depend on means-tested benefits because they are out-of-work or have low earnings. These additional findings, available from the author, are not presented here because they largely replicate the distributions shown in Figure 2. They show, for instance, that 22 per cent of manses are in the most income deprived two-fifths of LSOAs where, all else being equal, 40 per cent would be expected by chance alone, indicating that a minority of ministers live in neighbourhoods where they might ordinarily meet or know people experiencing income poverty.

A bias towards placing manses in less deprived areas may be evident across larger neighbourhoods or suburbs if LSOAs with similar levels of deprivation cluster together within conurbations and metropolitan regions. This was explored in the M&S District which covers some of the most deprived urban areas in the country including the cities of Manchester, Oldham, and Salford.[25] Although its boundary is not precisely known, it is estimated that the M&S District encompasses over twice as many of the most deprived LSOAs nationally as there are least deprived LSOAs (444 and 188 respectively).[26] So

[25] Stefan Noble, David McLennan, Michael Noble, Emma Plunkett, Nils Gutacker, Mary Silk, and Gemma Wright, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 Research Report* (London: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019), 50.

[26] The definition of the M&S District according to its constituent LSOAs is described in Michael Hirst, 'Preferential Places in the Manchester and Stockport Methodist District during the early twenty-first century', *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 14 (2022).

regardless of deprivation levels in the immediate vicinity of manses, we might expect manses to be nearer more of the most deprived areas than the least deprived areas. This outcome is plotted by the diagonal line in Figure 3 which shows how LSOAs would be expected to accumulate with distance from manses occupied by circuit ministers with pastoral responsibilities. The observed pattern is shown by the curved line which indicates that manses are disproportionately more likely to be nearer least deprived suburbs than most deprived suburbs. (If the opposite were the case, the curved line would be above the main diagonal.) There are, for example, 134 least deprived areas within 1.5 miles of a manse and 221 most deprived areas when 106 and 249 respectively would be expected. The disparity is somewhat greater within 1 mile of every manse wherein 105 least deprived areas and 117 most deprived areas lie, when 66 and 156 respectively would be expected within this radius. In other words, despite the preponderance of deprived areas in the M&S District, manses are found disproportionately in less deprived suburbs and housing estates, which cover several LSOAs, indicating that such settings are preferred places for a manse. It seems that physical distance and social distancing between manse neighbourhoods and deprived areas reinforce each other.

Figure 3. Cumulative number of most and least deprived LSOAs with distance from a manse, M&S District 2019

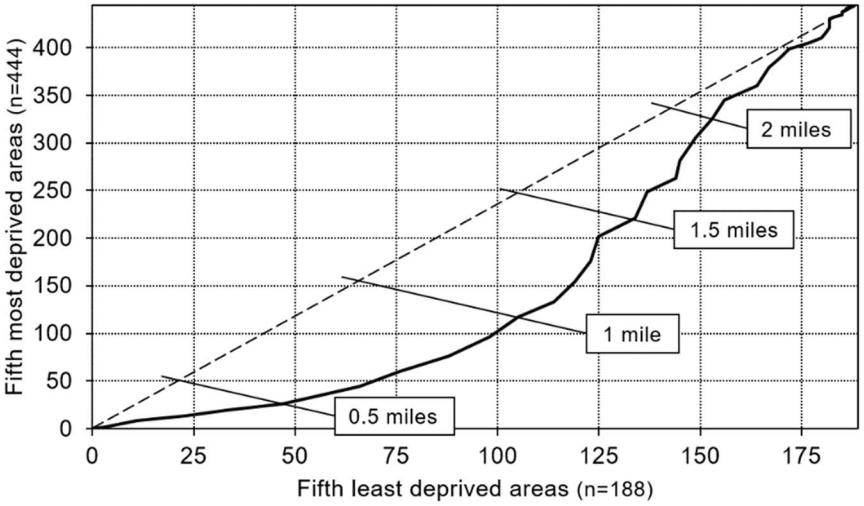


Table 1 explores the issue further by comparing the immediate neighbourhoods of manses in the M&S District with those of their ministers' pastoral churches according to quintiles of the national distribution of multiple deprivation. The shaded diagonal identifies manses and pastoral churches with comparable levels of neighbourhood deprivation; they comprise

33 per cent of all pastoral arrangements. Although differences in deprivation between adjacent quintiles may be small, one further observation from Table 1 is noteworthy. Pastoral responsibilities of ministers living in areas less deprived than those of their pastoral churches (below the diagonal: 47 per cent) outnumber those of ministers living in areas more deprived than those of their pastoral churches (above the diagonal: 20 per cent).

Table 1. Pastoral charges by area deprivation, M&S District 2019 (per cent*)

	Churches					
Manses	Fifth most deprived areas	2nd quintile	3rd quintile	4th quintile	Fifth least deprived areas	Total
Fifth most deprived areas	8	4	1	3	2	17
2nd quintile	11	3	2	1	–	17
3rd quintile	3	5	3	3	–	14
4th quintile	2	5	3	9	4	23
Fifth least deprived areas	4	4	4	8	11	29
Total	28	20	13	23	17	100†

* Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

† Base=133 pastoral charges.

Place as Social Exclusion and Dominance

In societies where money provides the means for everyday living and social participation, and shapes perceptions of self-worth, status, and achievement, consumer activity provides insight into societal norms and values as well as where power is used, particularly in control over resources.[27] Geodemographic classifications of consumer behaviour and circumstances reflect these themes and, because affordability is a key determinant, they evidence the conditions that allow or constrain choice. Accordingly, geodemographic classifications are good predictors of human capability for agency in a consumerist society; they also reveal cultural alignments in terms of who people wish to associate or identify with, and who might be excluded. In particular, such classifications provide evidence of the socio-spatial evolution of residential areas and the ways in which people flock together with others like themselves and share the same neighbourhoods.[28]

[27] Dorling, *Injustice*; Michael Marmot, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010* (London: The Marmot Review, 2010); Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

[28] Richard Webber and Roger Burrows, *The Predictive Postcode: The Geodemographic Classification of British Society* (London: Sage, 2018).

This analysis uses the *Acorn* geodemographic classification which combines data on people's household circumstances, shopping behaviour, service use, and finances.[29] The *Acorn* system classifies postcode areas into groups and sub-groups, and manses can be linked to the classification by their postcodes. Residential postcodes cover smaller areas than LSOAs and typically contain just over a dozen private households with around 30 residents.[30]

Table 2 shows manses according to Acorn categories, distinguishing between all manses and the 'circuit manses' defined above, and compares both groups with what might be expected according to the national distribution of postcode areas. The findings show that more than nine out of ten manses are in neighbourhoods where people generally enjoy a high standard of living, comfortable lifestyles in good housing, and secure financial circumstances. Under one in ten manses are in neighbourhoods of people with modest means, struggling families, poorer pensioners, and people hard-pressed by financial uncertainty and insecure housing. Compared with the national distribution, manses are around twice as likely as expected to be in postcode areas where people's circumstances are described as 'Affluent achievers', and considerably less likely than expected to be in postcode areas where households are characterized as 'Financially stretched' or 'Urban adversity'.

Table 2. Manses by *Acorn* categories, England 2019 (per cent)

Acorn category	All manses	Ratio to all postcodes	Circuit manses	Ratio to all postcodes	All English postcodes†
Affluent Achievers	57	1.9	58	2.0	30
Rising Prosperity	8	0.9	8	0.9	9
Comfortable Communities	27	1.0	27	1.0	27
Financially Stretched	6	0.3	6	0.3	19
Urban Adversity	2	0.1	1	0.1	15
Base (= 100 per cent)	1,248	–	1,044	–	1,263,049

† excludes communal populations and business areas without a resident population.

Table 2 also shows that more than half of Methodist manses are found in postcode areas where households are characterized as 'Affluent achievers'. Table 3 breaks this category down into three *Acorn* groups and thirteen *Acorn* types. Ignoring *Acorn* types with few manses (under five per cent), manses are more than twice as likely to be found in

[29] CACI Limited, *Acorn Postcode-Level Directory for the United Kingdom, 2017* (Colchester: UK Data Service, 2017) Study Number 8196.

[30] It was not possible to compare manses and pastoral churches using *Acorn* because some church postcodes have no resident population and therefore no data with which to apply the classification.

neighbourhoods where households are described as 'Asset rich families', 'Financially comfortable families', 'Prosperous suburban families', 'Well-off edge of towners', 'Settled suburbia, older people', and 'Retired and Empty Nesters'. Differences between all manses and circuit manses in their postcode *Acorn* types are negligible. These findings are consistent with those presented above describing multiple deprivation and indicate that manses are predominantly located in more affluent, relatively exclusive neighbourhoods.

Table 3. Manses by *Acorn* category 'Affluent Achievers', England 2019 (per cent)

Acorn group and type	All manses	Ratio to all postcodes	Circuit manses	Ratio to all postcodes	All English postcodes†
A. Lavish Lifestyles					
Exclusive enclaves	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Metropolitan money	0.5	1.8	0.6	2.2	0.3
Large house luxury	1.8	1.1	1.4	0.9	1.6
B. Executive Wealth					
Asset rich families	11.2	3.4	11.1	3.4	3.3
Wealthy countryside commuters	1.9	0.4	1.5	0.3	5.3
Financially comfortable families	6.2	2.8	7.0	3.2	2.2
Affluent professionals	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	1.0
Prosperous suburban families	7.1	4.2	7.0	4.2	1.7
Well-off edge of towners	5.9	3.0	6.2	3.1	2.0
C. Mature Money					
Better-off villagers	3.8	0.8	3.5	0.7	5.0
Settled suburbia, older people	8.7	3.1	9.0	3.2	2.8
Retired and empty nesters	5.9	2.0	6.7	2.3	3.0
Upmarket downsizers	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.8	1.3
All Affluent Achievers	57.1	1.9	58.1	2.0	29.6
Base (= 100 per cent)	1,248	–	1,044	–	1,263,049

† excludes communal populations and business areas without a resident population.

Discussion

After acknowledging the two greatest commandments in the Torah, an expert in Jewish law asks Jesus: 'who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10.29). Jesus ignores this question which considers the commandment to love one's neighbour as a legal matter or technicality; instead, he focuses on its practical application. After telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks who 'was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' (Luke 10.36). The legal expert answers correctly although he avoids uttering the word 'Samaritan' – perhaps, it is thought, to protect his religious purity. Spatial references in the parable – the

particularity of its setting on the road to Jericho and its choreography – reinforce the message: the Samaritan changes his trajectory of travel along the road and draws 'near'; the priest and the Levite also change trajectory but pass by 'on the other side'. They, apparently, do not wish to jeopardize their religious purity by coming into contact with a bloodied or dead body, which might require them returning to Jerusalem for purification. By comparison, the Samaritan sees himself as a neighbour – 'moved with pity' – sets aside concerns about purity laws in his own religious tradition, and tends to the man left 'half dead'. Clearly, whatever one's religious observance, tradition, or standing, the important question for Christian disciples is: who am I neighbour to, rather than who is my neighbour?

There are various readings of the Good Samaritan but they all highlight the importance of physical nearness and bodily presence in acts of love and care: a neighbour is one who draws near. An allegorical interpretation of the parable, recently re-presented by Samuel Wells,[31] views the Samaritan as symbolizing Christ healing the wounds caused by sin and links the parable to God drawing near through the incarnation when 'the Word became flesh and lived among us' or, as *The Message* Bible puts it, 'moved into the neighbourhood' (John 1.14). Although this reading of the parable focuses on humanity's needs for reconciliation and redemption, it doesn't preclude an understanding that in following Christ – becoming like him – we can learn from the example of the Samaritan.

Other readings of the parable highlight the universal nature of Christian love: teaching all disciples to be good neighbours, drawing near to every other human being, Christian and non-Christian alike. Some commentators also reference the key passage underpinning liberation theology: that Jesus is found among those experiencing poverty and social exclusion (Matt. 25.31–46). Richard Teal links this preferential option for those in poverty with the incarnation of God in Christ when he affirms that "God doesn't practice social distancing but becomes close and personal […] Not [to] the wealthy or the privileged but [to] the least and lowest."[32] Seeing oneself as a neighbour thus reaches beyond reciprocal acts of love for one's in-group to encountering 'the other', stepping outside customary relationships, natural inclinations, and material interests, and drawing near to those who are different from us (Matt. 5.43–48). Similarly, socially marginalized communities can be viewed as opportunities for Christian neighbourliness and preferential places for discipleship, mission, and ministry.[33] And much is promised: such encounters can express a love that transforms the lives of both the ones who draw near and the ones who are not like us.[34]

[31] Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Chichester: Wiley, 2015), 86–99.
[32] 'Website of the Methodist Church in Britain', https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-conference/conference-2020/presidency/the-presidents-and-vice-presidents-addresses-to-the-methodist-conference-2020/the-presidents-address-to-the-methodist-conference-2020/ accessed 10 June 2021.
[33] Ann Morisy, *Journeying Out: A New Approach to Christian Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
[34] Jonathan Sachs, *The Dignity of Difference*, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2003); Roger Walton, 'Social holiness and social justice', *Holiness, the Journal of Wesley House, Cambridge* 5 (2019), 25–36.

Following in the steps of its founder John Wesley, Methodism has long placed concern for the poorest in society at the heart of its mission and ministry.[35] At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Methodist Church adopted a vision – *Our Calling* – which includes amongst its aims: 'to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice'.[36] It is the only priority in *Our Calling* to stem directly from the second greatest commandment (Mark 12.28–34), and was explained as 'Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor – in Britain and worldwide'.[37]

More recently, the Methodist Church reaffirmed *Our Calling* as 'the primary strategic driver for the whole Church'[38] and adopted a strategy for evangelism and growth 'with a particular focus on communities experiencing marginalisation' called 'Church at the Margins'.[39] This focus draws on a passion for social justice as much as for scriptural holiness and Wesleyan tradition and, in the wake of the 2020/21 coronavirus pandemic, some Methodists claim the time is ripe for renewed commitment. The pandemic has deepened prevailing inequalities and injustices in British society,[40] mobilizing Methodist activists to call for a radical response from the Church. To back their appeal, they gathered widespread grassroots support via an online petition for Methodism to be 'a church of and on the margins' – a position, it was claimed, that expresses its 'essence and identity'.[41]

Inherited, institutional formations of being church – gathered congregations with clergy – may be unsuited for community engagement in marginalized places.[42] The *Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth* recognizes that Methodist mission most effectively develops through following and supporting lay people in new places to be church. So it is not clear how ministers with a Circuit job profile to fulfil might orient their ministry to engage with 'Church at the Margins' which requires greater emphasis on community approaches to ministerial formation and practice.[43] To address this issue, the *Strategy* proposes coaching, learning, and training for leaders, lay and ordained, to support individuals and congregations in evangelism to build new Christian communities with

[35] Theodore Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990); Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2014).
[36] The Methodist Church, *Our Calling* (Conference Report, 2000), 1.
[37] The Methodist Church, *Priorities for the Methodist Church* (Conference Report, 2004), 1.
[38] The Methodist Church, *Reaffirming Our Calling: The Future Call of the Methodist Church* (Conference Report, 2018), 3.
[39] The Methodist Church, *God for All: The Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth* (Conference Report, 2020), 43, 47–67. 'Church at the Margins' is the largest budget stream: 38 per cent of £22.7m over five years.
[40] E.g. Public Health England, *Beyond the Data: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Groups* (London: Public Health England, 2020).
[41] Network of Methodist Activists, 'An Open Letter to the Methodist Church', *Methodist Recorder*, 12 June 2020, 12–13, https://methodistopenletter.wordpress.com/ accessed 10 June 2021.
[42] Tim Chester, *Unreached: Growing Churches in Working-Class and Deprived Areas* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012); Judith Jessop, 'Church in the margins', 2018, https://openhousesheffield.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/church-in-the-margins.docx, accessed 10 June 2021.
[43] Ann Morisy, *Beyond the Good Samaritan: Community Ministry and Mission* (London: Continuum, 1997).

unaffiliated people.[44] The *Strategy* further recognizes that effective mission with people on the margins of society must be contextualized around shared experience of a place and its influence on the lives of those who live there. This will depend in large measure on 'indigenous leaders' and Circuits and churches working 'alongside people experiencing poverty to deepen community engagement'.[45]

Imagining new ways of being church alongside marginalized communities may already be happening. Findings indicate that some manses are located within or near deprived areas, and some ministers hold pastoral responsibility for churches within or near deprived areas. These ministers may encounter everyday opportunities for engaging with individuals and households experiencing poverty and social marginalization. Most manses, however, are not well placed for ministers to engage directly with such communities. Manses are more often found in less deprived, more affluent, relatively exclusive neighbourhoods, and there is no evidence that manses are nearer their minister's pastoral churches in deprived areas than their pastoral churches in less deprived areas.

Not living in marginalized communities and lacking an obvious identity with people living there may mean lost opportunities for exercising a ministry of presence and engaging with people in poverty. Ministers without pastoral charges or manses in or near marginalized communities may be viewed as outsiders engaging from positions of comfort. In contrast, local residency provides occasions for everyday social contact among individuals living in the same place. Casual opportunities may occur in the street or particular places such as a post office, local shop, public house, park, or doctor's surgery. More frequent contacts with near neighbours or associated with luncheon clubs, children's attendance at school, and the like, may foster social networks for interpersonal exchanges of information, social support, and resources of various kinds. Residency may underpin common cause around issues of concern in the community such as public transport, green spaces, payday lending, insecure tenancies, and the quality of public services. Residency may also enable engagement in school governing bodies, residents' or neighbourhood associations, and other local voluntary action. Such opportunities promote both a personal and a collective sense of connectedness, inclusion, and engagement, and help build solidarity with communities experiencing poverty and social marginalization.

By comparison, living at a distance from marginalized communities risks weakening efforts to build solidarity, especially if the places where ministers live share little in common with the communities where their ministry, pastoral care, and witness are focused. Ministers living at a distance may have to balance the opportunities and costs of community ministry within the neighbourhood of their pastoral churches in deprived areas with those of their pastoral churches in more affluent areas, or with their own residential neighbourhoods.

[44] The Methodist Church, *Next Steps in Evangelism and Growth: Opportunities and Resources for Individuals, Churches and Circuits 2021/2022* (London: Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2021).
[45] Methodist Church, *God for All*, 64.

Highlighting the importance of nearness and presence is not to claim that staying in or moving into marginalized communities is sufficient for mission and ministry; authentic engagement within marginalized communities does not rest merely on being in the right place.[46] Rather, the claim is that residency is a crucial step towards building solidarity with people experiencing poverty and social marginalization. Theologies of mission, particularly around understandings of contextualization, dialogue, attentive listening, and vulnerability support the case for being intentionally present in marginalized communities.[47] A key feature of these understandings is that a ministry of presence is about being alongside, working with people not doing things to them or for them. Social or community projects may develop but the primary goal is building relationships and partnering with existing networks and strengths rather than focusing on apparent needs or providing services. Thus Mark Votava discovers from personal experience of moving into downtown Tacoma, Washington, that 'practice-based theology [lies] within the context of shared life, proximity, living into the ordinary, seeing the sacredness of life and a commitment to a particular place where the body of Christ can practice their faith as a way of life together'.[48] Personal encounters and social engagement in deprived areas of Manchester and Sheffield demonstrate further these understandings of nearness and presence, and how they might unfold.[49]

Further investigation might identify additional factors that influence the placing of manses. Findings reported here indicate that decisions on where to purchase a manse are shaped by neighbourhood variations in socio-economic deprivation and affluence, or by factors associated with them. The role of such factors in locational discernment may reflect the residential preferences of lay leaders and ministers responsible for implementing manse policy. Socio-economic profiles indicate that lay roles in preaching, church administration, and finance are often filled by people from middle class backgrounds because they are likely to have the required skills from their secular occupations or to meet the educational criteria to undertake formal training.[50] So the location of manses may reflect their preferences for residential neighbourhoods with which they identify or associate. Ministers

[46] Al Barrett, 'What is radical receptivity?', 2018, https://bameanglican.wordpress.com/2018/09/22/what-is-radical-receptivity/ accessed 10 June 2021; Al Barrett, "Interrupting the church's flow: hearing 'other' voices on an outer urban estate", *Practical Theology* 11 (2018), 79–92; Gary Waddington, 'Estates, the Poor and Culture War Stereotypes', 2016, https://thebusypriest.wordpress.com/2016/12/13/estates-the-poor-and-culture-war-stereotypes/ accessed 10 June 2021.

[47] Paul Cloke and Mike Pears, eds, *Mission in Marginal Places: The Theory* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016); Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014).

[48] Mark Votava, *The Communal Imagination: Finding a Way to Share Life Together* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft, 2014), p. 50.

[49] Paul Keeble, *Mission-With: Something Out of the Ordinary* (Watford: Instant Apostle, 2017); Jessop, 'Church in the Margins'.

[50] Nicholas Paterson, Ian Paterson and John Sawkins, 'A demographic, educational and occupational analysis of Methodist local preachers in England', Discussion Paper 98/6, Department of Economics (Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University, 1998).

may share similar preferences because their residential decisions on retirement, when most choose themselves where to rent or buy a home, are skewed towards least deprived areas.[51] Decisions on placing manses may also be constrained by Church guidelines. Amongst other things, these recommend that manses should 'normally' include four bedrooms; if an upstairs bedroom is used as a study, a room downstairs should be available 'for pastoral interviews or church business […] without disturbing the privacy of other family members'.[52] Some ministers may not require more than two or three bedrooms but treating the 'bedroom rule' as a requirement would narrow options for placing manses where housing of the recommended size and type is limited or concentrated in particular areas.[53] Additional requirements including a garage and garden would further limit choice in some localities.

Where ministry, pastoral care, and witness are limited or prevented by strict adherence to rules, it could be argued that they should be redefined (Matt. 12.1–14). In practice there are regular opportunities for redefining the application of manse guidelines as Circuits are expected to 'review at intervals of not more than four years whether the buildings are in the right places'.[54] Pierce's reflections are relevant to such reviews: he argues that 'our common cultural aspirations for a private home', which arguably include its neighbourhood, should be tested against 'a model of Incarnation, that is, God come down from His glory to live among us'.[55] From this perspective it would be difficult to defend the bedroom rule if, by precluding local residency, it risked church formations on the margins, compromised shared ministry with indigenous leaders, or disadvantaged community engagement in deprived areas.

It is often argued that Methodists should faithfully serve in every community and the *Connexional Strategy for Evangelism and Growth* is aptly named 'God for All', echoing the 'all-ness' of John Wesley's vision and Methodist commitment to discipleship.[56] Few would challenge this vision but with finite and diminishing resources – in terms of membership, income, and active ministers – priorities matter. A key Methodist priority, derived from scripture and affirmed by tradition, reason, and Christian experience, focuses on being alongside people experiencing poverty and social marginalization.[57] Moreover, Wesley's injunction to 'regard the whole world as our parish' does not mean that the significance

[51] Michael Hirst, 'Poverty, place and presence: positioning Methodism in England, 2001 to 2011', *Theology and Ministry* 4 (2016).
[52] Methodist Church, *Constitutional Practice*, 775.
[53] Preliminary enquiries found that across residential neighbourhoods in the North West Region of England, most of which contained around 127 dwellings (median; inter-quartile range: 117 to 138), 36 per cent had fewer than ten dwellings with four or more bedrooms, while 75 per cent had under 30 such dwellings. Estimated from 2011 Census data, https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/qs411ew, accessed 10 June 2021.
[54] Methodist Church, *Constitutional Practice*, 659.
[55] Pierce, 'At home with God', 5.13.
[56] Methodist Church, *God for All*; Martyn Atkins, *Discipleship … and the People Called Methodists* (Peterborough: Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2010), 26.
[57] The Methodist Church, *Of Equal Value: Poverty and Inequality in the United Kingdom* (Conference Report, 2011).

and particularity of place for engaging with marginalized communities can be overlooked.[58] One assumption underlying the analysis reported here is that if Methodism were identified with all communities impartially – an outcome implied by 'all-ness' – then we would expect manses to be distributed evenly across the deprivation spectrum represented by quintiles of the national pattern. That the distribution of manses is systematically skewed towards less deprived, more affluent neighbourhoods points to a substantive inequality.[59] Worryingly, this inequality contradicts the Church's self-proclaimed priorities and theological sensibilities.

The response of Circuits and congregations may depend on their alignment with Church priorities and whether separation from poor and socially marginalized communities is seen as problematic. Local understandings may hinge on tension between the Church's tradition of 'Connexionalism' which recognizes that Circuits and churches are mutually accountable and committed to sharing resources, and 'creeping congregationalism' which Martin Wellings describes as distracting 'Small churches with energy only for maintenance and large churches safe in their self-sufficiency' from Connexional priorities and vision.[60] Additionally, the response of Circuits and congregations may depend on their understandings of the minister's role.[61] If the minister's role and contribution is seen primarily as serving the needs of the congregation and those for whom s/he has pastoral responsibility, there may be little concern about where the manse is placed, especially where congregations gather from a wide catchment. However, if the minister's primary role is to serve alongside people experiencing poverty and social marginalization, and enabling members of the congregation to join this mission, placing the manse accordingly may be essential for genuine community engagement and developing a ministry of presence. This approach may require new funding models for deploying lay and ordained leaders to sustain church formations in marginalized communities, including redistribution of resources from wealthier Circuits and churches.[62]

The availability of ministerial resources within marginalized communities may also depend on stationing policy. Cockling reckons that current stationing criteria, which take into account the number of church members a minister is expected to serve, disproportionately favours rural Districts and inherited church formations.[63] He argues for Districts to have a greater role in ministerial deployment and for stationing to be based on the actual population of Districts to fulfil their mandate for mission. Such an approach would deploy ministers to relatively under-resourced Districts where there is a comparative lack

[58] Atkins, *Discipleship*, 21; Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*.
[59] Alan Hay, 'Concepts of equity, fairness and justice in geographical studies', *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995), 500–8.
[60] Martin Wellings, '"A time to be born and a time to die"? A historian's perspective on the future of Methodism', in Jane Craske and Clive Marsh, eds, *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge* (London: Cassell, 1999), 156.
[61] Cf. Atfield and Parry, 'The poor will always be with you', 335.
[62] Jessop, 'Church in the Margins'.
[63] Cockling, 'Stationing Methodist presbyters', 4.15.

of members. This approach would favour some of the more deprived Districts, especially if population figures were weighted to reflect deprivation levels; it would also enable Districts covering metropolitan areas to deploy ministers on the margins where they are needed most.

Conclusions

The main conclusion is that Methodist manses are often not well placed for ministers to engage with socially marginalized communities experiencing poverty and deprivation. Most manses are located in less deprived, more affluent, and relatively exclusive neighbourhoods, socially and physically distanced from deprived households and neighbourhoods.

The practical relevance of this conclusion rests on two claims: first, that marginalized communities are a priority for mission and ministry and secondly, that nearness and presence – drawing near – are key to community engagement. These claims are supported by several considerations. They include incarnational principles and the Christian model of incarnation; understandings of liberation theology which proclaim a preferential option for people experiencing poverty; engaging with the 'stranger' and the 'other' as the embodiment of being good neighbours; Connexionalism and Methodist priorities towards marginalized communities; and above all, the example of Jesus who demonstrated the significance and meaning of what he was doing through encounters with people experiencing poverty and social marginalization. Both claims are supported by, amongst other things, the principles and practices of community work and social anthropology which recognize that the best way to relate to a culture is to move into it and live it, engaging with its social forms and meanings from the point of view of local participants.[64]

Findings demonstrate an association between the distribution of manses and area differences in social, economic, and demographic measures describing households and neighbourhoods. The systematic relationship between the number of manses and multiple deprivation –fewer manses associated with greater deprivation – and the consistency of these findings with a geodemographic classification, point to a probable causal link with decisions on where to buy a manse. Such linkage may prompt a review of the guidelines and their application to encourage greater consideration of the Church's missional needs and priorities when placing manses.

Nonetheless, the analysis does not resolve the central question: in what ways and to what extent does the placing of manses allow or constrain local mission and ministry, especially in poor and social marginalized communities? Ethnographic accounts of ministers' and church members' encounters and social engagement within church neighbourhoods, as well as the views and experiences of local residents, would chart useful

[64] Peter Somerville, *Understanding Community: Politics, Policy and Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2011); Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 3rd edition (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

steps towards developing a ministry of presence.[65] Findings indicate that opportunities already exist within the vicinity of some manses and some church neighbourhoods to engage with individuals and households marginalized by poverty and deprivation; these places provide entry points to inform church formations on the margins.

Focusing ministerial resources in poor and socially marginalized communities is likely to be costly in personal, social, economic, and cultural terms.[66] Roger Walton argues that 'costly positioning is necessary in order to treat all people as made in the image of God, a fundamental truth made known in Christ – for Christ died for all – and experienced in the Christian community.'[67] Positioning acts of mercy – how Christians respond to issues of poverty and injustice – and positioning acts of piety – how they meet with God and build up one another – are, he claims, inseparable expressions of love and means of grace, following each other in a 'holy dance'. Being good neighbours to marginalized communities thus promises to lead the people called Methodists into 'holy habitats, where grace flows with the power to transform us.'[68]

[65] Paul Cloke and Mike Pears, eds, *Mission in Marginal Places: The Praxis* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2016), 1–22.
[66] Barrett, 'Radical receptivity'.
[67] Walton 'Social holiness and social justice', 32.
[68] Walton 'Social holiness and social justice', 33.

