Incarnational geographies? The faith-inspired praxis of ‘Living Amongst’

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ................................................................. (Samuel Christopher Thomas)
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Abstract

Despite a resurgence of religion in the provision of public welfare and care, geography has only recently begun to make sense of this public phenomenon (Kong, 2011). In keeping with recent calls to allow religion to ‘speak back’ to geography (Yorgason & Della Dora, 2009), this thesis presents a re-reading of one particular arena of Christian faith-praxi in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods across the UK. Much of the literature on faith-based organisations has so far focused on service-provision and political advocacy roles adopted by faith-motivated groups, and there has been little, to no, acknowledgment of re-emergent forms of ‘incarnational’ mission. Incarnational approaches differ from mainstream service-provision in the sense that faith-inspired individuals and organisations come to permanently ‘live amongst’ marginalised people and places, rather than physically serve from a distance. This thesis seeks to address this lacuna in the literature by critically assessing the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’, and developing a socio-temporal and ethical account of ‘incarnational geographies’.

Drawing upon ethnographic research with one Christian incarnational FBO, this thesis investigates the historical development of the FBO and the experience and practices of staff and volunteers who relocate to live in one particular socio-economically deprived neighbourhood of Greater Manchester.

In contrast to essentialist academic accounts of faith-praxis that might present ‘living amongst’ as either a form of self-betterment (see Allahyari, 2000) or proselytisation (see Woods, 2011), this thesis argues that ‘incarnational geographies’ need to be re-read as complex, emergent and performative landscapes that often involve a reconfiguration of purpose and praxis through proximate participation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This first introductory chapter places my thesis within two contexts, one academic and the other societal. Beginning with a discussion of the resurgence of public religion in British society this chapter charts how religion has once again come to the fore in the public arena. This discussion takes two directions. Firstly it charts how the multicultural nature of contemporary Britain has in certain ways seen religion take centre stage, and secondly, it comments on how the hushed up voice of religion has also made itself heard through becoming embedded in public welfare and care (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). It is within this second societal context that my overall thesis is situated. This chapter then turns its attention to geography’s research on religion and faith and this second section questions the degree to which the discipline has made adequate sense of contemporary public expressions of religious faith. In this section I argue that geography has often limited its study of religion to a number of orthodox concerns, and that as a consequence, the study of faith-praxis in public welfare is still underdeveloped. In the final section of this introductory chapter I set out three key reasons why geography needs to attend in greater detail to the place, purpose, and practice of faith-praxis in public welfare. Broader afield I finish this section by signposting towards a number of key voices in human geography and the social sciences that have rather implicitly influenced and shaped my thesis. I conclude this introductory chapter with a brief summary of the structure of the rest of the thesis. Before all this though it is necessary to give a brief explanation of the FACIT project and my role within it. Although this is further elaborated upon in the third most methodological chapter I feel it is important that I articulate my own starting point and the specific context out of which this thesis emerged right at the beginning.

The FACIT project

This Ph.D project would not have been embarked upon where it not for FACIT, a pan-European research project that provided the funding framework that enabled me to undertake my own Ph.D research.
The central aim of the FACIT project was to investigate the present role of FBOs in tackling different forms of exclusion in urban contexts. The project was broadly interested in discerning the significance of FBOs in the policy and practice of urban social policy - particularly in combating social exclusion and promoting social cohesion - and the institutional and political conditions under which FBOs have become increasing present in urban social policy. It sought to analyse the extent to which FBOs have been informed and are operating in the context of a shadow state as part of a wider retrenchment of the welfare states - while determining the network and nature of relations that have developed both formally and informally with other NGOs and national and local public authorities.

To offer a cross-comparative perspective on these themes, the FACIT project brought together research teams from seven European countries (Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, UK, Turkey and the Netherlands) to work on a unified research agenda. As part of the UK team I worked in collaboration with my Ph.D supervisor Paul Cloke and my postgraduate colleague Andrew Williams. Our work in this project was built around three stages. Focusing initially on a scoping exercise, we undertook desk research with the aim of mapping out the involvement of national-level FBOs in tackling social exclusion (see Cloke et al, 2009). In this piece of work we outlined the broad range of FBO involvement in providing services, building capacity and politically advocating on behalf of those socially excluded. This research detailed the activities of many FBOs founded in different faiths. For the purpose of this research we framed our investigation around seven domains: Asylum Seekers and Immigration, Housing and Homelessness, Poverty and Debt, Children and Youth, Elderly, Disability and Community Regeneration. In the second and third stages of the project our work focused on national and regional case studies. As a research assistant in these next two stages I was responsible for undertaking interviews, writing up reports and producing written overviews of the different case studies. In practical terms for my own Ph.D research these second two stages provided me with apple opportunity to become embedded in my own research topic- more on this in chapter three. Now I want to turn to the two contexts in which my thesis is nested: one societal and one academic.
Section 1: The resurgence of religion in the public realm

“The public resurgence of religion is clearly one of the defining features of this century, which has not continued the modernist and secularist trajectory assumed during the later half of the 20th Century”

(Beaumont 2010, 7)

Religion has moved from the margins of society, bound away in private worlds, to once again show its face in the public realm. As Beaumont (2010) claims this re-emergence has been one of the defining features of contemporary western society, disrupting the modernist secular imagination that envisaged the continual decline of religion retreating further into the backwaters of private life. The shifting dynamics that have seen religion and faith become public matters do not point towards a de-secularisation of society, but towards a certain hybridity in the public arena (Beaumont and Baker, 2011) in which the hushed up voice of religion has resurfaced in different ways (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012).

In Britain, religion and faith have resurfaced in the public arena in two major ways. The first is bound up in the multicultural character of contemporary British society, while the second is encapsulated in the way the service-based arm of religion has re-positioned religion in ways that see it as holding a central position in public welfare landscapes.

In the first instance, increased global mobility has resulted in large changes to Britain’s demographic composition; this has led in turn to an increase in different cultures and religious faiths in Britain (Kong 2010). Significantly these successive waves of global immigration have meant new religious dynamics and energies have been bought to public and political life (Beaumont and Baker, 2011.) As a result of these dynamics the apparent previous hegemony of Christianity has been replaced by a plurality of religious faiths (Cloke et al, 2008). Under this guise religion has been propelled into the public spotlight by particular geopolitical events and media-orientated discourses, while state led responses to these events and changing
dynamics have also seen religion become a focus of local and national government, ushered into the public arena through certain government initiatives.

The rupture and resonance of various acts of ‘religious extremism’ have forced religion into the mainstream of public discussion. This has sculpted media portrayals of ‘other’ religions into particular cast types, and yet at the same time, these faith-motivated events have underlined the actual and potential ramifications of extremist religious participation in politics of protest and resistance (Cloke et al, 2008). The ‘9/11’ event across the Atlantic and the domestic ‘7/7’ event have somewhat furrowed the presence of religion in the public sphere into the discourse of ‘threat’, emphasizing religion’s hand in perceived geo-political conflict. Added to this is the political debate that has centered on different understandings of multiculturalism, religious freedom and civic behavior (see Modood, 2005; 2007; Abbas, 2005).

In an attempt to respond to these shifting dynamics and emergent events, state led initiatives have further enrolled religion into the public arena. Contributing factors have been the stream of counterterrorism measures and the repeated attempt to incorporate different ethnic and religious minority groups around the public table (Dinham, 2009: Dinham et al, 2009). Home Office initiatives such as Prevent (see Thomas, 2009), launched in 2007 to gather intelligence and address the causes of ‘radicalisation’, make it clear that the state is actively seeking to bring religious communities to the public table to increase public security (Dinham et al, 2009). While ‘new political ideas are seeking to bring about an overt/metaphysical religious pluralism in public live so as to forge a ‘positive engagement’ out of the multicultural plurality of contemporary life’ (Connolly 1999: 185). In this vein the incorporation of different faith groups around the political table has also been part of a strategic positioning in response to the race riots of 2001, which under the banner of ‘social cohesion’, aims to include marginal religious communities (see Cloke et al, 2008).

In the second instance, that of the service-based arm of religion, it is clear that faith-based organisations and faith-motivated individuals appear to have once again taken up a key position as providers in public welfare.
The stripping down of the welfare state and the shape of contemporary neoliberal governance has provided opportunities for something of a resurgence of faith-based activity in the public sphere (Cloke and Beaumont, 2012). While neoliberalism appears to be everywhere it is clearly distinctive in different nation states, best viewed as embedded and contextual, shaping national, regional and local contexts differently (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). This said, however the linchpin of neoliberal ideology has clearly always been that open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from state intervention, represent the mechanism for economic development. Overviewing the past forty years however the history of neoliberalism has had several distinct stages. The most recent of these has led to the reappearance of religion in the public arena as a provider of welfare services.

Protoneoliberalism of the 1970s was given a robust and definite shape under Thatcher and Regan in the 1980s. It was in here that free trade, flexible labour and active individualism became common place in politics (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Thatcherism and Reganism represented particularly aggressive programs of economic restructuring that have since been labelled ‘roll back’ forms of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002). The implementation of these policies led to the rolling back of the welfare safety net and the hollowing out of the welfare state in both Britain and the USA (Jessop, 2002). Comparatively, more moderate forms of neoliberalism were being mobilised during the same period in traditionally social democratic and social Christian democratic states such as Canada, New Zealand and the Netherlands (see Brenner and Theodore, 2002). With New Labour taking to government in the 1990s neoliberalism took on a more complex shape that led to the contemporary circumstances in which Faith-based organizations (hereafter FBOs) find themselves invited to deliver public services. New discourses of welfare reform and new institutional arrangements have emerged that have led to the rolling out of public welfare responsibilities with private and voluntary sector partners. This shift towards a more socially interventionist agenda has led to a decentralised state with many different actors and delivers of welfare. It is within this landscape of devolved responsibility that many FBOs now find the opportunity to deliver public welfare.
The significance of FBOs in contributing towards contemporary welfare landscapes has been picked up in various ways by academics. This is reflected in special issues of *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* (see Beaumont, 2008a) and Urban studies (see Beaumont, 2008b), and in a series of essays edited by Backstrom et al (2010, 2011), Molendijk et al (2010), Baker and Beaumont (2011) and Woodhead and Catto (2012). According to Cloke and Beaumont (2012) academic recognition of this resurgence of public faith has broadly taken four major avenues. Firstly, academics have emphasized the place of religious faith in the endurance of community mobilization in both the northern and southern hemisphere. One such example of this in the context of the Global south is the work of Davis (2007) that has ‘spurred a newly emergent focus within urban studies on religious organizations in slum areas’ (Beaumont, 2008, 378). Secondly, social policy debates have traced the role and impact of FBOs in secular political and welfare issues over the last two decades, elaborating how social, religious, and spiritual capital, are made available to local communities, bought to the table by faith involvement (see Baker and Skinner 2006; Dinham et al 2009).

Within this second context however, social policy literatures have also shown that religious welfare provision goes beyond the mixed economy and the utilization of faith based capital to challenge mainstream social policy thinking by giving more relative importance to ethical issues such as self-knowledge and morality (see Jawad, 2012). And research by Baker (2012) has highlighted that shifts in governance and the recent introduction of Big Society discourse by the coalition government has in fact continued a postsecular relationship between faith groups and government. In the recent writings of a number of social policy academics it is such a postsecular relationship between people of faith and government that part of the alternative to the harsh realities of neoliberalism might be configured. Dinham (2012) for example has most recently articulated this alternative by arguing that faith based people should be seen as community solidaritists over and above viewing them as social capitalists. His argument is underpinned by the belief that faith based social action arises out of relationships in communities. In comparison to the concept of social capital, which Dinham believes only leads to a narrow understanding of faith-based
involvement in public welfare, this relationally conceived alternative leaves room for a much richer understanding of faith based involvement in public welfare, a conceptualisation that chimes heavily with the ethnographic argument developed in the subsequent chapters of my thesis.

Thirdly, Cloke and Beaumont (2012) state that academics have also highlighted how FBOs are frequent partners in progressive and neo-Alinsky style multi-organisational coalitions working to combat poverty and alleviate inequality in different countries (see Beaumont and Nicholls, 2007) and, fourthly, there has been a recent interest into the range of theological perspectives that is reflected in faith based action (see Cloke, 2010). In addition to these four stands of significance, it should be emphasised that FBOs are significant at different scales and with different functions. This point has been exemplified in the findings of the EU 7th framework FACIT project, which in the context of the UK research, has shown how faith involvement extends through capacity building, political advocacy and welfare provision functions (See Beaumont and Cloke, 2012; Cloke et al, 2008). However, even though there has been a dramatic increase in research on religion over the last decade, the discipline of Geography has only recently begun to come to terms with the public place of religion in acts of care and welfare (Beaumont, 2008). Much of this is due to the orthodox manner in which religion has been researched in the discipline.

Section 2: Geography’s orthodox engagements with religion

Geography’s orthodox engagement with religion has focused on the politics and poetics of religious place, community and identities (see Kong, 2001). In the first instance this orthodox approach has led to lots of research on religious sites, ‘sacred’ spaces and pilgrimages (see Kong, 2001). In the second, it has also meant that a whole remit of work has developed that critically examines the multifaith and multicultural nature of Western society (see Aitchison et al, 2008)

Studying religious sites, sacred spaces and pilgrimages, much of this research has focused on the political contestation of ‘sacred’ or ‘religious’ spaces, and through this
work geographers have analysed the spatial conflict and power struggles between religious-religious and secular-religious relations (see Kong 2001). In some cases this research has examined how multicultural and religious understandings of sacred sites clash with capitalist and ‘rational’ urban planning logics (see Kong, 1993a; 1993b) and much of this work has focused on the religious built environment (See Zelinsky 2001; Dunn, 2005). Additionally others have examined the institutionalization and nationalization of religion and its effects on classically ‘sacred spaces’ like Buddhist temples (see Philip and Mercer, 1999), and semi-religious spaces like religious schools (see Dwyer and Myer, 1995; 1996). Examining pilgrimage routes, geography of religion scholars have investigated the contested nature of official and unofficial pilgrimage routes (see for example Murray and Graham, 1997).

Studying the multicultural and multifaith nature of Western society, a large swathe of this research has been undertaken into ethnic minorities and associated religions, while other geographers have turned to consider the increasing emergence of alternative spiritualities (Holloway, 2003; 2006). A large proportion of research focusing in on ethnic minorities has emanated from social geography and this research reflects many of geography of religion’s orthodox concerns as it has focused on politics and poetics of particular spaces (see Naylor and Ryan, 1998), religious and ethnic identities and the contested nature of these religious communities (see Dwyer, 1998; Hopkins and Gale, 2009). In many cases this work has been under the banner of geographies of Islam (see for example Falah and Nagel 2005) and an expansive current of this work has been entirely focused on the identity construction of Muslim youth (Kong 2010), both female (see Dwyer 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000) and male (see Hopkins, 2004; 2006; 2007).

Geography of religion's orthodox focus on sacred spaces and sacred practices and its more recent extended attempt to take account of the increasing multicultural nature of British society has furthered Geography in several ways. Importantly this research has spatially grounded the contestations between religions and between religious-secular differences, and it has also illustrated how the politics of these interrelations are played out across, and in, particular ‘sacred’ spaces. Secondly, the extensive
research into minority religions and minority identities has bought to the fore a whole collection of ‘other’ voices. This orthodox approach has meant however that the examination of religion in geography has tended to be constructed as something spatially confined to certain spaces and practices and this confinement has potentially sidelined the development of how religion is also re-emerging in the public arena through service acts embedded in societal welfare and care. This is illustrative in the advances geography of religion has made over the last decade.

‘New’ geographies of religion

Reviewing the progress over the last decade Lily Kong (2010) reports that there has been a dramatic increase in the abundance of geography’s research on religion. This increase has picked up on many of the gaps she highlighted in the subdiscipline ten years earlier (see Kong 2001). In her recent review it is clear that research now extends to many different sites of religious practice and that theses include the unofficially sacred, including: museums (see Kong, 2005) media spaces (Kong, 2006), street scapes (see Ismail, 2006; Jones, 2006; Kong 2008) and financial praxis (see Pollard and Samers, 2007). Research by geographers has also attended to different sensuous geographies (see Holloway; 2003; 2006), the different constituents of populations (see Dwyer, 2008; Hopkins, 2008), different religions (see Aitchison et al, 2008) and different geographic scales (see Kong, 2010). Notable however is that research into the place and significance of religion in public welfare and care still remains remarkably sparse.

Examining how geography is beginning to make sense of a number of global shifts, one of which being the increase in urbanization and social inequality, Lily Kong’s review makes note of the recent contribution geographers have made to research on faith-based organisations (FBOs) and exclusion in European cities (see Cloke et al, 2012). However, similar to the comments made by Beaumont (2008) it is clear that before the recent work of Cloke et al (2012), geographical research into the public involvement of faith motivated people and organizations was particularly slim, appearing only as ‘stand alone examples’ (Beaumont, 2008, 377). Taking account of
both these 'stand alone examples' and the collective work of Cloke et al (2012) there is still a remarkable disparity between the significance of this phenomenon and the quantity and depth of geographical research. Even though recent research by Cloke et al (2012) has highlighted the involvement of FBOs and faith-motivated individuals across different welfare sectors and at different scales, there are still many unexplored avenues. As Lily Kong (2010, 12) argues:

“much detailed work remains to be done regarding faith based organizations in specific contexts, such as: the ways in which sociopolitical environments shape the development of FBOs; the specific nature of and impetuses for FBOs in different settings; the relative success in bringing about changes in urban social justice; and the factors that limit or aid their success, including the internal and external dynamic relationships of FBOs.”

Section 3: The significance of faith-praxis in public welfare

In this final section of the chapter I argue why geography's understanding of the place, purpose and practice of religion and faith in public acts of welfare and care needs to be both deepened and extended. I argue that there are three main reasons why this must occur: firstly, because faith-praxis is often motivated and shaped by particular theo-ethics, secondly, because faith-praxis is a very real and embedded phenomena in contemporary welfare landscapes, and thirdly, because the engagement of faith-motivated people in contemporary acts of welfare and care provides an important insight into the place of faith-praxis in relation to emerging postsecular stirrings.

i) Faith-praxis and theo-ethics

Faith-inspired public expressions of welfare and care need to be given greater academic attention because the involvement of faith-motivated individuals and organizations in public welfare is often underpinned by certain theological ethics that prompt and form public faith-praxis in particular ways. The importance of paying
attention to these particularities is that it will bring greater clarity as to why faith-motivated people and organizations are involved in public care and welfare. It will also enable a more discerned understanding of how people of faith are publicly involved. Understanding both these facets will enable the particularities of faith-inspired and structured praxis to speak back to the discipline of geography (Yorgason, 2009). There are two important strands of theo-ethics that need to be given more room to speak back to geography.

The first strand is discursive. Theo-ethics are often derived from particular theological narratives and these theological narratives elicit certain theological values and inform ethical decision-making in particular ways. Understanding how different religions and faiths draw upon theological narrative as they are enrolled into public welfare and care will allow geography to engage more deeply with the theological underpinnings of belief (Kong, 2010).

In the case of Christianity alone for example, theo-ethics draw on particular scriptural narratives. Whether this is to ‘love your neighbour’ (Mark 12:31), to forgive and ‘embrace’ different and perhaps despised others (see Volf, 1996), or in the context of post-Christendom, to embody an ‘exiled’ lifestyle that rejects individualism and greed (see Frost, 2006), theological narratives are used to encourage and prompt people of faith to undertake certain acts and to develop particular character traits. Increasingly people of faith have leant on a mix of tradition and immanence in the form of virtue ethics, and virtuous actions have been valorised as both a goal to aspire to and as a habit to be acquired (Cloke, 2010). Therefore as well as it being important to understand how discursive theo-ethics encourage and prompt particular action, it is also important to understand how discursive theo-ethics shape particular agents in public acts of welfare and care.

The second strand relates directly to the nature of faith and religion in and of itself. Religion and faith draw not only on the ‘real’, they draw on the ineffable. Faith-practice is not only prompted and structured by the discursive but also by the less discursive. Faith, spirituality and religion offers what Caputo terms the ‘hyper-real’
a ‘reality beyond the visible, making available that which eluded the narrow-minded idea of what was possible within modernity’ (Cloke, 2010, 231). Reaching for this ‘reality beyond the visible’ draws upon experience and emotion as well as reason, and it draws upon spiritual dispositions to evoke a consciousness that is alternative to the consciousness and perception of dominant culture (see Cloke 2010). This way of perceiving and engaging with the ‘hyper-real’ can lead to particular theo-ethical sensibilities.

ii) Faith-praxis as a real and embedded public phenomenon

The scope of faith-inspired involvement in public acts of care and welfare is both vast and complex and across the UK both locally and nationally faith-praxis is often at the forefront of certain welfare sectors (see Cloke et al, 2008).

Research by Cloke et al (2010) for example gives an insightful indication of how embedded people of faith and their networks are in the provision of care and support for the homeless population of Bristol. This research found that churches remain fertile recruiting ground for volunteers, and that faith-networks continue to initiate, encourage, valorize, and even organise, individual and group involvement in the provision of homeless people. Furthermore this research made note of the place of homeless services as devices for the fulfillment of active Christian service (Ibid, 2010). Similarly, the research of Barnett et al (2010) has highlighted how people of faith and faith-networks are significantly enrolled into local spaces of ethical consumption. As supporters rather than as consumers these people of faith are enrolled through interpersonal ties, embedded in spaces of social interaction such as churches, schools or work places. On a wider scale across Britain, faith-networks, organizations and individuals appear to hold key roles in other sectors of provision and protest. The Christian FBO the Trussel Trust has facilitated the franchise of over 150 foodbanks across the UK (see Lambie, 2011) and the Salvation Army is in its second year of delivering the public contract to care and support for victims of human trafficking. While the history of the international ‘drop the debt’ campaign, Jubilee, provides evidence that faith-networks provide a key role in the actual birth of many
contemporary initiatives campaigning against debt and global poverty (see Dent et al, 1999).

iii) Faith-praxis as a co-constituent of the postsecular

Faith-praxis in the arena of public welfare and care is one part-constituent of the postsecular. Whereas previously rigid lines were drawn up to demarcate the secular and the religious now instead new relations of possibility are emerging (Beaumont and Baker, 2011). Therefore, while faith-praxis is arguably important in its own right: as both praxis that is motivated by particular theo-ethics, and as phenomena that is publically resurgent in society, the broader significance of faith-praxis is that it often performed and negotiated amongst a mix of different positionalities. The involvement of people of faith in acts of welfare and care is taking place alongside actors who hold different identities, motivations and ideological standpoints. Returning to the examples of fairtrade, debt campaigning and provision for the homeless for example, it is evident that this is the case within all three of these sectors.

The research of Cloke et al (2010) into homeless provision across Bristol found that in almost all cases there was a mixing of different faith, religious, political and ideological motivations among organizer’s staff and volunteers. At night shelters across the City a mix of students, church groups and a range of other volunteers worked together to do something practical for homeless people (see Cloke, 2011.) While similarly in local fair-trade initiatives a similar combination of theological, ethical and political differences coalesced (see Barnett et al, 2010). In some instances as well there being evidence of a mutual point of engagement between differently motivated people, sometimes people of faith are responsible for initiating particular campaigns and services that then go on to receive wider take up by broader society. This was the case with the Jubilee campaign.

The Jubilee campaign drew on Old Testament narrative to foreground an idea of present day debt remission in contemporary global affairs. Primarily supported by the Christian faith network across the UK this campaign soon incorporated a host of organizations and affiliated activists drawn from secular and non-Christian faith
networks, growing at its peak to incorporate 60 different countries. Reframed now under Jubilee-plus, the Jubilee campaign continues and has developed a multifaith project to link local, national and international efforts to encourage people of faith to engage with combating and campaigning against poverty (see Dent et al, 1999).

Stepping back from these three examples and reflecting more broadly on postsecular possibilities, faith praxis needs further investigation because as it is a co-constituent of the postsecular, further research into the place, purpose and practice of faith-praxis will highlight and extend not only the position and place of faith-praxis but what and how such praxis plays a part in postsecular society. Understanding faith-praxis as part of these broader postsecular stirrings will therefore further geography’s understanding of how the postsecular is spaced and placed as well as the particular contribution faith-praxis makes to this rapprochement (see Cloke, 2010).

Taking note of these three provocations and the call of Lily Kong (2010) to attend in much more detail to FBOs in different contexts this thesis critically explores one particular avenue of Christian faith-praxis in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. Haunting this critical exploration however is a number of broader geographic sub-fields, particularly Marxism, Feminism and Post-Colonialism. While these three sets of literatures are not made categorically explicit in the thesis they are implicit in its formulation. The implicit nature of their influence rises to the surface from time to time throughout the thesis, however because at the heart of this thesis lies an ethnography, the thesis is intentionally written as a ‘theory light’ thesis. There is however a number of Marxist, Feminist and Post colonial themes/voices that resonate with the questions raised, the content and thematic structure of this thesis. From a post colonial/ feminist perspective much that is implicit within this thesis centers on notions of self and other. Concepts of representation, power and practice, as broad and as fluid as they are within post colonial and feminist debates, all are formative to the direction this thesis takes, particularly in the production of research questions in chapter two, and in the piecemeal conceptual framework that is drawn upon in chapter four to analyse the relations and encounters between Christian-self and marginal other. Like so many geographers interested in the intersection between
ethics and social and economic inequality my intellectual starting point has been those voices that locate and analyse power in the immediacy and primacy of an encounter with difference. In such light my work has been implicitly influenced by the work of Sarah Ahmed (2000), Edward Said (1978) and Mirosalf Volf (1994).

While as an undergraduate student the work of Edward Said (1978) introduced me to the stark reality that notions of self and other are inseparable and best understood as mutually constitutive of one another. I am indepted to Sarah Ahmed (2000) for introducing me to the complex way in which ‘strangers’ and ‘others’ are constructed through fetishism with difference. Lastly the work of the theologian Mirosalf Volf (1994) took me by surprise and has influenced me deeply ever since I first read his work. His examination of the forces that bring us together and hold us apart have enabled me to begin to make sense of how, theologically speaking at least, the human self might reconcile itself to an other in contexts of persisting enmity.

Secondly, two particular Marxist geographers haunt the questions and the critique that has been developed throughout this thesis. Doreen Massey and David Harvey, two intellectual giants in Human Geography implicitly haunt this ethnographic work. While deeply implicit in the actual written piece there is the occasional glimmer of suggestion that this thesis owes them a debt, none more so than my use of the phrases marginal and marginal-other. Both Harvey and Massey have so eloquently argued that the dynamic nature of capitalism reworks space and produces new configurations of uneven spatial development. Both have been influential in training me to turn my attention to how the built environment is continually re-shaped and reworked by social relations that structure the shifting and mutating beast we call capitalism. Both have been influential in helping me to understand how the shifting processes of capital accumulation leave some places, territories and scales privileged over others.

The work of Harvey (see 2010) has led me to understand that space, place, culture and social relations are dramatically shaped by the volatility of capital accumulation and these flow across and connect the global, national and local. While the work of Massey has shown me that most importantly places are places of social relations and that space/place is a product of and is imbued with social power. While much of her work
on late capitalism and the built environment articulates the negative effect of capitalist social processes (see Massey, 2000), the broader philosophical points she makes I find extremely hopeful, and these points implicitly underpin my work into the nature and dynamics of ‘incarnational geographies’ in this thesis. Like Doreen Massey (2005) I am convicted that space is the product of interrelations; that it has the potential to be understood as a capable of multiple realities and that it is always under construction. The re-reading this thesis makes is implicitly dependent upon such an alternative spatial outlook and this is implicit in the rest of the thesis which is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 outlines and critically interrogates the Christian faith-praxis under in investigation in this thesis. It explores the theological and cultural context that has led to the contemporary uptake of ‘incarnational living’ in socio-economic areas and outlines how such faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ is being embraced by: individuals, groups of faith-inspired individuals, and Christian faith based organizations. Critically examining two normative interpretations I argue that ‘incarnational geographies’ need to be carefully re-read with attention to certain nuances and complexities. Like all four of the concepts that emerge from this thesis an understanding of the concept ‘incarnational geographies is develop as the thesis progresses. It is introduced in this second chapter and then fleshed out through the fourth and fifth ethnographic chapters.

Chapter 3 charts the development of the research and critically explores both the practicalities and issues that emerged whilst planning and undertaking the research. It critically examines why I adopted an ethnographic approach, introduces the case study at the heart of the ethnographic enquiry and engages with a number of critical issues concerning both positionality and writing and representing ‘incarnational geographies’.

Chapter 4 is the first of two substantive empirical chapters and it critically examines ‘incarnational geographies’ through a socio-temporal lens. This chapter furthers the re-reading set out in chapter two by exploring the dynamic nature of ‘living amongst’.
Tracing the historical development of the Message Trust and the Eden-network it critically analyses the changing structure, vision and theologies embedded in the organisation’s practice. Drawing on the experience of volunteers and staff within the Eden/614UK case study this chapter examines why people joined the project, what their experiences of doing the project were, and why in some cases people left. Examining practitioners actual experiences of ‘living amongst’ helps to build a critical examination of the motivations that trigger involvement, the practicalities, imaginaries and feelings caught up in actually doing the project, as well as examining the changing expectations and understandings of rational for self-involvement. Critically examining these biographic narratives of joining, doing and leaving also opens up an appreciation of how these practiced landscapes are often characterized by other-orientated practices and notions of care. In this fourth chapter the concept of ‘socio-temporal landscapes’ is used to articulate how ‘incarnational geographies’ are contingent upon the formation of new social relations between self and other and how such relations are enriched and reformulated in and through praxis over time, while the concept of ‘re-enchantment’ is used to articulate the impact such encounters have on motivating ethical behavior, to and for the sake of marginal others. Like other thesis specific concepts these two concepts are given shape as the argument progresses through the chapter.

**Chapter 5** is the second substantive empirical chapter and it critically examines ‘incarnational geographies’ through an ethical lens. This chapter furthers the re-reading set out in chapter two by examining the involvement of volunteers and staff of Eden/SA614UK in the local community. It questions how this involvement might be considered as co-constitutive of an ethical landscape by attending to the involvement of staff and volunteers of Eden/SA614UK in and beyond voluntary and public welfare provision. In this final ethnographic chapter I give substance to the concept of ‘progressive post secular partnerships’ by focusing on the everyday mutual partnership between secular and religious people in local public sector spaces. I mark them out as progressive due to their ability to synergize effort for the sake of marginalized others.
Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by laying out the significant contribution of the research findings to the overall argument of this thesis before critically reflecting on methodology and suggesting how this research could be expanded upon and taken further in the future.
Chapter 2: Incarnational geographies

In the previous introductory chapter I explored how religion and faith have resurfaced in the public arena in the UK: rising in prominence due to the increasing multicultural context of the nation and standing out because of the resurgence of the service-based arm of religion. I explained that the resurgence of the service-based arm of religion is the broad societal context within which my thesis is nested and I argued that geography has yet to fully come to terms with this public phenomenon. In this second chapter I build upon this argument by examining in depth one particular arena of Christian faith-inspired action taking place in socio-economically deprived areas. This public contemporary expression of Christianity is the empirical and investigative focus of this thesis. This review makes up the first section of this chapter and it critically engages with the dual impetus driving this form of faith-inspired praxis: a discontentment with contemporary church praxis and theological inspiration drawn from the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the second section of this chapter I critically review two normative critical interpretations of this type of faith-inspired action and I argue that this particular faith-praxis and its geographies needs to be carefully re-read with attention to certain nuances and complexities. Questioning and deconstructing these normative interpretations opens up a series of analytical themes that are later applied to my ethnographic case study.

Section 1: Reengaging with the margins and ‘living amongst’

While most Faith-based organisations (FBOs) establish an organisational presence among the socio-economically marginalised people, there has been a recent move towards a personal habitual presence amongst people living in poverty (Cloke, 2010). This faith-motivated praxis involves choosing to live in-amongst the excluded, serving as a close neighbour rather than as a volunteer, or worker, who vocationally breezes in and out of these areas.

‘Living amongst’ is not solely the ambit of faith-based practitioners and it is important
to acknowledge that there are examples of people who are driven by secular impulses to ‘live amongst’. Examples can be drawn from across a number of different public sector professions. Doctors, community organisers and social workers sometimes intentionally choose to practice their profession in areas of socio-economic deprivation. In the medical profession these doctors stand out as ‘exceptional individuals’ wishing to help counter the ‘inverse care law’ (Hastings et al, 2001) while in social work those concerned do so out of an adherence to a more radical take up of a profession becoming increasingly inhibited by professionalisation and managerialism that draws practitioners away from a truly community-based approach to care (See Baldwin, 2008). This said, in the UK the phenomena of intentionally choosing to relocate to live within a socio-economically deprived neighbourhood appears to be a faith-inspired praxis. These practices are often born out of a critical dissidence with the way faith is often (not) translated into action and is at times physically distant from ‘nearly forgotten places’ (Thompson, 2010). They are also symptomatic of a growing ambivalence with the engrained normative way of practicing Christian ‘mission’ under the fast fading established order of Christendom (see Murray, 2004).

**Critiquing Christian Church**

Many critical questions have been asked of how the Christian faith should be practiced in light of social, economical and political needs of urban communities. A good number of these criticisms have been from outside faith networks (see Allahyari, 2000), while others have emanated from within (see Frost, 2006). Recently there has been a growing reflexive critique within elements of the Western Church over how the church relates to ‘the poor’ (see Bishop, 2007; Claibourne, 2006; Wilson, 2005; Myers, 2011). Particular faith-practitioners have questioned how urban Christian faith communities and FBOs should be structured, where they should be placed, and what values should be central (see Frost, 2006; Graham and Lowe, 2009). To provide greater context and to elicit some of the passion that drives the forms of praxis at the centre of discussion in this thesis it is appropriate to dwell upon this critique. In this instance, I will consider the critical contribution of Gary Bishop, a faith-based
The critique by Bishop (2007), in his book *Darkest England and the Way Back In*, suggests a two-fold contradiction in what the Christian faith so often upholds as its central narratives. In the context of his own denominational movement, the Salvation Army, he writes that what has emerged is both a physical distance between churches and the marginalised, and a particular way of engaging with the marginalised; one that is temporary and mediated through organisational and project-based contexts. Bishop explains that the physical distance between the ‘Western Church’ and ‘the poor’ has been exacerbated by the increasing wealth of those who practice Christianity. He highlights how the Salvation Army has grown from a 19th century movement to a 21st century respectable organisation, broadly being subject to an upward shift in socio-economic terms. The gulf between the Church and the marginalised has been further emphasised by the geographical relocation of many new larger church congregations into out-of-town or industrial warehouses (see Connell, 2005; Warf et al, 2010) and the location of many FBO and church buildings onto the fringes of prime space away from major geographic pockets of deprivation. For Bishop the effect of these changes has been for Christian congregations to enter into areas of deprivation in a breeze-in/ breeze-out fashion, shaping the way in which they relate to marginal-others. In one sense charity has become the Church’s mediator, while in another sense physical distance has become its comfort.

The act of financial giving has been one of the ways in which the Western Church has ethically expressed its desire to help out, but as Slavoj Zizek (2010) makes the point with regards to the idea of ‘conscious consumerism’ and what he calls ‘cultural capitalism’, charity is not the final answer to an unjust system or unjust network of social relations. At their best these forms of charity are an improvement, and at their worst, they are a display of guilt: using charity as a means of perhaps putting at bay larger efforts to create radically alternative ways of living in relation to others. Charity, on first inspection appears to be extremely admirable but, according to Zizek, on closer inspection, charity perpetuates a hypocritical system. Although I am not sure if I fully support Zizek in this view, such a spirit of skepticism is worth exploring in the
context of Christian ‘charity’ for a moment longer.

To get an idea of how charity might act as a mediator between a person, church and marginal, perhaps, disempowered others, Zizek’s mode of criticism—albeit undervaluing what good is actually being worked out through the work of these charities and those who support them with their time and money—highlights something of the same spirit that lies behind Bishop’s faith-based critique. International faith-based child sponsorship schemes (see Yeun, 2011) linking developed country donors with less developed country receivers, continue to grow, and domestically within the UK, there has been continual growth in the size of Christian faith-based charities tackling homelessness (see Cloke et al 2010), human trafficking (see Zimmerman, 2001) and inadequate access to nutritional food (see Lambie-Mumford et al, 2012). While this illustrates the incredible passion and entrepreneurial spirit of many faith actors keen to ‘get stuck in’ and ‘make a difference’ it also illustrates a common trend across the Christian faith-based welfare sector. The gritty work of tackling such issues is deemed the work of charities. Lay individuals from worshipping communities, unless active as staff or volunteers in these organisations, find themselves distinctively removed from the real lives of those facing poverty and social exclusion as a stark reality of everyday life. As a result, for the lay person in church, intimate knowledge of these marginal-others never becomes fully realised; it remains the work of charity and the physical distance that separates the donor and the benefactor delineates particular ways of relating to these ‘others’ that never see this relational and emotional distance collapsed.

Although I agree with others who have argued how constructive such spaces and networks of charitable care are for the voluntary outworking of localised forms of ethical citizenship (see Cloke et al, 2007 Barnett et al, 2005), I would echo Zizek to suggest, maybe (and I would emphasise the maybe) sometimes ‘charity’ in some guises stands in the way to justice ‘proper’, not so much as a barrier to being ethical, but as a diversion from the realization of more radical forms of ethically relating to marginal-others. In the context of Christian faith-based care this is because what broadly epitomizes the nature of Christian care and engagement with marginal others
is, more often than not, that members of the Christian faith at best do things for others rather than with others (Auge, 1998). Charities, social enterprises, and other FBOs structure social relations in ways that rarely break out of the normatively structured nature of 20th century welfare context of service provider/client or donor/recipient. Deconstructing this normative way of relating and embracing radical forms of knowing and caring for marginal-others is at the heart of Bishop's faith-based critique.

Surveying the way the Church currently relates to marginal-others, Bishop is certain that in contrast to distant and delocalized expressions of Christian faith-inspired care, what would be most effective is for Christians to journey back in, consciously choosing to live within these areas of socio-economic deprivation. This, he believes, would result in 'becoming part of these communities, making real friendships with people that may seem very different to us at the onset but allowing them to shape and change us so that we can become at home in their native territory' (2007, 60). He hopes that this would result in an asymmetrical relationship with others, opening up ‘a level of relationship with local people that is difficult to achieve when you only do things for the community’ (2007, 65, emphasis added).

These challenges have also been echoed by a number of prominent Christian activists in the United States (see for example Claibourne, 2006; Sider, 2005). Claibourne (2006), an American Christian author and activist, argues that the hypocrisy and complacent indifference with which Christians treat Jesus’ teachings on the marginalised has depersonalized poverty and has created relational, and in some cases spatial and emotional, distance from the marginalised. On the back of trying to work this out for himself in Philadelphia, Shane Claibourne and others that are part of the Simply Way Christian faith community have prompted other Christians to question whether they simply ‘know of the poor’ or whether they actually ‘know the poor’?'(Claibourne, 2006, p 48). Drawing on theological narrative in particular ways this movement and the surge of Christians who have chosen once again to habitually live alongside marginal-others has been labeled as living out an ‘incarnational’ faith in socioeconomic areas. My thesis is all about these ‘incarnational geographies’.
Pursuing Christ and being ‘incarnational’

As Terry Eagleton (2010) argues, being Christian and having a Christian faith is about a tenacious loyalty to the Christ ‘event’ and enacting a ‘loving commitment’ to this ‘event’. Similarly as Alain Badiou (2003, p 70) comments, ‘becoming Christian’ it is about ‘becoming an authentic human subject’ ‘through one’s passionate allegiance to such a revelation’. Such loyalty, commitment, and allegiance of the faithful, has performatively resulted in an abundance of different ways of being and doing Christianity throughout history. Time and again these different approaches, practices and postures of the Church and of Christians have taken inspiration from particular biblical narrative. The theological center point for Christians trying to embody an ‘incarnational’ faith is the account of Christ ‘becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us’ (John 1:14). This theological narrative presents a knowledge of the humility of God; the commitment of God to His world having entered into it; a model for what it means to be fully human: embracing humility and being sacrificial, and all importantly a cosmic change to everything: God is not only revealed in human flesh but is sent for redemptive purposes (see Lloyd, 2005). This example of Jesus entering in and being in the world in a particular way acts as the theological model for those who seek to follow as ‘disciples’. Reflecting on the model of Jesus: his incarnation, life and death has real significance for Christians acting upon an ‘incarnational’ approach.

As the Church is theologically thought of as ‘Christ’s body in the world’ faithfully called to ‘being the bearer of biblical story’ (Myers, 2011, p 79) some Christians, including the likes of Bishop and Claibourne, are inspired to embrace an approach to Christian mission and discipleship that is founded upon a brave process of questioning the discrepancies between the biblical narratives of Christ and the contemporary practices of the church. Christianity after Christendom (see Murray, 2004) is turning once again to consider the life and death of Jesus Christ in ways that re-centre the importance of Christ’s incarnational witness (Guder, 2000). Christians who relocate to socioeconomically deprived areas of the UK are therefore comparing the contemporary practices of the Church, and therefore themselves, to those of Christ, and this theological narrative is reflexively shaping their actions.
As I explored in the critiques of Bishop, there is a discontentment with the tendency of the Church and Christians to be located among affluent areas, dwelling among the middle class. However, considering that the Church is theologically representative of Christ’s body, many involved in choosing to ‘live amongst’ are questioning the discrepancies between the biblical narratives of Christ and the practices of the church. As biblical narrative portrays the embodied life of Christ as often dwelling among and with the marginalised in society, these Christians are reflexively asking how they can emulate such a lifestyle when it is, at times, not reflected in the contemporary Church.

It is clear that in light of these theological narratives a set of discursive tropes have come together around the narrative of Christ’s Incarnation. This has produced particular theoethical enactments of this narrative (see Cloke, 2010). Embracing this particular theological mindset has provided some of the impetus for where and why these Christians choose to live. A faith-inspired approach that on the one hand is about *proximity* and on the other hand is about *posture*. This incarnational way of relating and being amongst the marginalised Bessnecker (2006, 172) describes involving ‘tearing down the insulation and becoming real to those in trouble’. Gaining inspiration from biblical accounts of Christ’s own descent into humanity (Bessnecker, 2006) this praxis involves a willingness to relinquish personal desires and interest in the service of others (Frost, 2006). This purposeful embrace of ‘downward mobility’ is about ‘moving from places of power and influence to places of poverty and desperation, renouncing privilege and opportunity’ (Bessenecker, 2006, 24; see also Hybels and Wilkins, 1993). This habitual practice of ‘living amongst’ is in many ways a ‘commitment to enter and ...remain in the universe of the poor with a much clearer awareness, making it a place of residence and not simply work (Guitterrez, 2001, 73).

In contrast to the type of charity Ziziek (2010) critiques, embedded within this incarnational approach is the possibility for a form of praxis that purposefully goes-beyond-the-self, reconfiguring relations between charitable-self and receiving-other in ways that are more radical. The *potential* and *possibility* caught up in this approach is the search to embody an ethic for and alongside the other that is configured, not around a tokenistic and self-orientated set of charitable desires, but around a sacrificial ethic that relies on a deep conviction and commitment to the other, meeting
them in their circumstance and seeking to step inside their world, to understand the pain and the pleasure in a deeply relational manner.

However for many involved in ‘living amongst’ such forms of faith-inspired praxis are not only about moving to serve others but about evangelically sharing faith with these others in the process of such service. Intentionally questioning the proximity and posture of the Church and its members in relation to marginalised-others in light of the ‘great commission’ is in this vein about being close enough that the lives of the faithful rub up against the lives of the marginalised, and that in such relational encounters those others see the incarnate Christ in their values, beliefs, and practices (Frost, 2006). ‘Living amongst’ is in many cases both a process of enacting faith and sharing faith, with some envisaging this process of sharing more explicitly than others. I will return to critically examine this tension in the second part of this chapter.

The relocation of individuals, groups and churches

Among Christians there is something of a re-emergent movement of people willing to be placed within marginal landscapes and a supportive social network wanting to generously redistribute resources – particularly volunteers, time and money – to support others who have been in place all along. Across the complexity of this re-emergent movement is the call for an intentional personal presence within these areas of deprivation that seeks to permanently place faith motivated individuals or groups more permanently alongside those experiencing poverty or social exclusion. Efforts to relocate and live amongst marginal-others have broadly taken three forms. Although in some cases there is a sense of hybridity between how these forms of response are shaped, in what follows, without wanting to present a model or spectrum that defines the shape of relocation, three distinctive styles of relocation are outlined to suggest key differences in approach.

First, there are faith-inspired individuals intentionally relocating and living in areas of socio-economic deprivation. These individuals relocate with the purpose and conviction of seeing positive transformation in these communities. These individuals
may engage with the wider neighbourhood through community organising, purposefully participating in collective action with others of goodwill, while attentively listening to the particular needs of people in the area. Below is typical example presented in the case study of Tom.

**Case Study 1: Tom**

*Tom Cleft works as a regional manager for a Christian Charity. He is a well-educated professional with a well-paid job. He could choose to live in suburbia but instead has chosen to live on Axel Estate in Roehampton.*

*Prompted by his Christian faith he has moved onto the social housing estate. He lives in Rivermead House in a two bedroom flat, which he shares with a friend. There have been plans to demolish Rivermead House, but nothing definite has been decided and so residents are currently living with uncertainty, facing constant battles with the local council to persuade them to maintain the building. Tom has become something of a spokesperson for Rivermead House. He spends time visiting neighbours to canvass their views on what needs mending and liaises with the council. These issues bother Tom. His concern is for his fellow neighbours and their kids. The lifts break down regularly and people treat the lifts like public urinals. The telecom system frequently does not work. Drug users ring all the buzzers till someone lets them in and then they deal drugs on the stairwell. Becoming a local resident has led Tom to campaign against these issues. Living in Rivermead House these issues have become personal for him.*

*Tom volunteers for another local Charity mentoring several young people on the estate. He encourages each young person to achieve their own goals and is witnessing them take small steps towards these targets. Some are going to the gym, eating a better diet; others are less stressed and are drinking less. Some are applying to University.*

*Not all things are so positive for Tom. He has had to make some big personal sacrifices – his quality of life and his relationships could be better if he chose to live somewhere else. His family doesn't enjoy coming to visit and his fiancée Ruth does not feel safe visiting.*
But for Tom, living on the estate, he is less preoccupied with mortgages, career and success, the estate presents more immediate and communal concerns and he can’t help but get involved.

While the example of Tom illustrates how his personal choice to relocate has led him to seek out positive transformation on the estate there are a number of critical issues that this example raises. Firstly, as an activist advocating against some of the conditions facing residents on the estate Tom is enrolled into acts of protest and campaigning as a representative on behalf of other neighbours. This dynamic, as an outsider who is authoritatively speaking as a ‘spokesperson’ for others, puts Tom in a position of power in relation to his nearby neighbours. The issue that such an unbalanced power dynamic creates is that it opens up the potential for the voices and views of others to be neglected. In this case Tom would be enrolled into redevelopment issues as an articulate ‘elite’ (see Ward 2011) and the wider participation of other neighbours into such discussions might be bypassed. Secondly, the other critical issue raised from this case study emerges out of the perceived need to ‘be sacrificial’. The assumption inherent within this premise is that living ‘incarnationally’ is something that presupposes those involved have greater access to resources, a higher standard of living, and greater mobility than those not capable of choosing to live in or leave that particular community. Equally, for Tom, moving into the neighbourhood was a personal choice. Which in itself is a reminder that while Tom can become a local resident, networked into the local community through voluntary work, a friendship group and his sharing of a flat on the estate, holding a different socio-economic position with access to surplus financial capital and with a network of friends and family beyond the estate there is always an ‘out’ for Tom should he choose it. These cultural, economic and social differences potentially could mean that Tom will always be something of an outsider, never fully being accepted as just another local neighbour. These tensions and critical issues will be picked up again in much greater detail in the ethnographic exploration of the thesis’s main case study in chapter 4.

Moving beyond the example of Tom there are groups of faith-inspired people, here
termed ‘communities of intention’, which relocate. These communities of intention are informally linked with one another but are often unaffiliated from any particular Christian denomination or established Church. The example of Dave and Lucy highlights how these communities of intention start.

Case Study 2: Dave and Lucy

Dave and his wife Lucy live in inner city Manchester. Dave finished University in Manchester five years ago. Together with a group of friends they intentionally moved into an area they once avoided as students. Dave would only have come into contact with the area through voluntary work with a local homeless organization. He now lives in the area and works full-time for the same charity.

From time to time Dave and Lucy house an asylum seeker in connection with a citywide asylum seeker charity. They regularly meet with other friends who have made the neighbourhood their home. This ‘community of intention’ is not associated with any particular formal church. As a group of friends with a common faith and the same passion for the area they see themselves as a faith community wishing to make a difference in the local area. Drawing upon their own Christian faith they re-imagine what the area could be like: a place with less poverty and racial conflict, a greater number of jobs for local people, and a decline in mental health issues.

The example of Dave and Lucy indicates how communities of intention are informally structured and highlights the nature of their character. Founded upon a passion for a particular area of the city and a hopeful participation within it, the example of Dave and Lucy elucidates how communities of intention seek to re-imagine socioeconomically deprived areas. Being bound together by a similar set of convictions, the case of Dave and Lucy also illustrates how communities of intention form, and gives an account of the purpose of their intentional relocation and gathering as a group.

In comparison to the examples of Tom, and Dave and Lucy, the most structured
accounts of relocation come in the form of ‘church plants’. These seek to see a form of church established in the local neighbourhood. These expressions of church may not be as formally recognisable as their traditional affiliated counterparts but are in any case linked to both a wider network of similar expressions of ‘doing church’ and a support network of more traditional denominational churches – from which financial and social capital is often resourced. In the case of the United Kingdom, many of the major traditional denominations have in someway embraced supporting and overseeing these initiatives. The Baptist (see Urban Expressions, 2011), Salvation Army (see 614UK, 2011) Methodist and the Anglican Church (see Fresh Expressions, 2011) have all become involved across the scope of the UK in these initiatives. In the UK the extent of this expression of Church finds its place in most major cities and many more are being planned. Case study three outlines how Mike became involved in an Incarnational ‘church plant’ linked with the Eden-Network (see chapter 3).

**Case Study 3: Mike**

Mike spent a year on a UK-based Christian Gap Year project connecting social action with a bible-based personal faith. Having completed this year out he felt the urgency and conviction to continue living out his faith in a way that directed him to one of the several Manchester-based Eden Projects. The Eden-network facilitated this process for him. This meant he could study at University while actively being involved in a local ‘church plant’. The Eden Project church partner organization, the Salvation Army, helped finance his degree in Youth Work and Community, and he moved onto a well renowned housing estate where the church plant had just been started. He soon became a key volunteer for the Eden Project/ Salvation Army partnership.

The ‘church plant’ was comprised of ten other volunteers who had moved from more affluent areas to commit to living on the estate for a minimum of five years. Motivated by Christian convictions, each volunteer wanted to actively share their own faith through both words and actions. Their aim was to embed themselves in the life of the estate, so that where they could, they could help make it a more hopeful and harmonious place. This meant that Mike commuted the 50 minutes to University and committed his spare
time to running drop-in youth clubs. He has now finished his degree and still lives on the estate. He still volunteers for the Eden Project and plays an active role in the church plant. He has made the estate his home. He now sits on a local residents association board and has an open door policy with the many youth who knock on his door.

In some cases a church ‘presence’ in areas of deprivation is nothing new, nor necessarily something that involves relocation or planting. The practice of enacting an incarnational expression of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived areas can be traced back through history and has a deep heritage. For example the various Franciscan orders established in the medieval period are a testament to the fact that this faith-inspired approach of ‘living amongst’ is indeed not a particularly new phenomenon (see Andrews, 2006; Clabaigh, 2011). Similarly the ‘Slum Sisters’ or Gutter, Cellar and Garret brigade of the Salvation Army often served ‘the poor’ living amongst them in Victorian England (see Walker, 2001). Looking at the established church in the UK there is also a long lineage of Christian priests expressing their faith in deprived communities through the parish system (see NECN, 2011). Not only has this parish model provided a community function through various stages of the life cycle: birth, marriage and death it has acted upon a commitment to the surrounding geographical community with all its particular needs and changes. For many centuries these established Christian pillars of community provided influential social, religious and spiritual capital for the surrounding area. Furthermore, if it were not for these parish-based congregations then the wider churches involvement in socioeconomically deprived areas would be significantly diminished because partnership schemes and short term projects would never get off the ground (Graham and Lowe, 2009).

Many contemporary relocation efforts are also supported by FBOs and Ecumenical networks. These organisations facilitate the relocation of Christian faith-inspired individuals, connecting individuals with wider groups of Christian faith-motivated people who have the same conviction to relocate to live among the marginalised. These FBOs offer training and placements and involve commitments of varying time length. In some cases these are shorter ‘gap year’ opportunities,
providing a training ground for individuals to experience this type of localised involvement (See Mission Year, 2011 and XLP, 2011) while for other organisations the intention is a longer commitment from the outset (see Eden-Network, chapter 3).

In summary, contemporary incarnational forms of praxis in marginal areas that involve ‘living amongst’ are clearly structured and supported in different ways. The examples of Tom, Dave and Lucy, and Mike, have highlighted how this can be an individual initiative, the effort of informal community, or as part of a ‘church plant’.

These different ‘incarnational’ expressions of the Christian faith in socioeconomically deprived areas are, however, united by a common Christian conviction to become involved in the evolving narrative of each marginal context and faithfully participate in life alongside marginalised others. These ‘convictional communities’ (see Thomas, 2012) are structured around having a permanent local presence that is intentionally directed in numerous ways towards engaging with the specific need of the area, listening, witnessing, discerning and responding.

Section 2: Working towards a re-reading of ‘incarnational geographies’

So far I have presented an outline of what ‘incarnational’ praxis in deprived areas might look like. By drawing upon three short case studies I have tried to give a flavor of these forms of Christian praxis. The main point of this first section was to emphasise that in contemporary Christian praxis there is a resurgent trend among some Christians to be permanently present in areas of deprivation: ‘living amongst’ the socio-economically marginalised. As well as illustrating what this praxis might look like this section has also explored the dual impetus behind these forms of praxis: the dissatisfaction with current expressions of church and Christian living; and the pursuit and application of particular theological narratives. Using the examples of Tom, Dave and Lucy, and Mike, I have outlined some of the responsive acts of service that may emerge from ‘living amongst’ but I have only touched upon some emergent critical questions. In this second section I review two major critical readings that could be levied against these forms of faith-inspired praxis and argue for a re-reading of these forms of faith-inspired activity. This re-reading produces a number of research themes that will be applied in the ethnographic chapters.
‘Living amongst’ and unwanted proselytisation? Exploring the nuances of ‘evangelism’

The first way of looking at these Christian interventions would be to assume that the purpose behind these ‘incarnational’ practices is solely to see others converted to the Christian faith. In other words these practices could be thought of as the ‘bible bashing’ acts of fundamentalist Christians. In this view engagement with marginal-others, and services offered to them, is constructed as a means only to create spaces of proselytisation or conversion (see Woods, 2012).

Proselytisation, in its contemporary usage has negative connotations and infers some form of coercion or force to see others converted to the same faith. In the context of incarnational geographies this tactical approach would use the guise of hospitality and different forms of service to create encounters with residents and relations of obligation so that they may be converted to the Christian faith; somewhat duping them into thinking that there is no ulterior motive. This is a prominent interpretation upheld as a chief concern by liberal humanists and the popularly branded ‘new atheists’, intellectually aggressive towards all forms of religion (see Dawkins, 2006, Hitchens, 2007, Harris, 2006 and Dennet 2007). Taking the viewpoint of these thinkers, incarnational forms of praxis in marginal areas would probably be type cast as an outworking of fundamentalists seeking only converts.

Like the term proselytisation, in the context of religion, the term ‘fundamentalist’, has widely negative connotations. Such a discourse has firstly regained popularity as a process of categorising those convicted by a religious faith towards geopolitical acts of ‘violent extremism’, while it has also regained popularity as a term associated with religious believers who, in a modernist reactionary fashion, hold to unwavering dogmatic beliefs (see Cloke et al, 2012). A popular example would be that of the American Pastor Terry Jones who insisted on burning copies of the Quran even after a presidential plea not to do so. While among academics across the social sciences, religious fundamentalism has been closely associated with the American rightwing
Aside from the debatable terminology, the potential interpretation of incarnational practices as fundamentalist and proselytising could be, like other Christian spheres of intervention and participation, “block categorised” as undeterminably out to indoctrinate and convert. This is best exemplified by turning to consider the contemporary debate surrounding faith-based schools and their variable public acceptance in post-Christian society.

The contemporary debate surrounding faith-based schools has similar parallels to the potential critique that could be raised against incarnational forms of praxis in marginal areas. What liberal humanists and the ‘new atheists’ might seek to interpret about a Christian faith-motivated incarnational presence in marginal areas may, very possibly, draw upon similar principles and view points to those that get drawn out in the debate for and against the existence and public funding of faith-based schools in Britain. The means for comparison lies firstly then in the ability to categorise both school children and the socio-economically marginalised as vulnerable. This vulnerability is, for school children, defined in the fact that they are highly impressionable and often incapable of making fully informed choices, while, in the case of the socio-economically marginalised, vulnerability is thought to be bound up in there lack of access to various services, having, by default, to call upon services offered by religious groups with ‘ulterior motives’. These two are also apt for comparison because both examples raise concern for secularists who wish to see all expressions of religious faith removed from the public realm.

Aside from being accused of selective admission and biased employment policies, faith schools have become somewhat controversial for what Richard Dawkins terms in his BBC channel four enquiry ‘intellectual dishonesty’. Scientific ‘truth’ claims are downplayed and RE syllabuses, reportedly not subject to Ofsted inspections, are confessional in nature and omit a ‘neutral’ comparative approach between different religions (Humanism, 2012). Here then, the immediate concern of liberal humanists is that the right for children to come to their own critical opinion of religion is taken
away from them and replaced with a syllabus that aims to instruct students of one particular religion and its doctrines (Humanism, 2012).

The comparison between the core tenets of the faith schools debate with that of the potential one surrounding Christians involved in incarnational initiatives is reinforced by a critical interpretation of the theological discourses that direct and shape incarnational geographies. Considering the fact that for many of the church denominations and Christian individuals involved, the guiding theologies build a significant place for so-called ‘proclamation’ and ‘evangelism’, concerns could quickly arise that these incarnational interventions are imposing and imperialistic. Liberal humanist opposition to Christians relocating to marginal areas and serving incarnationally would potentially be concerned that such praxis is a continuation of ‘mission’ prevalent with the era of colonial British rule. Framed in this way it would be easy to dismiss these practices as potentially exploitative and self-imposing, mixing the welfare of these marginal others with the self-serving religious aims underlying these intentions. In this framing what appears to be other-serving is actually deeply motivated by a self-serving ambition to see new Christian converts. This view, however, potentially neglects the complex and diverse way in which faith is shared and performed.

Accordingly, Thiessen (2011) persuasively argues that the intolerance of liberal post-Christian society towards ‘evangelism’ or the ‘sharing’ of faith with others, and the deep cynicism and negativity that pervades such a resonant attitude, is built upon mass generalisation. Outright objections similar to those being articulated by the ‘new atheists’ and liberal humanists surrounding the faith schools debate are made with little effort to seek to understand and search out the diversity of approaches embodied within the actual performance of ‘sharing faith’ or doing ‘evangelism’. These views neglect the complexity and diversity of how faith is shared with others and how such varied forms of sharing faith are co-constituted and expressed with due care or without. It is therefore important to carefully consider how different socially engaged expressions of evangelism; which involve a focus on care and service to, for, and alongside the other, are constituted as ‘faith’, and crucially how this faith is ‘shared’. It
is also fundamental that staging and performance of evangelism is critically assessed for how it might be enacted without due care for the other.

Giving space to consider the incredible diversity of approaches taken in this performative act of ‘sharing’ faith is to acknowledge that such performances are differently co-constituted. Attending to the influence of these different factors opens up the nuances of evangelism: the individual agency of those enacting the ‘sharing’, how evangelism is received by different individuals, the diversity of theological, cultural and political discourses that inflect on, and give purpose to, such praxis; and the geographic context in which such a ‘sharing’ process takes place and is embedded. It also brings to light an appreciation of the complexity of how evangelism is differently enacted by different people in different places throughout history. This can be illustrated by way of brief review of some of the different forms evangelism takes, both today in contemporary western society, and in light of some of the catastrophic historical attempts to share faith that haunt Christian understandings, and continue to dominate popular imaginaries of how religious faith is ‘shared’.

Religion with a capital ‘R’ has been rightly criticised for ‘sharing faith’ in ways that are coercive, exploitive and immoral. A number of these are succinctly reviewed by Thiessen (2011, 38) in his discussion of ‘immoral proselytising’. The growth of Christianity in the first five centuries of Christianity included ‘imperially conferred benefits for church leaders and the advancement of civil servants who had become Christian’ (ibid, 38) and the compulsion to convert to Christianity under established Christendom slowly became compulsory through cultural and political pressures (see Kreider, 1999). While more overtly coercive, in the eighth century, Charlemagne forced the Saxons to be baptised under threat of death (see Daves, 1972) as did King Olaf of Norway and the Swedes upon the Finns in the twelfth century (see Megivern, 1976). Equally, the Christian crusades of the eleventh century (see Riley-smith, 1981) and the Spanish conquest of the Americas saw the cross and the sword intrinsically linked (see Rivera, 1992) to bring about many forced conversions.

In more recent history Thiessen (2011) also cites an example of the moral failures of
evangelism by drawing on the account of Glanzer (2002). In this case a large group of mission organisations were invited into the postcommunist Russian education system to spearhead a programme to instruct Russian public school teachers on how to teach Christian ethics. The practice of this became ‘ethically problematic’ (ibid, 196) as those responsible for instruction became more concerned with delivering a course introducing Christianity and seeking converts than actually teaching about Christian ethics. Similarly in Britain a number of the on-street services offered by Christian groups to homeless people have been accused of being offered with significant ‘strings attached’ (Long, 2010).

Today in America and Britain alone, Christian evangelism comes in many different guises. The abundance of books questioning both the variety of methods and contexts of evangelism are a clear indicator of this diversity. Covering a broad selection of contexts books have been published questioning how to evangelise through the internet (see Ogbonda, 2005); through sports (see Connor, 2003); the business sector (see Russel, 2010); in rural (see Rufficorn, 1994) and in urban contexts (see Davey, 2010); and to young people (see Aiken, 1992; Stier, 2006) and older people (Boynes, 1999). While exploring many different methods of evangelism Christian authors have put forward the need to embrace supernatural and ‘spirit-led’ evangelism (see Che, 2006; Deman, 2007); the use of questions (see Newman, 2004); the use of prophecy (see Stibbe, 2004), the use of group discussion (see Booker and Ireland, 2010; Finney, 2004); in the setting of large or mass audiences (Blinco, 1952); in person (Gibbs, 2004; Dever, 2007). From these titles alone it is clear that doing evangelism is not a simple or single shaped act. Not only can evangelism be viewed as a complex process enacted differently in differing contexts, it is also something that is subject to change through time. This is clearly indicative in shifts in approach and strategy over the last half a century.

One of the most notable changes in approach used by the Evangelical Church in Britain over the last fifty years has been the shift from mass audience evangelisation, that had its roots in the preaching of Charles Finney in the 19th century (Finney, 2004), to small group based discussion. ‘In 1985 evangelism for most people still
meant the meeting, the important speaker, the exhausting (and expensive) effort by the church’ (Finney, 2004, p70). However, quite quickly in these Christian circles the large scale crusades of Billy Graham and Luis Pau and the broadcast of the ‘Jesus’ video were replaced by small discussion groups run by local churches (Finney, 2004).

In the early stages of development these styles of evangelism were first associated with the ‘nurture groups’ that ran alongside the later Crusades of Billy Graham, however, in the late 1970s and 1980s a number of different pioneering courses were developed, including the first Alpha courses, the ‘Saints Alive!’ course emanating out of St Margaret's in Nottingham, and the Emmaus course from the Wakefield diocese (Finney, 2004). A number of these courses, including the Alpha course, which has received much media and some scholarly attention (see Hunt, 2004; Brian, 2003; Ward, 1998), have today grown to become nationally and internationally recogniseable brands. Alpha, originally pioneered by Holy Trinity Brompton in London, has now been translated into 55 different languages and 7,215 churches of all denominations across Britain are registered as running alpha courses (Booker et al, 2005). Several different specialised versions of the course have now been produced for use with students, the elderly, and the armed forces. While a specialist course ‘Alpha for Prisons’ has been used in 135 prisons across Britain (Booker et al, 2005).

The growth of these strategies of evangelism has been interpreted by some commentators as having resulted in the ‘McDonaldization of religion’ (see Ward, 1998) where the (modernised) Christian faith is based on ‘a package, not a pilgrimage’ and results in ‘salvation by copyright’ (Percy, 1997, 15). However others have more positively concluded that the shift in evangelistic strategy from a focus on the ‘big event’ to regular invitational discussion groups such as the Alpha course, Christianity explored or the Emmaus course (see Cottrell et al, 1996) has meant that evangelism in such a setting is built upon relationships, a relaxed personable atmosphere, a blend of reason and experience, and gives space for different people to contribute while often being led by lay persons (Finney, 2004).

The significant point to emphasise here is that ‘evangelism’ can and is performed in many different ways. As the short historical discussion has reviewed, past attempts at
'sharing’ the Christian faith have been tragically caught up in the expansion of empires, colonies and the rule of the powerful. Even in the contemporary context of post-Christendom, Christians seeking to ardently ‘share’ and evangelise others have sometimes done so with disregard to the liberty, dignity and care of others, while those Christians undertaking acts of service and welfare have done so with significant ‘strings attached’. It is important to emphasise here however that not all attempts to ‘share’ faith and evangelise might be undertaken coercively or with significant ‘strings attached’. Performances of evangelism and the methods of ‘sharing’ faith are nuanced and complex. They also require a careful analysis of the particularity of context, be it socio-cultural, political or organisational, and vigilant and scrupulous examination of the directive and shaping nature of different theologies and the appreciation of variability in human agents performing evangelism.

**Incarnational Geographies, evangelism and self-other relations**

As I have shown in the above discussion there are many different forms of evangelism and the complexity and diversity of how evangelism is enacted needs to be given significant attention. In light of these differences my thesis will need to pay attention to how ‘faithful purposefulness’ is enacted in different styles of ‘doing mission’ ‘evangelism’ and ‘service’. To best question how these are performed and what constitutes the nature and dynamics of ‘incarnational geographies’ I will need to question how relations with others are interwoven with discourses of evangelism and how these discourses of evangelism are explicitly enacted in and through these practices of ‘living amongst’.

Interrogating performances of mission and evangelism in this way will open up an analysis of how the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ could be considered as ethical or not. On the one hand this may reveal a set of colonial faith practices that may have their out-workings in the assimilation of cultural differences, gender differences or religious differences, with little regard to diversity (see Volf 1996). On the other hand, seeking to understand the nuanced nature of evangelism and how it is enacted in and through relations with others through the praxis of ‘living amongst’
may bring to light faith practices that actively attempt to go beyond-the-self (Cloke, 2002) in developing a sensitivity to otherness that includes both a sense of the other and for the other (see Auge, 1998). These performances of faith praxis might ‘involve the ability to receive the specificity of the other and to be generous in the context of that specificity rather than in the context of the self’ (Cloke et al 2005: 398), moving towards receptive forms of generosity, that include a theo-ethical notion of embrace (Volf, 1996).

The dual capacity for religion to spawn ‘lovers of the impossible’ (Caputo, 2001), capable of spilling out their passion into situations of social, economic or political need, and yet also being prone to produce the tendency for its adherents to confuse themselves with God and compromise the liberties of people who disagree with them (Caputo, 2001) means that vigilance and criticality must be employed when questioning how mission, in its holistic sense, and evangelism, in its different forms of appearance, are enacted through incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in marginal areas.

**Research Question 1: What motivates and structures the practices of volunteers and staff working within these incarnational Christian FBOs?**

**Research Question 2: How are relations with others interwoven with discourses of evangelism and how are these discourses enacted in and through the process of ‘living amongst’.**

**Faith-inspired action and virtuous self-betterment?**

The second critical reading narrows its focus to the level of individual actors, whether staff or volunteers. This interpretation of incarnational praxis in marginal areas would frame the involvement of individuals as part of a highly moralised process. This is the main argument running through the work of Rebecca Allahyari (2000) in her book *Visions of Charity*. Undertaking a detailed analysis of two different organisations, one affiliated with the Catholic Church and the other with the Salvation Army, Allahyari
draws upon in-depth volunteer profiles to question the experience of volunteering in the socio-cultural moral context of each of these two organisations. Allahyari’s conclusions are that volunteers come to hold an opinion of themselves that is constructed through their interactions with clients in the setting of these two organisations, and in adherence with the moral rhetoric of these two organisations, volunteers frame their sense of selfhood in such a way as to work towards ‘self betterment’.

Conceptualising volunteers and staff involved in incarnational geographies in this way would essentially uphold them as ‘do gooders’ where, what appears at the outset to be an altruistically motivated process, is in fact, a thinly veiled set of egotistically motivated processes. ‘What appears to be going-beyond-the-self is properly explained as reinventing the self, with charitable affects’ (Cloke et al, 2005, 387).

The previous case study examples of Tom, Lucy and Dave, and Mike, presented in section one, all involved different Christians feeling drawn to relocate to live in socioeconomically deprived areas. As a result of relocating each person became involved within the local area in particular ways, assisting and supporting with certain services, creating different forms of provision when there was a visible lack, and building relationships with other local residents. They bind themselves to all of these practices with the hope that there will be some recognisable transformation of the area and some positive benefit to other local residents. Considering these practices through the lens of the interpretations given in the argument of Allahyari (2000) however, these acts of service, friendship and support would be seen to be motivated by virtuous self-betterment. This view however is only one end of the spectrum and it neglects to consider how charitable or caring involvement could be interpreted as ‘reasoned or instinctive reaching out beyond self-interest’ (Cloke et al, 2005, 387). Therefore by presenting a re-reading of these types of faith-inspired actions I want to suggest that instead ‘incarnational geographies’ could be seen as ethical landscapes in the way that relations with others are mediated and enacted. This has two main components.
Incarnational geographies and the theo-ethics of Christ’s incarnation

Firstly I want to suggest that particular Christian theologies might be significant in prompting and structuring certain ethical postures and ways of relating to marginal-others. In the first chapter with reference to the Christian theological notions of embrace (Volf, 1996) and exile (Frost, 2006) I argued that different theological narratives can be drawn upon to structure relations between selves and others in different ways. In the first section of this second chapter I suggested that part of the impetus for Christians to choose to embrace ‘living amongst’ was the pursuit of a Christ-like sacrificial ethic. This particular ethics was drawn out of a ‘theology of incarnation’ to reflexively shape and structure relations in ways that are seen to go-beyond-the-self.

In recent years western Christianity has begun to return to questions of virtue and character (see Wright, 2010), and questions of virtuous living have been central to those who have chosen to relocate into marginalised areas. Inspiration drawn from the theological narrative of the Incarnation of Christ has prompted Christians involved in incarnational initiatives in marginal areas to faithfully pursue ways of embodying similar virtues. This is clearly illustrated in the example of Gareth, a leader of one of the Christian FBOs that models itself on this incarnational expression of praxis, here he describes what defines his faith and how he tries to emulate ‘Christ-like’ virtues:

‘What I see differently about faith is this downward mobility, which you see in an example like Jesus, take the bible passage: Philippians 2 verse 5: ‘let your mind be like Jesus, though he had equality with God he did not consider equality with God but made himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a servant and became obedient even to the point of death, therefore he was highly exalted’ I quote that because I think that is absolutely central to what we do. In a society that says upward mobility is right, it is our neighbourhood that exists because of this. It is the people who have lost in that game.’

For Gareth it is the narrative of the sacrificed and humble incarnate Christ that shapes
the way he seeks to actively embody his Christian faith in a socio-economically deprived area. Gareth is convinced the reason behind why marginal neighbourhoods, like the one into which he has moved, exist, is because society upholds and encourages a different set of virtues or values. In light of this upward mobility, Gareth seeks to follow the example of Christ as portrayed in the narrative of the Incarnation, something he words as ‘downward mobility’. Gareth’s faithful following of the discourse of the Incarnation could be seen as a counter-cultural ethic (see Cloke, 2010) opposed to the widely hegemonic pursuit of wealth, individualism, gain and pleasure (see Ward, 2001). In this way the incarnational discourse is a narrative that presents a confrontation in its theo-ethical call to go-beyond-the-self, embracing what Zizek (2000) accounts to be the ‘subversive core’ of Christianity, radically inseparable from Christianity’s orthodoxy (Ward, 2001). Taking this view of incarnational geographies, ethics is enlisted within these marginal spaces and places through the formulation of ethical character. Importantly, in these incarnational forms of praxis, the fabrication of virtuous character has to be considered in and through place. Rather than being something constituted in abstract space this formulative notion of ethical character should be considered as shaped and moulded through relational place-based and people-based engagement. Conceiving of virtue in this way highlights how virtue flourishes through a deep and purposeful engagement with, and in the service to, and for, others. Cast in this form this acknowledges that the ‘virtuous self’ is formed in and through practice. Unlike the thinking of Allahyari that sees the construction of moral selves to be unequivocally about self-betterment I take the view, following Cloke et al (2005), that moral selves are constructed in a more complex dialogical manner; some aspects being self-concerned and others being concerned about others. In this view virtue is formed with a mosaic of underlying rationales, established neither with pure egotistical or altruistic rationales in sight. In light of this complexity my research will need to ask how Christian-selves are reshaped through the dialogical process of living amongst.

**Research Question 3:** How are Christian-selves reshaped by ‘living amongst’.

Considering the nature of these forms of praxis there are a still a number of critical
questions that need to be levied against these practices of 'living amongst'. As the example of Tom illustrated in the first section of this chapter, many of those who choose to move into socio-economically deprived areas, while making personal sacrifices, still have the choice to move in. This ability to choose, their background, skill set and lifestyle is in some ways contrasting to those they have chosen to live amongst. Furthermore there is often an imbalance of power and privilege between middle class Christians who have relocated and local inhabitants who have less choice, less access to resources, and less given opportunities. This uneven relationship needs careful analysis. In the same way that my research needs to involve a careful consideration of how faith is shared and enacted through the process of 'living amongst', it is also necessary, considering the differences between those Christians who choose to move in and those local residents who live there already, to consider carefully how relations between Christian-self and neighbourly-other are enacted in and through the faith-inspired process of 'living amongst'. This post-colonial critique will enable me to question whether or not this form of faith-inspired praxis empowers local residents or if such practices tend to reproduce uneven imbalances of power and privilege.

**Research Question 4**: How are relationships between Christian-self and neighbourly-other enacted and performed considering the uneven balance of power and privilege embedded within practices of 'living amongst'?

**Incarnational Geographies and the performance of faith-virtue and theo-ethics**

Geography has been deeply influenced by the performative turn in the social sciences and cultural studies. Moving away from understanding place, space and practice through interpreting discourses and representation, geographers have become concerned with how things actually happen and are experienced. This performative turn has been taken very seriously by those geographers interested in the ethics of places and practices. As such then, geographers trying to come to terms with the ethics of spaces, places and practices, have highlighted the important interconnections between organisations, spaces, discourse and practices (Conradson, 2003; Crang,
1994; Knowles, 2000; Parr, 2000; Philo, 1997). This body of work has sought to question how spaces of care are performatively bought into being and how ethics are through actual practice, enacted and performed. This has consequentially moved away from just simply ‘reading off’ the moral and ethical discourses entrenched and embedded as signs and signifiers of moral and ethical meaning in landscapes (Cloke et al 2005) and focusing, as attentively instead, on the actual practice of ethics in and through every day life.

Research by Cloke et al (2005) into the ethics of homeless service provision has insightfully made use of this conceptual framework in examining the spaces of homeless provision. Not only did their research take an interest in how spaces of homeless provision could be considered as ethical spaces of care though the ethical frames and attitudes that volunteers bought to these organisational spaces, but they sought to take account of the actual way in which care and support for homeless others was performed through everyday acts of kindness, charity and generosity. In this way, these spaces of provision were considered to be ethical because of the actual performance of certain virtue. This needs to be applied to how the theological narratives that structure and prompt efforts to relocate and live among the marginal, and the faith-inspired virtues that are encouraged through these forms of incarnational praxis are performatively enacted. Analysing these performances in the context of specific service-spaces, encounters and events will further develop an understanding of the ethical nature of incarnational geographies and the way these spaces of care are co-constituted and enacted.

**Research Question:** How are these incarnation spaces and specific settings of care performatively constituted?
Chapter 3: Researching incarnational geographies

The purpose of this chapter is to detail and critically evaluate how I went about conducting my research. In summary, this chapter explains both the practicalities and issues that emerged whilst planning and undertaking my research and it critically examines the methodological approach I took to undertake my thesis research. This chapter is split into seven distinct sections.

In section one I explain how my own doctoral research was connected to the broader pan-European research project and I account for how my involvement in this project led me to become interested in incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived areas. In this first section I also review some of the methodological design of this pan-European project and I explore how my involvement in this project was influential in shaping the trajectory of my own methods of research. Section two then critically evaluates why I chose to embrace an ethnographic approach grounded in researcher participation in two particular residential placements. In this section I justify my use of this methodological approach in consideration of the nature of my research topic. I also explore how this methodological approach enabled me to enact my own form of ‘quiet‘ activism. In section three I explain why I decided to only make use of the second of my two research placements in this thesis. Section four then introduces this case study, elaborating on the socio-economic context of the area, the FBO project context and my involvement while on placement. Section five then examines why I employed a number of mixed methods and details how I recorded this ethnographic information. In section six of this chapter I critically assess my positionality and explore how I remained critically engaged throughout the research process. In the final section, section seven, I outline and justify the approach I took to writing and representing ‘incarnational geographies’ in the empirical chapters.

Section 1: Beginnings

It was within the parameters of the first few months undertaking desk research for
the FACIT project that I became intrigued about ‘incarnational expressions’ of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived communities. Being confronted by an enormous spectrum of faith motivated praxis tackling issues of urban social justice (see Beaumont and Cloke, 2012) I was particularly taken by the idea of the Eden initiatives.

**Intrigued by Eden**

‘Eden’ had actually crossed my path when I attended a Christian youth festival entitled ‘Soul in the City’ with my church youth group in the year 2000. Three weeks into compiling the desk-based research on national faith based organisations (hereafter FBOs) tackling social exclusion and poverty I began to reflect on my own previous brief encounters with this organisation. Reading through a draft of a paper Paul Cloke was to present at a conference in early October 2008 (see Cloke, 2010), I began to reflect through my own involvement in this Christian youth festival. Reviewing ‘emergent streams’ of what Cloke termed ‘post-secular praxis’ I came across a few sentences overviewing, in his words, the work of the Message Trust’s Eden Initiatives:

> “faith-action can also involve behind-the-scenes radicalism, as with The Message Trust's Eden Project in which young adult volunteers choose to uproot themselves and take up residence in some of the most difficult urban areas, sharing the problems of young people growing up in these areas and ministering to their needs. This sacrificial lifestyle choice represents a countercultural form of faith praxis, and stands as a prophetic alternative to the standard processes of neoliberalism that 'make up' the subject through individuation and entrepreneurship.” (Cloke, 2010, 236)

This all got me thinking. I loosely rememberd that eight years ago there was a lot of buzz at the Christian youth festival about the Message Trust’s Eden initiatives. At the time many young people and adults were being encouraged to consider joining an Eden Team and move onto one of Manchester’s most deprived residential areas. Being
encouraged by my supervisor to find a PhD research topic amongst the plethora of FACIT research I began to consider whether perhaps the Eden initiatives were indeed a tangible option. Maybe, just maybe, there was something here in these Eden initiatives into which I could get my teeth. I spent some time reading into the Eden initiatives and the Message Trust on the Internet. I came across the Eden-network website and began streaming a talk by Matt Wilson, the Eden-network director.

With my headphones plugged in to the laptop, I could hear the echoes of his voice from what I only imagined to be a typical Church of England pulpit. Disparate memories of that two-week summer social action festival were, at points, being revitalized by a talk he was giving to a church congregation in Sheffield. Matt Wilson was describing what it looked like to be involved in an Eden team, drawing out faith-cultivated lessons from what he had encountered. He spoke with real conviction and a sense of certainty. He described how he had initially found his way onto a particular housing estate in Manchester, how he and others came to live on the estate, and what they had begun to do once they had decided to move into the neighbourhood. I scribbled into my little black notebook, trying to capture what he had to say. Maybe I could research these initiatives? Maybe they had a story to tell, a story that had enough life in it for a thesis? They certainly had deep convictions, relocating to some of the most socioeconomically deprived housing estates in the UK. The talk continued...

"speak it into being, speak those things that are not as if they are, that is our approach now, we will get in the community, we will begin to find out. God, where are you at work? What good things is your spirit doing and how can we fan that into flames? How can we bless that and make it more? Similarly we can’t turn a blind eye to the fact that there is bad stuff happening, and there is mess and there are problems. There are people who need locking up cos they are causing all kinds of agro. So we walk this counter cultural line, where on many occasions it will need to be the guys on our team who are the ones who stand up and be counted and say, “that’s wrong, that is not right, you gotta sort this out”. You know our work with young people is not cotton wool and encouragement,
we gotta be those who are willing to discipline young people as well as say, “if you keep doing this it’s going to lead to this” [or] “your out of order there, you need to apologise”. We are not just about being wooly, there has gotta be tough love there as well, and so that is part of our countercultural calling as well cos there is nobody else who will do that…”

(Wilson, 2007)

Heck! Matt Wilson, those are pretty strong statements. ‘A countercultural calling’, ‘cos there is nobody else who will do it’ (Wilson, 2007). I did not have enough of the detail but those were bold words. The thought of a bunch of Christians ‘telling others how to live’; some of his words made me shrink into my skin, others made me ask deep questions of how I put my own Christian faith into practice. Moving into communities and engaging with what they discerned to be good, standing against what they felt was bad, here was a very active ‘presence’; Christians moving to places with intention and commitment. I navigated myself around the Eden-network website and found a book for sale, a written account of the last eight years of the Eden ‘communities’. Noted the title and the author. Eden- Called to the streets. Written by Matt Wilson. I clicked ‘add to basket’ on the computer screen.

Two days later the book appeared in the post, I got to work reading it. Every Ph.D student seems to have certain objects, people, or narratives that they chase at the beginning of their first year (see Crang and Cook, 2007). Mine were caught up in ‘Eden’ and I began to try to make sense of them. The book described an obsession with particular places and a story of a group of passionate people whose Christian faith had drawn them to relocate onto socioeconomically deprived housing estates; certain places and particular people. A collection of people whose Christian faith was shaped in a way that tied them to particular places, dwelling there and shaping out certain landscapes. It seemed to be a story that shifted and mutated with time. Many of the people involved seemed to have relocated from more affluent parts of the South of England. Young couples, school leavers and university graduates made up the majority of the migration. My own imagination began to fill in the gaps. I wanted to know more. Not a bad aspiration I suppose, particularly when I was going to need to
dedicate three years of my life towards this one area of interest (Crang and Cook, 2007). Wanting to build space within the FACIT project to learn more about the Eden Initiatives it was agreed with my PhD supervisor/FACIT UK project leader that I would be able to explore the Eden initiatives in more depth at the third stage of the FACIT research. Firstly however there was a responsibility to undertake a series of interviews with key national level FBOs to further explore some of the key themes we had begun to develop in the national report (see Cloke et al 2008). Undertaking the FACIT research was highly influential in shaping the trajectory of my own research.

Firstly, the FACIT project introduced me to a vast array of relevant literatures. I became familiar with relevant literature surrounding debates on contemporary structures of welfare, neoliberalism, governance, and the voluntary sector. And it also introduced to a whole host of important philosophical, theological, and ethical debates that crosscut this first set of literatures. Secondly, with regards to my emerging empirical interests, the initial stages of the FACIT project also gave me insight into what methods of research might be a best, and possibly a worst, fit model for me to adopt for myself.

As the foundational premises of the FACIT project were by default comparative, much of the early stages of research was built around marco-level endeavors, comparing national structures of governance and the operation of FBOs within these political contexts. The problems that seemed intrinsic within this approach was that much of the way the project sort to understand FBOs was caught up in the expansive nature of the project. The first two stages of the research, both the desk-based scoping exercise that explored FBOs active at a national level, and the structured interviews with a number of these national level organisations, had a number of interrogative limitations. These were rooted in the fact that, at a national level at least, much of the way the project came to understand the role and place of FBOs in relation to contemporary European societies was based exclusively on discourse analysis of what participants said While in one sense this provided meaningful descriptive insights into the broad spectrum of approaches FBOs take in tackling poverty and social exclusion, and in another sense it placed on the map much of the creative and innovative work
FBOs are undertaking under the banner of lobbying, protest and strategy, this approach left little room for human agency, or the context of particular places and the actual grounded daily performances involved in each organisational setting. Trawling through website after website, annual reports and in-house FBO publications only presented a sea of words. Reading FBO mission and ethos statements, albeit an important point of orientation, was exactly that, simply a starting point. FBO mission and ethos statements provided key discursive themes but did not give any grounding knowledge of what might be actually happening on a day to day basis within each organization. Similarly, while the formal semi-structured interviews with national FBO representatives enabled the project to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of provision and interplay between neoliberal governance and the role of FBOs within such a context, very little was actually understood of how this looked on the ground. Interviews with FBO representatives were often carried out over the telephone, or away from the local contexts in which their work was embedded. Teams of researchers would appear briefly to undertake an interview, questioning participants on places, actions and rationales, with little more than an hour to gleam an understanding of the whole internal dynamics of an organisation. Much of this research could have been aptly described as a smash and grab raid on a few informants (Atkinson and Delamont, 2006). I became very aware of these limitations when I initially visited an Eden initiative to undertake an interview for the FACIT project. This initial visit did however give me the chance to meet Anna Tompson, a key contact and crucial ‘gatekeeper’ in terms of conducting further research (Fetterman, 1998), and it enabled me to begin to ‘cast my net’; developing a preliminary feel for an empirical topic and building a network of crucial contacts (Cook and Crang, 2003, pg 17).

**Visiting Eden:**

It was clear that the Eden initiatives were very used to having visitors. Eden teams were well versed in chaperoning visitors and in fact, as I learnt through my email correspondence with the network coordinator, certain days were even ear marked as open days when visitors could informally come take a look round. Being unable to
attend one of these particular dates Anna Thompson, the network coordinator, kindly set me up with an interview and an initial tour in conjunction with one of the Manchester based Eden initiatives.

Anna and I had two similarities, we both had a personal Christian faith, and, as I was excited to find out as we toured the western edge of Manchester's inner city, Anna too was soon to be pursuing her doctorate; embarking on a part time PhD in Practical Theology at Chester University that following September. This and our Christian convictions gave us a lot to talk about. We visited the Salford Eden team base, the Life Centre, and I conducted a recorded interview for the FACIT project.

West of Manchester’s city centre, sitting upstairs in the Life Centre, the project leader Paul detailed how he and his wife had tried to discern if moving from Poole to Manchester was an idea with which ‘they both felt was spiritually right’. Paul told me how a number of different things had jumped out at him, as ‘signs that this was right’. He faithfully interpreted these as God’s will for them both. He articulated how a team was formed and they all moved onto the estate. Taking jobs in the surrounding area Paul described how the team initially spent evenings doing detached youth work. They played football, hung out in the park, walked the side streets and ‘just met young people’. I gauged through the interview that in the initial few months their sudden presence on the estate had not been received without skepticism. One local resident phoned the police, others were rather concerned with why this group had turned up at all. Paul gave me his version of things.

Paul traced how things had changed since the early days when they all moved in, he told me some of the politics of working with a local church and some of the persistent problems. He gave me a quick overview of all their current projects, their future plans and ambitions. An A5 brochure of the centre was placed in my hands and the interview was bought to a close as Paul indicated he was about to open the centre for an after school club.

I could hear a banging noise, ‘let us in’ a young voice shouted. ‘Hurry up’, another
chirped. ‘Come on’. All this started to invade our rather polite and meandering conversation. From the street came rather more frank and explicit requests to be let in. ‘5 minutes!’ someone roared from downstairs. Paul looked tired of talking. He reiterated to Anna and myself that the after school club was about to begin, Anna agreed that we better get going. We found our way downstairs into a purpose built youth facility, three volunteers taking a moment together to collect their thoughts and run through exactly what activities would hold everything together. The pleas from behind the bolted door continued. We returned our empty mugs to a sink and left. We subsequently were due to drop in on the second part of a meeting that bought the staff and volunteers of the Message Trust and different Eden projects together: the ‘together day’ Anna had explained in an email that this would help me gauge something of the culture of the Message trust and give me the chance to meet a number of staff and volunteers from across the Eden initiatives. We headed straight for the Message Trust headquarters.

The purpose of the ‘together day’ was to bring volunteers and staff from across the Message Trust and the Eden initiatives together for a time of reflective Christian worship and prayer. Anna explained that this was explicitly a marked moment in the month when both Eden and the Message Trust could celebrate what ‘God was doing’. It was a space to share stories, celebrate, and intentionally take time out from the daily grind of administration and to do lists. It gave room for people to share experiences, narrate both their excitement and hardship as they lived and worked in some of Manchester’s most deprived neighbourhoods.

Contrasting the Message Trust headquarters with the glimpse of activity I had witnessed at the Life Centre in Salford it was clear the two spaces were extremely different. The Message Trust headquarters seemed far removed from the perpetual knocks at the door, the insistent screaming, Eden volunteers’ frantically running around setting up after school club resources. A reception, a swipe card entry system, a large meeting room full of people, all very clean and modern. The Message Trust was a warehouse on a Manchester Industrial estate. What connected the Langworthy housing estate and the other estates, on which Eden teams lived, with this large
meeting, was that all these people formed part of one of these teams. Gathered together in the conference room of the headquarters were over eighty people, all part of the same network, the ‘Eden-network’. All of the participants of the ‘together day’ volunteered or worked as part of an ‘Eden team’. During the coffee break I was introduced to many of these people. Each person had a story to tell. Each told me of how they came to be on ‘Eden’. I quickly found myself immersed in my intrigue. What had started with an interview for the FACIT project and a series of emails was quickly snowballing. A number of Eden volunteers and staff openly shared their account of how they came to join an Eden initiative. A collection of joining narratives had already begun to emerge (see chapter 4). Flooded with narratives, I left the afternoon feeling overwhelmed. My FACIT interview felt awkwardly lifeless compared to the glimpse of practice I had witnessed leaving the Life Centre in Langworthy, Salford. Dipping into the meeting at the Message Trust headquarters had personalized some of the narratives I had read in the written account of Eden. It had also left me feeling saturated with spoken accounts of what people did. What I longed for however was a knowledge gained through participation. All these stories were interesting but I intrinsically felt that these accounts needed to be matched up with periods of observation, participation and immersion - something I knew from my undergraduate training was the blood line of any ethnographic approach to research (see Thomas, 2006). Returning from my visit to Manchester in early 2009 I began to quickly work at organising my research around an ethnographic approach, searching for a number of appropriate ‘case studies’ within which my ethnography research could take place.

Section 2: Embracing ethnography

‘Ethnography explores the tissue of everyday life’

(Herbert 2000, 551)

Having been given the space to explore my own research interests within the parameter of the third stage of the FACIT project I chose to build my empirical research around two case study placements: one in Birmingham and one in Oldham. Both placements were a part of the same Salvation Army 614UK church network and the later one in Oldham also partnered with the Eden project with which I had already
become incredibly intrigued. With the help of Anna Thompson, the key contact I had made through an earlier FACIT interview, I was able to secure a volunteer placement with the Oldham FBO, Eden Fitton Hill (EDEN/SA614UK). This gave me the assured credibility I needed to then attain a preliminary placement in Aston, Birmingham. Undertaking two residential ethnographic placements as a general project volunteer I was able to practically engage with the daily life of what happened within the projects. These two placements provided the field sites within which I able to research ethnographically through participation. This second section critically evaluates why I chose to embrace an ethnographic approach grounded in researcher participation within these two placements. Here I argue that such a decision was based on two interconnecting rationales.

Firstly, I argue that I embraced an ethnographic participatory approach to my research because it provided the best means of exploring what I was interested in investigating. Secondly, I argue that ethnography presented me with a methodological device through which I could personally get involved. In this later sense ethnography allowed me to ‘get off my arse’ and to blur the boundaries between my academic and personal positionalities and do ‘something about something’ (Cloke 2002).

Unpacking the ethnographic toolbox in this way presented me with both a theoretical and practical way of approaching my empirical interest. In one sense it provided an appropriate angle from which to approach the topic; an angle that would, considering my personal frustration in the early stages of the FACIT research, allow me to do more than scratch the surface of the topic. While, in another sense, it opened up an opportunity for me to purposefully and meaningfully engage with others in a way that would allow me to practically offer something of myself to others. Designing my research in this way enabled me to put something of my own Christian faith into action and it also enabled me to move from making sense of Christian faith-based action through a process of just listening to others talk about their work, lives and action, to matching such talk with what actually happens.
Comparing Human Geography to Anthropology it is clear that there has never been a period of Geography’s history that reflects the same near-mandatory requirement for scholars to have to travel off to some far flung and perceivably exotic location to undertake an ‘ethnography’ (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). However, in reflection of Geography’s so called ‘qualitative turn’ (see Crang, 2002, 2003, 2005), the past few decades have certainly seen ethnographic methods become a common component of many Geographer’s means of enquiry, often for very valid reasons (see for example Herbert, 2000, Megoran, 2006; Cook, 2006; Hubbard, 2006; MacLeod et al, 2003).

Ethnography, as the short epitaph by Steve Herbert (2000) aptly suggests, is an exploration of the tissue of everyday life. And while there is a case to be built that ‘everyday life’ has become increasingly put on a pedestal in Geography, particularly within Cultural Geography (Valentine, 2001), the description is fitting as it succinctly captures how ethnographic methods have the ability to encounter and engage with the lived and the immanent, the performed and the practiced (Crang, 2005). Describing ethnography as an ‘exploration of the tissue of everyday life’ hints at how ethnography gets closer to something of the liveliness of our many worlds (Lorimer, 2005). It helps us make sense of what we wish to study (Pink, 2009; 2012). Whereas surveys and interviews might get at what is said, ethnography also helps to get at what people actually do (Crang and Cook, 2007). Ethnography offers a nuanced understanding of what discrepancies there might be between thought and deeds (Herbert, 2000). This approach aims to tell a ‘credible, rigorous, and authentic story’ that gives ‘voice to people in their own local context, typically relying on verbatim quotations and a ‘thick’ description of events’ (Fetterman, 2010, pg 1).

Taking into account that my research focused in quite some depth on the performative - or the practiced - aspects of the Christian faith, making use of a method that is suited to the examination of the living and performed nature of human life seemed almost common sense. Although many of my research questions were at their core focused on the rationale for engagement; questioning the motivations for care
and the place of theological, spiritual and ethical prompts and formulations, my research was also interested in how this all took place, or was enacted within a local context. Not only was I interested in how meaning is put-into-praxis but how it is was also made-through-praxis. Utilising an ethnographic approach that focused on researcher participation and participant observation was therefore the most appropriate means of coming to terms with these performed aspects of Christian praxis. This opened up a means of research that was both experiential and reflective; an approach that was on the one hand about myself as I took part alongside others and on the other hand about others as they reflected with me on what they did.

Designing my ethnographic research around an approach in which participant observation was a key facet meant that I was able to take ‘part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture’ (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002, 1). And, as a methodological approach that was built around the idea of immersing myself in a particular culture (Fetterman, 1998, 35), it gave me three distinct advantages. Reflecting on my disappointments with the two preliminary stages of the FACIT project, these three advantages significantly bolstered my decision to design my method around an approach that would further open up the empirical topic.

Firstly, participant observation enabled me to work towards improving the quality of my data. Secondly, it provided me with an approach that would enable a greater quality in the interpretation of the data, and thirdly, it helped me formulate new research questions grounded in on-the-scene observation (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002). Researching Incarnational forms of Christian Praxis in socio-economically deprived areas in this way enabled me to begin to move from research on religion to research that allowed religion to ‘speak back’ (Yorgson et al, 2009, p 636). There were broadly four ways in which by embracing a participatory approach I was able to allow Christian praxis to ‘speak back’ to Geography (IBID, p 636).

Firstly, participant observation enabled me to improve the quality of my research and
'speak back’ because it enabled me to question Christian praxis through an embodied experiential approach. By acknowledging that one of the most vital tools of enquiry is in fact the body of the researcher (see Paterson, 2004; 2009; Parr, 1998; Longhurst et al, 2008) I was able to come to terms with common action through what I felt as well as what I thought (See Grills, 1998; Katz, 1998, Stoller, 2004). This meant that by giving space for an epistemological framework that was centered on the body as a way of knowing (see Patterson, 2009), what I learnt of the field was tacit (Desjarlais, 1992). It enabled me to account for the non-verbal as well as the verbal (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002) and it significantly led me to be sure not to neglect the phenomenological and the performative (see Lorimer, 2005). The traces of what could not be adequately described in words left its mark on me through visceral means (Thrift, 2007). Being bodily present I was open to witness action through affectual registers (see Dewsberry et al, 2002; Crouch, 2001). I felt things for myself and I felt things with others (Stoller, 2004).

Secondly, taking part alongside other participants, building relationships and friendships, staying in their environment, observing and participating in their everyday meant that my research became highly relational (Gobo, 2008). Developing integral relationships with others through common action, reflection and experience meant that I was able to gather greater insight into the lives of others. I built friendships, shared meals and even went on holiday with one of the participants. This all enabled me to understand the interplay between motivations and action to a greater extent as the complexity and multiplicity of praxis was anchored within the context of individual and communal biographies. Knowing different peoples character traits made me able to draw out more insightful and more contextual understandings of why people acted the way that they did. Making use of an approach that focused on researcher participation and reflective engagement meant that I could try to come to terms with ‘action-events’ as a co-contributor (Stoller, 2004).

While some aspects of my research developed to become heavily auto-ethnographic, ‘producing self-narratives that placed the self within a particular social context’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997, 7), much of my research was grounded in this relational,
researcher-participant as co-contributor approach. Observation of my participation with others enabled me to experience and observe my own co-participation with and alongside others within the ethnographic encounter (Tedlock, 1991). Participating as a volunteer alongside others in these projects meant that I was not a dispassionate observer of the lives of others, but emotionally, physically and, I would hope, spiritually, a co-producer of life in these specific contexts. Hopefully viewing my participation in this light I would be accepted as a welcomed co-performer (Denzin, 2003). Helpfully, tempering the balance between observation and participation (Spradley, 1980) allowed me to find an appropriate middle ground between that of being a complete insider by going native becoming ‘the phenomena’ (Jorgerson, 1989), and that of being a neutral observer with no intention to partake. Choosing to take on the role of an active participant I aimed at producing something of ethnography with others rather than of others. Respecting and cherishing that life is made up of many intersubjective moments I sought to strive to engage with others with sincerity and passion, accepting the open ended understandings of the life worlds of an other (Prus, 1998). Participating alongside others in this way was reliant upon me being friendly, likeable, dependable, honest and at times trustworthy (see Shaffir, 1998; Grills, 1998). This reduced the extent to which I was actively poking into the lives of people who were not in the position to poke into mine (Geerts, 1998). It made me vulnerable, real and susceptible to the same kind of questions I was asking of other participants. Researching relationally I was able to somewhat address certain power dynamics, I worked at creating genuine friendships and I tried to maintain a sincere appreciation that I was sometimes participating alongside them as a guest (Harvey, 2004, pg 181).

Thirdly, being present when things happened also meant that the quality of my findings improved as second-hand stories and informant stories were greatly enriched by me experiencing events first hand. Being enrolled into participant observation meant that I watched and experienced things unfold. Enrolled into praxis I had to build room for surprises (Crang and Cook, 2007) and I had to remain personally proactive and flexible (Baszanger and Dodier 2004). In the early stages of my fieldwork I searched out experiences and events and participant observation set
the stage for a more refined technique of recording, remembering and interrogating these events and experiences as time went on. This development meant that ideas that were originally a blur when I first entered the field took a sharper focus over time (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002).

Fourthly, ‘being there’ and ‘taking part’ not only allowed me to more effectively make sense of what happened, it also forced my ideas and assumptions to be resisted and tested by what I actually experienced in the field (Becker, 1970). Embracing an ethnographic approach led me to develop a certain process as well as a definitive product (Fetterman, 2010). This process of analysis was ‘inherently iterative’ as my participation in the field helped formulate new research questions and develop different lines of enquiry (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002, pg 13)

As I have argued in this first part of section two, embracing an ethnographic participatory approach to research enabled me to achieve a certain depth of understanding into these particular Christian practices in four adjoining ways. It created space for an embodied experiential understanding of these Christian practices through my own active engagement in them. Being there myself also meant that I experienced events for myself. It also forced me to learn from the field as I participated in it, iteratively coming to terms with these Christian practices as they unfolded before me and with me, this forced me to question certain assumptions and certain theories I bought to the field. Furthermore, purposefully seeking to be relational meant that my iterative grappling with these practices was grounded in the vulnerability of friendship and the explicit recognition that others might, and will, have different experiences and opinions, and that through mutual dialogue, friendship and reflection I would be able to come to terms with their actions, both individually and as a group, by having a listening ear to the storied narratives of their own biographies. As important as these reasons were in deepening my enquiry, however, I also felt impelled to undertake an ethnographic participatory approach as a means of expressing my own activism alongside others passionate about a similar cause. I will now expand upon this within the context of critical and radical geography.
Critical and Radical Geography, participation and my ‘quiet’ activism:

‘The critiques offered by critics... have the luxury of social distance from the sharp wounds of social reality.. ‘

Walter Brueggemann (2001, xi)

‘Let us be realists: we, the academic Left, want to appear critical, while fully enjoying the privileges the system is offering us. So let us bombard the system with impossible demands; we all know that these demands will not be met, so we can be sure that nothing will be effectively changed and we will maintain our privileged status quo!’

Slavoj Zizek (2005, 57)

In geography there has been much debate and review over the exact nature of ‘critical’ geography (see Blomley, 2006; 2008;). Some geographers (see Fuller and Kitchen, 2004) have forcefully compared critical geography to applied geography, setting up a strong distinction between that which actively seeks to make a subversive difference on the ground (viva la activist!) and that which attempts to influence ‘elitist policy’ (subjugated by the state!), while others, drawing upon the lineage of critical thought in the social sciences, have traced the emergent and tangential development of critical geography out of radical geography in the 1970s (see Peet 2000). Either way, the common concern amongst ‘critical geographers’ is a ‘shared commitment to emancipatory politics within and beyond the discipline, to the promotion of progressive social change and the development of a broad range of critical theories and their application in geographical research and political practice’ (Painter, 2000, 126). United by a concerted and engaged encounter with issues of inequality (see Hubbard et al, 2002), these geographers, on the one hand, have sought both the development of essential critical scholarship (see Mitchell, 2004) that contests ‘the hegemony of dominate representations’ in order to build ‘transformative insight’ (Blomley, 2006, 92), and, on the other hand, have searched to engage themselves in various ‘forms of progressive praxis’ (Ibid, 2006, 92). This praxis often bears fidelity
to an approach that, in one sense, promotes the ethics of solidarity and equality between researcher and research subjects (see Routledge, 2004), while in another sense, critiques the imaginary boundaries that exist between academic research and personal life (see Cloke, 2004). It is also an approach that is often based on dialogical connections and encounters with others, blurring the activist/public boundary. My participatory ethnography borrows several key features from this genre of geography. Being a participant-researcher not only gave me the opportunity to reflect on action and events through my emotions and thoughts; building a co-produced ethnography, it gave me the chance to be make a personal contribution; ‘getting off my arse and doing something’ (Cloke, 2002, 92), subsequently ‘getting my hands dirty in an attempt to do something useful’ (Ibid, 94). ‘Making a contribution’ was something that I was concerned should be built into the research from the outset of the research process and, acknowledging that ethnographic research is ‘an embodied activity that draws in our whole physical person, along with all its inescapable identities’, I was set on putting all of these inescapable personal aspects of my identity into action through my research (Crang and Cook, 2007, 9). I wanted to help out where I could and put my faith-fuelled passions into play.

Joining the case study placements as a volunteer provided a certain ‘contact space’ (see Cloke, 2002) and it provided a means of bridging the vast void between what the epigraph quote from Brueggemann (2001, pg xi) details as ‘the luxury of social distance from the sharp wounds of social reality’. This ‘contact space’ enabled me to enact my own personal politics, express my Christian faith, and in some small way make a positive difference alongside others in different and more socio-economically deprived circumstances. Building on a similar experience I had encountered undertaking my undergraduate research, I wanted to involve myself in the projects in a way that would venture beyond them having purely an academic utility; I wanted to do more than offer rhetorical ‘impossible demands’ from a safe liberal distance (Zizek, 2005, 57). I wanted to be of impact and I wanted to be impacted upon. As with my undergraduate experience researching alongside the on-street homeless, where I volunteered at a day-centre (see Thomas, 2006), I wanted to finish my Ph.D research knowing that I had been of some sort of help beyond the walls of the University. From
the first moments initially designing my research I ideally envisaged that my involvement would allow me to draw upon my previous experiences working with young people in both a voluntary capacity at my local church, and in a paid role as a teacher in Indonesia. Both research placements took me at my word when I wrote in my research outline that I wanted to get involved in every aspect of their projects. Being drafted in to support drop-in clubs, run various after-school activities, use my car for trips and outings, I integrally became another member of the voluntary team. During the first placement my past teaching skills were put to work by being asked to oversee and instruct two young volunteers in the process of planning, resourcing and implementing workshops for the young people who attended the drop-in clubs. Additionally, working one-to-one with different young people, my tutoring and mentoring skills were put to the test. In this role I found myself working alongside one particular young person to recondition a mini motorbike; while later in the placement, searching for other engaging activities, I ended up giving basic pottery lessons! Making use of my own skills and abilities in this way gave me a chance to actively engage in processes of social change on a very localized level. On a very small scale my involvement allowed me to share some of my skills with others, developing and empowering others (see Silltoe et al, 2002) and it enabled me to feed back my thoughts and views to others who ran the project on a regular basis (Cole, 2005).

Unlike orthodox understandings of (political) activism that may envisage activism as an involvement in political campaigning my (social) activist engagement follows the broader action-oriented approach outlined by Pain (2003) which focuses on the involvement of academics in different social processes with the aim of creating better and different worlds. Pain (2003) encouraging outlines how through policy, participation and activism, social geographers are involving themselves in the lives of others. While my work did not involve squatting (see Chatterton, 2002) or radical displays of public protest (see Graeber, 2009; and Burton, 2012), it involved what I might term a ‘quiet’ form of activism, which, in minor ways contributed towards these Christian incarnational faith-based initiatives aimed at improving the lives of marginal others.
Becoming a temporary member of ‘their’ community I tentatively hope I was able to interdependently contribute in whatever way possible, be this through volunteering my skills as an educator, or through running youth activities, or, in a fleeting and more ephemeral manner through embodying a spirit of generosity. In light of this later contribution, I hope, in a small way, I was able to leave something of myself in the ‘interstitial spaces’ and in the moments that present themselves as ‘brief festivals of hope’; moments that contribute in a miniscule way to the ‘air that hangs heavy with a generous odour’ (Brewin, 2009, 150). In a personal sense, stepping back from the research I certainly have never been able to get rid of the feeling that I was, in some minor way, a part of something temporarily different, something that for a second, psycho-geographically speaking at least, felt marvelous, something that changed me at least, something that influenced me, something that, through my active involvement alongside others in attempting to create countercultural spaces based on the Christian transformative hope, had an affect; finding its manifestation in friendship, laughter and a good deal of ‘tom foolery’. This was my own personal attempt at ‘activism’ and it could be viewed as a performative means of enacting a certain politics of hope (Denzin, 2003b). I will return to critically evaluate how this level of personal involvement influenced my ability to ‘be critical’ later in the chapter. Immediately next in section three, however, I will critically assess why I chose to only base this written thesis on the second of my two placements. An introduction to this case study and my involvement within it will then follow in section four.

Section 3: From a multi-site to a site-specific ethnography

Initially I conceived that my written PhD thesis would compare and draw upon both of the two case studies. This would have meant that my research was conceived around a multi-site ethnography (see Marcus 1995). However, for various reasons that I will establish here, I made the decision upon finishing my second research placement to build the majority of my written thesis around the second case study in Oldham.

While multi-site ethnographies have allowed many scholars to ground and demystify studies of globalistaion and neoliberalistion (see for example Zsuzsa, 2001; Marcus,
there have been numerous scholars who have had to ask

Firstly, as I begun the process of writing up, reviewing narratives and experiences, developing themes and empirical chapters, I begun to find that quite naturally I began to write through many of the themes in the context of the second placement. A part of this was that these vivid memories were still fresh, having just completed my second placement, and, rather problematic was the fact that while I had notes, audio reflections, interviews and photos to remind me of my involvement in my first placement, there was a large time lapse between finishing this first placement in the late autumn of 2010 and beginning, let alone considerably developing, the writing in the late summer of 2011. Iteratively I found that as the written thesis developed the life of the first placement was either often absent or at best used to supplement the primary stories and accounts of the second placement.

Secondly, and more significantly than the first rationale, my second concern revolved around my desire to integrate sufficient depth and quality into my ethnographic narrative. I wanted to represent the lived worlds of those I had encountered with some integrity and rigour. Keen to avoid an essentialist critique of faith-motivated people I wanted to be sure that I built enough room to reflexively ask with an eye to search for complexity, context and difference: what they do, how they do it and why they do it, without diluting my account by aimlessly flitting between different accounts for no apparent reason (see Hannerz, 2003).

I reasoned with myself that if I was arguing that ethnography provides a suitable way of unfolding complexity within a given context, then adequately illustrating this point I would have to carefully question the need to be comparative between case studies as well as within case studies. Therefore, considering that a large part of my argument in this thesis was to be built around the need to understand the agency, individuality and
character of different Christians in placed contexts, I would have to be able to reflect this well in the writing and narrative exposition that inscribes these complex lives and actions to paper. Concentrating on detailed biographies and everyday performed events I could not bring myself to draw upon these two case studies in diminutive ways, utilising them both as only mere pools of data from which to draw out the briefest of vignettes (Crang and Cook, 2007). Similiarly, after the experience of the rather surface level encounter with different faith communities and organisations undertaken through the early stages of the FACIT project I was emphatic that I wanted to build a thick account of certain aspects of praxis. Needless to say thick accounts drawing on experiences, actions and events meant using up my precious prescribed word count. Wanting to illustrate with sufficient empirical detail the complexity inherent in the ethnography around which this thesis is built, I therefore made the pragmatic decision to only write up the ‘life’ of the second placement, hoping that by doing this I would retain enough of the illustrative detail I was keen to keep in the impressionistic writing.

Thirdly, originally setting out to compare two different FBOs united by the common endeavor to live in the local neighbourhood it soon emerged in the details of my first research placement that the volunteers and staff did not actually live in the immediate neighbourhood. In reality, the Salvation Army Birmingham 614UK project was a community centre staffed by volunteers and paid staff that lived beyond the confines of the local estate. While there a number of interesting themes that emerged from the first case study, reviewing my ethnographic journals and planning my chapters I decided that the ethnography would work better if I focused solely on the second case study organisation. After all it was only this second case study that adequately fitted the true remit of my investigation.

While these three strands of reasoning were enough for me to come to the decision not to include the first case study placement in the written thesis, my participation in this project was constructive in a number of ways. Firstly, through this thesis there are a series of methodological endeavors with which I only became comfortable through trying them out in the context of the first placement. In this vein then the first
placement presented me with something of a practice ground through which I could become better skilled as a researcher. In a word, perhaps my first placement would be best considered as something of a ‘pilot’ study. Secondly, this first placement was not only influential in terms of how I learnt to research but also what I pursued as key thematic points of interest in the second placement. Thirdly, while the first case study is absent from this written thesis the friendships that developed between volunteers, staff and myself could not be excluded in the same way that the representation of this case study has been in the text. I formed several key friendships during this placement and these enabled me to get the most out of the second placement. Similarly a large part of the actual experience of participating in this project has been written into my identity and therefore haunts something of my subjective encounter of the second placement case study. I will now introduce this second case study, detailing both the socio-economic history of the town of Oldham and my involvement within the Eden Fitton Hill, the local FBO within which the majority of this thesis is grounded.

Section 4: Eden/SA614UK, Fitton Hill, Oldham.

Oldham is located to the Northeast of Manchester. It was during the latter part of the industrial revolution that Oldham was placed on the map, becoming a world-renowned centre of textile manufacturing (Frangopollo, 1977). In the early part of the industrial revolution Oldham did not figure as a suitable location for industrial investors and their engineers as there are no major rivers or stores of natural resources (McNeil et al 2000, Gurr et al 1998). What led to its importance in the latter part of the industrial revolution was its convenient position between the labour forces of Manchester and South Yorkshire (Foster, 1974). By the middle of the 19th century Oldham had become one of the most important towns in the world for spinning cotton (McNeil et al, 2000), and an offshoot of this was that Oldham developed renowned structural and mechanical engineering sectors at the turn of the 20th century (Bateson, 1949). To support the local cotton industry a substantial coal mining industry also emerged (Nadin, 2006). By the late 1920s Oldham had over 360 working mills (McNeil et al, 2000).
Unfortunately however, Oldham’s cotton industry was heavily hit by the importation of cheaper yarns. This lead to rapid economic decline and despite concerted efforts to increase competiveness and efficiency (Frangapulo, 1977) by 1998 Oldham had ceased to produce Cotton at all (Mc Neil et al, 2000).

Oldham, like other parts of Greater Manchester, saw a large influx of citizens of the wider commonwealth nations in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of these migrants were encouraged to settle in the town to help bolster the declining cotton Industry, working unsociable hours in low-skilled and low paid work (Millet, 1994). The 2001 census quantifies that by the turn of the 21st century over 25 percent of Oldham’s residents were of South Asian or British Asian Background (ONS, 2001). The combination of Oldham’s industrial decline and its wide spread ethnic self-segregation has led to significant issues.

The town is nationally known for being labeled as having strong cultural divisions and poor integration and cohesion among white British and Asian British local communities. This became most prominent when Oldham surfaced in the national media during the so-called ‘race riots’ of May 2001. Underlying racial tension led to repeated violent attacks between white British and Asian British communities, the majority of which clashed in the Glodwich area of town.

These intense clashes prompted several independent inquiries (see Cantle et al 2006; Ritchie, 2001). The ‘Ritchie report’ as it has been termed, suggested that a number of long and short-term factors were influential. Reportedly a reliance upon one single industry, segregated patterns of settlement and education, lack of social and cultural mixing, and perceived cultural differences and ethnic clustering, all contributed to the development of underlying racial tension and the emergence of the outbursts of conflict and rioting (Ritchie, 2001).

**Fitton Hill**

There are three Eden projects across Oldham. The project in which I was placed is a
joint partnership between the Eden-network and the Salvation Army 614. It is located on Fitton Hill estate, located to the south of the city. Fitton Hill is made up of approximately 400 dwellings and 1000 residents (ONS, 2011). Fitton Hill estate was built as a residential estate in the early 1950s on farmland that was bought by the city council to house residents relocated from Oldham city centre areas that were being redeveloped. Residents of Fitton Hill are predominantly white and working class; only 1.7% of residents hold professional occupations while 50% work in elementary occupations and process, plant and machine operating (ONS, 2011). According to the multiple deprivation index of 2004, Fitton Hill is ranked as the 420th most deprived neighbourhood in England, however, according to the 2007 indices of deprivation has declined, leading to Fitton Hill being ranked at 783 (These are ranked out of 32,482 neighbourhoods- Rank 1 being most deprived) (ONS, 2011). Employment, Education and Health stand out as significant factors contributing to Fitton Hill’s level of deprivation. Accordingly, 10% of residents are seeking job seekers allowance and 20% are seeking incapacity benefit (Average across England is 7%). While health statistics of the area indicate that 62% of residents are in ‘good health’ and 25% of those who are working age suffer from some long-term illness, nearly double the average for England. (ONS, 2011).

Eden Fitton Hill:

Eden Fitton Hill was established in 2001 on the back of the Christian summer festival: ‘Festival Manchester’ (See chapter 4). When I joined Eden Fitton Hill (Eden/SA614UK) as a volunteer/researcher the project had a weekly stream of activities and four paid, part-time or full time staff; the project was supported by over ten volunteers who, like all but one of the staff, lived on the estate. Weekly projects included drop-in youth clubs, football clubs, a multimedia project - FACE, aimed at building positive stories and depictions of the neighborhood - and a school cookery club. During my time volunteering a number of other initiatives began, including a schools learning and support project and a school educational project linking two different local schools - one local comprehensive and one fee paying former grammar school. Once a week Eden/SA614UK also provided a Christian youth club called ‘Cell’,
this particular club gave young people the chance to explore the Christian faith for themselves, allowing them to ‘ask their own questions about life, who they are and why church is boring’ (EFH, 2011).

Eden Fitton Hill describes itself as a ‘Christian Community’ who express their faith by ‘working to improve their community through commitment, friendship, action, care, compassion, love and neighbourliness’ (EFH, 2011). As Eden/SA614UK is a partnership with the Salvation Army Church they are committed to their personal faith in Jesus Christ and to expressing that ‘through prayer and worship but also through personal relationships, how they represent their community and fight for justice’ (EFH, 2011).

**My involvement:**

I made it clear in my research outline that I wanted to have a dual role on the project, both researching and volunteering at the same time. I positioned myself as a Christian who was willing to be involved in any aspects of the project. When I first arrived for my five month placement with EDEN/SA614UK I was given a room in the Neilson’s family house- a distinctive large house in the corner of the estate, which, before the land was sold to the council, was originally the farmer’s house. The couple of weeks living with the Neislons- the project leaders and church ‘pastor’- provided me with a great opportunity to get to know them well. Sharing the day’s events over food and plenty of tea, we exchanged personal stories that allowed me to build robust biographic narratives.

The house was something of a ‘hub’ for gathering people together, providing a place to communally meet to plan new initiatives, air frustrations, seek some counsel, and the Neilson’s house always had visitors. The house was used for Christian worship, times of prayer, and plenty of board game evenings and takeaways. Being initially placed in this house meant that I was very quickly incorporated into the ‘family’ community of EDEN/SA614UK. This gave me the chance to build a strong relationship with Chris, the church/project leader/pastor, and his family. It also provided me with the
opportunity to become quickly embedded into the routines and rhythms of life ‘on Eden’. With the house so central to so much of what happens, I quickly learnt names and became familiar with other volunteers and staff over many ‘brews’.

After a couple of weeks I moved barely a hundred meters down the road to share a house with a volunteer- John, who studied at the ‘Nazarene Bible College’. In keeping with what I soon learnt was the ‘Eden way’, we got to work redecorating the room I had been allocated. A number of local young adults from the neighbourhood helped us strip wallpaper, paint and lay carpet. Like my initial two weeks living at the Church leaders house this refurbishment process provided plenty of time to chat to volunteers and provided a ‘hands-on’ way of becoming part of the team.

Settling in, my involvement spread across many of the drop in clubs, trips further afield, and school projects. At every turn I took on board any opportunity to engage with the ‘Christian community’ and help deliver its services. So if someone invited me for dinner, I attended, if I was invited to grab a take away or take part in a board games evening, deliver leaflets or attend a neighbourhood meeting evening, I did not hesitate to join them. My aim was to become involved in anything and everything. How practical this was when my then long-term girlfriend, now wife, lived 6 hours away on the train proved to be testing. In reality I tended to be resident on Fitton Hill volunteering and researching during the week, returning every other weekend to Exeter. Combining these trips to Exeter with conference visits and a holiday skiing with the church leader, I gradually found that a lot of my weekends were away from the estate - so much for being there all the time! In total I spent four months volunteering for Eden Fitton Hill during the spring of 2011 (February-May). Volunteering on the project I found that my research themes and questions would be best answered if I combined participant observation and observation of participation with numerous other methods. I will outline and justify my use of these in the next section along with explaining and evaluating how I went about collecting and collating all this ethnographic information.
Section 5: Making use of mixed methods

Investigating incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived areas through an ethnographic methodological framework required me to do more than just observe the participation of others and myself as we undertook the daily tasks involved in the project. This move to embrace ‘participant observation + something else’ (see Crang and Cook, 2007) was bolstered by two precautions. Firstly, I could not assume that my ‘mere presence did not ensue [complete] insight’ (Spickard et al, 2002, 4) and, secondly, I could not be justified in thinking that experience alone meant everything (Silverman, 2004). Strategically this meant I triangulated and bridged different methodological approaches to access various different aspects built into my research themes and questions. On the one hand this research strategy allowed me to use several different methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single empirical reality, strengthening one specific point through different methodological angles (Denzin, 1978), and, on the other hand, it allowed me to use different methods to draw out different points (Miller and Fox, 2004). My research themes and questions combined praxis and discourse, thought and action, and I was keen to pick up on the views and insights of other people who were connected to the project in various ways but who were not people I would directly come into contact with through participating in the projects themselves. Developing a rigorous understanding of these different aspects and different actors meant using several different methodological approaches best suited to these different tenants of the investigation.

In my research, informal interviews proved to be the best means of accessing this ‘other’ information. Informal Interviews allowed me to get to grips with the context and the content of different peoples everyday lives (Crang and Cook, 2007, 60) by opening up an avenue through which to explore rich subjective personal narratives (Miller and Glassner, 2004). Triangulating these interviews with participation and observation assured that these stories were understood in context (Miller and Glassner, 2004).
Building biographic narratives

While much of what I heard and talked about with volunteers and staff across the project was part of the impromptu nature of being actively involved, there was definitely a need to build in specific times when I could ‘pin people down’ and chat in some detail. These times formed the closest thing to anything resembling an ‘interview’. As a participant-researcher, naturally getting involved, running services, and dealing with issues sometimes took precedent over time spent informally questioning other volunteers and staff while ‘on the job’. Symptomatic of the culture of these initiatives, being focused first and foremost on service-to and for-others, scheduling time aside with volunteers and staff for ‘an interview’ allowed me to cover more ground and avoid interruptions.

In total, over the second placement, I ‘interviewed’ 16 staff and volunteers and, considering that there was a total of 21 full time staff and volunteers I was fairly satisfied with this ‘haul’ of biographic narratives (see appendix 1 for complete research itinerary). In light of the fact, however, that each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and two and a half hours, I was not so happy transcribing them verbatim. Complaints aside, transcribing the interviews verbatim during the course of the placement did allow me to take time to reflect on what each volunteer or paid staff member had to say. This helped inform my next step of inquiry and in some cases resulted in me following up individuals to ask further questions a crucial part of my informal analysis (Crang and Cook, 2007).

As these biographic narratives built up I found that what also emerged was a reflective coming-to-terms of the more present immanent events and actions as I was able to draw on a historical and temporal set of knowledges that emerged from the biographic accounts. Undertaking these biographic ‘life story’ style interviews gave me great insight into both the past and present worlds of volunteers (Allahyari, 2000, p 111). These interviews filled in gaps, presented internal difference and emphasised individual character. They also, in a very practical form, provided a suitable way in which I could get to know other volunteers, opening up researcher-researched
relationships and bringing down any pretense. This meant that volunteers felt comfortable sharing aspects of their story that were personal, included hardship, or was only really appropriate for someone who was in there shoes; volunteering and living in the area. Interviews became increasingly dialogical, unfolding often as an ‘interpersonal drama with a developing plot’ (Pool, 1957, pg 193). As I settled into the project and I was able to draw on my own reflective experience of volunteering to draw out the experiences of staff and volunteers working on the projects. The dialogical interviews could easily have been described as ‘active interviews’ as I played a performative role in creating intersubjective accounts of reality, often ‘unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents’ (Holsten and Gubrium, 2004, pg 141).

Many of these interviews looked distinct and there was no one location where they took place as I was determined that such details would be left up to the interviewees. Accordingly, the structure of each biographic narrative/interview varied quite significantly and each ‘storying’ evolved according to the nature of each volunteers character and the strength of relationship between the interviewee and myself. As a result, across the spectrum of interviews, one was enjoyably undertaken over two hours of allotment digging, several took place at individual volunteers’ homes on the estate, or others were conducted at the kitchen table of the house I shared with another volunteer. One participant even twisted my arm to be bought dinner in exchange for an interview; a joke I suspect I naively took too seriously.

Taking time to interview many of the volunteers and staff involved in the projects was not an accessory to the continuous and iterative dialogue that came out of volunteering alongside other staff and volunteers. In fact, it had its own aim. I wanted to clearly get a sense of their own stories, hear how they individually had come to volunteer or be employed by the projects. The point here was to build biographic narratives. The reason I wanted to build these forms of narrative was to get a sense of their motivations for joining, the way they envisaged there involvement and how, at least in discursive terms, they ‘storied’ their involvement and experiences in the area over time. I soon discovered in undertaking these interviews that ‘incarnational geographies’ must firstly be considered as temporal landscapes before understanding
how they can be envisaged as ethical and spiritual landscapes (see chapter 4). These biographic historical narratives bought a temporal account to the surface that I could not directly access in and through practicing alongside others. Together with observation, taking life histories allowed me to assemble a massive amount of perceptual data that generated and answered basic cultural questions about the social life of the faith-based community (Fetterman, 1998). It also meant that sometimes rather than learning about a participant’s life in a holistic fashion it allowed me to learn some depth about one facet of a participant’s life (Fetterman, 1998, 52).

**Interviewing partnering agencies**

Other than setting aside specific times to interview volunteers and staff at the projects, I made a decision early on to contact and request to interview partner agencies. Much of what was actually established by EDEN/SA614UK was done so in collaboration with other local agencies, many of which governmental, others, third sector charities. Therefore, as one of my core aims was to come to terms with the dynamics of incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived areas, I saw the necessity to come to terms with the dynamics of these locally placed and locally contextualized relationships with other agencies and actors.

Access to these agencies came directly through lead-actors in the EDEN/SA614UK project. Gaining access to these other agencies through the project did mean that there was a considerable chance that this had an impact on what I was told or how these other agencies narrated the two projects. As an interviewer in these circumstances I was firstly associated with the projects and secondly with my identity as a researcher. In some instances I did feel that partnering agencies and their representative spokesperson therefore tempered what they wanted to say in case I was to ‘report back’ to the project. Had I been disassociated myself from the project I may have received more critical feedback, however, unfortunately I am unable to really know whether this is the case as my positionality was mediated in this way throughout the duration of my placement. However, as I will explain later in the chapter, I did find a number of useful means of drawing out critical dialogue: firstly
through asking critical questions, and secondly, through phoning a number of individuals once I had finished my research placement.

**Collecting and recording information**

Much of a participatory approach to research involves the immediate situation; what is actually happening there and then (Fetterman, 2010). However, with no way of capturing these moments and events, details can be lost or at best subject to a reliance on memory (Crang and Cook, 2007). Emotions, speech, bodily gestures and atmosphere are recalled in hindsight, loosing much of the vitality of the moment (Thrift, 2007). To date however, ethnographers have found various ways of keeping an account of all this action, some more creative than others. Most conventionally this has meant using a notebook, jotting down short hand details to trigger the memory when lengthy post-participation research diaries are written up (Fetterman, 2010). More recently, participatory and performative approaches to research have encompassed the use of other representative mediums including film and stills photography (see Pink, 2007; Russell, 1999; Schwartz, 1989). These forms of technology have enabled ethnographers to make sense of their involvement in the field in ways that often re-instill the past experiences with performative and embodied registers, helpfully in hindsight ‘bringing to life’ participation in the field (Pink, 2007). When I started my ethnographic research I stumbled across my own research ‘tool’ that enabled me to best make sense of what I had experienced and observed: my iPhone.

To keep an account of what happened, who said what, where it happened, how I felt, and much, much, more, the iPhone proved extremely useful. The iPhone soon became an indispensable piece of ethnographic ‘kit’ (Crang and Cook, 2007). Having an iPhone always provided a great way of having a number of research tools collapsed into one piece of technology and before long my iPhone was used for taking photographs, recording notes, collecting contact information and, very importantly, recording conversations and interviews. Too lazy or hurried to write notes while on the go during the day I also often used the dictaphone function to keep an audio-diary,
recording my feelings and building thoughts. These thoughts and comments were then transcribed verbatim in the evenings.

Using the *iPhone* as a continuous recorder of information I realized that it was a good means of inconspicuously collecting ethnographic material. Smart phones, as they are known in the telecommunications industry, are now commonplace and many people are accustomed to the smart phone being used to capture photographs and record notes. What this meant for my research is that my continual use of my *iPhone* to collect and record ethnographic material did not result in me ‘standing out like sore thumb’, nor did it awkwardly signify my presence as a ‘researcher’. Recording meetings my *iPhone* was simply another phone on the table, and volunteers and staff became quickly accustomed to these ‘researcher performances’ (Pratt, 2000). Had I used a note pad, or recorded interviews and conversations on a dictaphone, my identity as a researcher-participant would have been pronounced. Constantly scribbling on a notepad or presenting, upon consent, a dictaphone onto the table would have been performances that clearly identified me as different, as a researcher and as an observer, rather than a fully committed volunteer.

Although it is an expensive piece of equipment and something of a marker of affluence, it did not prove to be much of an indicator of class difference or economic standing, as many households on low mean incomes purchase *iPhones* through second hand pawn shops or as part of lengthy and binding contracts, building the cost of the *iPhone* into the monthly package.

During my research I did however learn that there are several occasions when the *iPhones*-as-research-tool is not appropriate and in fact is seen as out of place, rude, or imposing. Here my routine performance as a researcher (Pratt, 2000) was interpreted differently. I found this out the first Sunday I attended the Eden Fitton Hill church gathering less than twenty-four hours into the placement.

Keen to take notes of the talk and eager not to miss anything potentially illustrative I proceeded to type away on the phone. I later discovered that the volunteer delivering
the talk was under the impression that I was texting through the whole of her talk, when in fact I was keeping notes. This was not a good way to begin my fieldwork placement. While taking personal notes is not an uncommon feature in contemporary evangelical church culture, appearing to be texting or playing a game however, was understandably seen as rude and signifying disinterest. My iPhone did not get shunned in favor of a note pad or a dictaphone after this incident, but what I did take into account is that conventions need to be given careful regard and the smart phone is as subject to this as much as any other method of collecting and recording information or performance by the researcher (Pratt, 2000).

Without a doubt my iPhone proved to be a supportive piece of technology aiding the daily ongoing collection of ethnographic material. Every day the connective functions of the phone allowed me to email my notes to my computer, securely backing up my ‘precious material’ (Crang and Cook, 2007). In the evenings I would turn these rough notes into more fluid and comprehensive field journal accounts, taking care not to embellish or pad out these notes in ways that were not true to my experiences. Having my notes sent to my email account in digital form did save me considerable time and alleviated some of the more taxing efforts of having to type up near impossible research squiggles and short hand notes that apparently meant something significant at the moment of their inscription (See Crang and Cook, 2007). These expanded field notes proved to be crucial as they would be eventually used in the final thesis as ethnographic narrative, ‘helping people to imagine being there’ and allowing them to partially ‘stand in my shoes’ (Crang and Cook, 2007, pg 50)

In summary of this fifth section what I have argued here is that it was not enough alone for me to observe and participate. I have outlined and evaluated how I triangulated and bridged together informal interviews with participation and observation. I have also clarified how I kept a record of all my experiences, interviews and observations throughout the ethnographic research with the use of my iPhone. In the next and penultimate section I turn to examine my own positionality and how I maintained a critical perspective throughout the research.
Section 6: Positionality and Criticality

Earlier in the chapter I outline how ethnographic methods, involving a certain degree of participation, were picked, not only because of their utility in working towards answering my research questions, but because of the way in which these participatory methods created a certain ‘contact space’ (Cloke, 2002) for personal action. Participatory research shaped a way through which I could bring to life my own politics and ethics by volunteering and assisting within this project. I termed this my own ‘quiet’ form of activism. As I stated in this earlier section, my personal desire to make a difference and do something about something (Cloke, 2002) draws in part on my own ongoing Christian faith, and this raises certain questions.

In Geography, like in Anthropology (see Howell, 2007), there are a number of scholars and researchers who have openly claimed a Christian identity (see Cloke 2002; Megoran 2004 and Slater, 2004). Anthropologists like Howell (2007) have argued that the positionality of being a Christian in doing ethnography among Christians should be viewed as a ‘viable and useful standpoint’ as the subject position is ‘characterised by moral/ethical commitments’ (Ibid, 372) and is therefore much like ‘the feminist studying women, the leftist studying labor unions or the Muslim studying mosques’ (Ibid, 385). A similar stance is held by Megoran (2004), and he suggests that his Christian faith influentially inflects upon his academic enquiry in several ways: informing the questions he asks, the way he asks them, the conclusions that he reaches and the uses to which he puts them. For me, as I have highlighted in earlier parts of this chapter, my Christian faith prompts me to act and participate in certain ways.

Deconstructing the binary between professional academic self and personal activist self (see Maxey, 1999) I had found that I could not resist bringing the ‘personal as political’ (see Staley and Wise, 1993) into my research. My Christian faith prompted me to be a participant and I had to help out where I could. There is, however, an intelligible necessity to reflect upon how this strand of my identity might conflict, compromise, or in fact even contribute towards by ability to critically examine
incarnational expressions of Christian praxis in socio-economically deprived areas. Wanting to research with integrity and academic vigor demands that I put this aspect of my identity through the same reflexive critical questions to which any other aspect of my identity - like being male, straight, white and middle class – is scrutinised.

In ethnographic research, where the researcher actively participates in the life of those she or he is wishing to study, questions often are needed to be asked as to how a balance was struck between that of being both ‘a participant researcher and as a researcher as critical observer’ (Gobo, 2008, 6). There is something oxymoronic about the nature of participatory-observation (Tedlock, 1991) and it is important that this tension is held in play through reflexively and critically questioning the position of the researcher-self in contrast to the researched-other. As well as there being a need to question aspects of a researchers identity that highlight differences between self and other (for example, gender, class, race, religion) there is a need to question and interrogate similarities (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

Throughout the process of my research many fellow academics raised the question: how can you actually research Christianity as someone who holds to the Christian faith yourself? This question is partly, I believe, a sign of ‘academic theophobia’ (see Ferber, 2006), whereby those directing the questions might actually want to ask: can you research Christianity as a Christian? However, in part I am convinced that underlying the first question is a genuine enquiry into how this particular ‘Christian’ aspect of my identity effects and for that matter, is affected, by my research. Underlying this reasonable and intelligent query is several sub-questions: How can you critically engage with your participatory research while personally holding to the Christian faith? Does your Christian faith not present a bias that inevitably means you translate what you encounter during your research in a purely positive and normatively supportive fashion? How does this position as ‘one of them’ frame or alter your investigation with others who do not hold to the Christian faith? I had to grapple with all of these questions reflexively throughout my research.

Bielo (2009, 22) suggests that ‘being reflexive’ in this way can at its worst be ‘navel
gazing’, ‘illuminating little that helps understand the analytical questions being asked’. At its best, however, Beilio (ibid, 22) suggests ‘being reflexive’ can ‘scrutinize how research is conducted, all in the pursuit of helping readers better understand the claims’.

There are numerous reasons why I must attend to questions of reflexivity, and in a similar vein to Beilo (2009), in his ethnographic study of evangelical group bible studies, for me, reflexivity was essential for the same reasons. Firstly, the ‘reflexive turn’ across the social scientists - and in my Geographic context in particular (see Mcdowell, 1992)- has emphasised the constructed nature of knowledge and the place of the researcher in this process. Secondly, ethnography is ‘not a matter of mirror-like reflections of cultural scenes’ (Beilio, 2009, 23) but takes the form of a cultural representation (see Clifford, 1986).

These two reasons only iterate further the necessity to provide an answer to my colleague’s questions. Therefore, if I am to take my ‘self’ seriously, I need to specifically outline how I endeavored to hold a ‘critical’ position throughout the research process. Rejecting the positivist assumption that research is a value-free and fact-heavy process meant that I needed to pay particular attention to my position as a Christian and the way in which this identity position affected my ability to critically engage throughout my participatory ethnography. In what follows I want to do this with reference to two different strands of discussion. These two strands will attempt to answer the questions raised by colleagues in earlier paragraphs. Both strands consider the extent to which I was able to research in a critical manner, while, at the same time, holding onto this Christian, rather ‘normative’, position. The first strand suggests how I attempted to achieve a certain critical proximity through the participatory research and the second discusses how, at least in theory, I attempted to purchase a certain critical distance from this Christian project and its participants.

**Embracing Critical Proximity**

‘What should be the relation of the churches to the cultures they inhabit? The
answer lies, I propose, in cultivating the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to it. Misolf Volf (1996, 37)

One of the assumptions made of Christians is that they all think and feel the same way. That somehow there is a homogenous mould that creates a singular identity ‘cast type’ from which all Christians are forged, responding and acting only according to the ‘party line’. This is unequivocally not the case. Vast difference exists across the spectrum of contemporary Christian believers and because of this heterogeneous display of Christian faith ‘it is important to be as specific as possible about what kind of Christianity one means’ (Howell, 2007, 381). This specificity creates ‘internal’ critique. It is from this exclaimer that I want to argue that within ‘the fold’, so to speak, there is dissidence, deconstruction, internal critique and disagreement. Being open to this idea of internal difference is built on the nuanced idea of identity that ‘we are who we are not because we are separate from others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related’ (Volf, 1996, p66). Acknowledging this, it is easier to see that just because one holds to a Christian faith does not mean that there is totally agreement over either Christian dogma or praxis.

There is a vast amount of internal difference that exists within the Christian ‘community’ and therefore, as a Christian, I might hold a different position on public issues such as ‘just war’, the free-market or on issues of immigration from the person that I stand next to in my own church congregation. Similarly, I might translate Christian teaching into action in different ways from my Christian contemporaries. This extends across the way I chose to share my faith with others, the lifestyle choices that I make and the aspects of the Christian faith I hold to be the most central guiding principles. The same can be said in comparing my views and beliefs against those of the individuals that make up the two Christian initiatives for which I volunteered.

What this reveals is that a part of my critical ability comes from holding different views from those that, while also being Christian, outwardly express their Christian faith in different ways. These critical faculties emerge in the tensions, in the despondent feelings over that which I witnessed, and in that nigling feeling that something was just not ‘right’. My exposure to different ways of translating the
Christian faith into praxis means that I am able to critique what I encounter according to my own values judgments. Just as a researcher who does not hold to the Christian faith might make certain conclusions based on their own values judgments and situated positions, my situated perspective as a Christian does not necessarily position me in the same shoes as other Christian volunteers and staff on the two projects. Essentially then, what is crucial to this form of ‘proximal critique’ is the ability to remain reflexive. It is through my on-going ability to be reflexive that I open myself to the value judgments that taint and polarise the nature of my observations, my writing and my thoughts. Being reflexive throughout the process of research clarifies the angle of my critique and opens the reader to the way I see things, which in turn involves its own measure of criticism. Rather than being void of criticism, my individual position as a Christian unsettles the facade of the ‘homogenous whole’ and brings exposure to my own situated context; one that is not necessarily the same as other Christians.

Secondly, in another form, rather than breaking away from the views and opinions of other Christians to form a critical opinion of my own - a critique that could be framed as critique that is bound up in ‘distance-within-proximity’- it might be the very nature of my proximity to the Christian faith, and my proximity to these Christian others, that creates and encourages a certain critique. Accepting my inherent closeness to the identity of those I am studying, and using this to my advantage, relies on the methodological premise that an emic position as opposed to an etic one is of significant value (Knott, 2010). Fortunately the social sciences have become quite accustomed to recognizing that ‘the view that those studying religion should set to one side their subjective experience and cultural baggage, and take an objective position with regard to the other’ (Knott, 2010 244) no longer holds much credibility. This ‘view from nowhere’ (Haraway, 1991) which is something of a ‘God trick’ (Rose, 1997) does not stand strong in an era of research that, under the progresive insights of feminism, acknowledges that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1991). Being aware that I could fall prey to the idea that I can simply be transparent about my situated position alongside other Christians (Rose, 1997) making full use of my critical proximity relies on a continual grappling with how such closeness is both an
advantage and a disadvantage. Positively, one of the advantages is that this particular insider position enables a certain critique both of self and of society (see for example Wallis, 2010).

In the last chapter I argued that the Christian practices around which this whole thesis gravitates might be translated in several different ways, and that part of my thesis stems from the recognition of this ‘something different’ going on. Rather than being seen as simply a route to convert others, or as a way to self-betterment, these practices, in a number of ways, can be seen as ethical enactments, or as part of the spiritual fabric of existence. These two strands of counter-critique bring complexity to the way we might view and make sense of these geographies; creating greater nuance; deconstructing overtly singular and simplistic ways of translating these faithful forms of praxis. In an essence then, the complexity that these two views arrive at, come, to a certain extent, from an insider position, as this insider position comes with its own lens of criticism. Critical of ‘outsider’ interpretations that may rush to announce ‘what is really going on’ my position as something of an ‘insider’ enables me to be critical through the nature of my closeness to both the group I am studying and the belief system that we jointly all hold.

In the same way that being a Marxist makes use of an ideological framework to critique the status quo, being a Christian allows me to draw upon certain ideological views to disagree and be critical of the nature of the present state of things. In other words, my position as a Christian enables a certain perception. This perception, rather than conjuring up ambivalence towards the current state of affairs is capable of enlivening its own critical opinion. This was reasonably exemplified in the last chapter, where I outlined how volunteers and staff involved in incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economic deprived areas often have been prompted to act in the way that they do because of the very nature of the critical narrative that they cast upon a society driven by materialism and consumerism.

The short quote at the beginning of this sixth section contains the substance of what I mean when I state that my Christian positionality enables a certain critical perception.
In outlining what the position of the Church should be in response to the cultures that it inhabits, Volf makes it clear that both distance from the culture and belonging to it are essential (1996, 37). He urges the Church and its members to inhabit this reflexive space because it is within this liminal interstitial space of criticism that the Church maintains its allegiance to God over its allegiance to empire, culture or state. Volf argues that living with this distance, lived out as ‘internal difference’ (Ibid, 50), creates space in us to receive the other and yet also creates space for judgment against ‘evil’ in every culture (see Cloke, 2002). In this vein, theological and theo-ethical prompts cast a different shadow, potentially enlivening imaginations. They often elicit an imagination of how one might live differently in the world. Inhabiting this interstitial space, critique formulates as opposition and as a counter-cultural critique of the status quo. In the words of John Caputo (2007), this critique is an attempt to embody ‘the politics of the kingdom’, one that would be ‘marked by madness of forgiveness, generosity, mercy and hospitality’ (Ibid, 88). This theological critique might be summarized as drawing on the ‘dangerous memory of the crucified body of Jesus’, ‘the weakness of God’, which ‘poses a threat to a world organized around the disastrous concept of power’ (Ibid, 88).

This proximal critique comes not only in the Christian views and value judgments that I hold - my espoused theology, or spoken theology (see Cameron et al, 2010)- but in a minor way at least in something of the ‘doing’ of this thesis; in my theology as it is performed.

**Searching for Critical Distance**

‘ethnographic research is a social art form and therefore subject to all the complexities and confusions of human relationships in general. In research sites, as well as every other life arena, narratives are contextual and so slippery, practices are easily misapprehended - sometimes with intention- and shared meaning is always approximate.’

(Spickard et al 2002, p 133)
Taking account of just these two forms of proximal critique, however, does not fully provide an adequate framework for critically engaging with incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived areas. Reviewing these two forms of critique: the first a form of ‘distance-within-proximity’, and the second, a form of critique ‘grounded-in-proximity’, reveals that what is missing is a deep consideration of alterity, or real difference beyond similarity. In other words, to phrase this in a provocative question, one that was on several occasions asked by my academic contemporaries: how does my work pertain to notice and take on board the views of others who might not be so sympathetic to the work of these Christians living and working in these two communities. Simply put, what about the voice of the ‘other’? What space have I made in my method of enquiry to try and reflexively step beyond the proximal nature of my own Christian identity to notice and take on board the views, opinions and experiences of those who are not Christian, and who do not necessarily stand shoulder to shoulder in agreement with these Christians. Is there a stranger whose voice and feelings are ignored if I am only to be critical through my own situated nature as a Christian?

In order to overcome this methodological quagmire I searched for critical distance in two specific ways. And, in the iterative process of my research I found that one other means of achieving critical distance naturally became embedded into my work, while another was already built into the design of my research from the outset. I will in turn now elaborate on each of these four means of ‘achieving’ - and I use that word with a certain amount of skepticism - critical distance.

The first method of trying to achieve critical distance from both the projects and people alongside whom I volunteered was to attentively listen to the opinions and experiences of others in the local neighborhood. In theory, I thought this would be simple, but in reality however, this presented me with several difficulties.

Being placed first and foremost as a volunteer of the Christian projects I was certainly seen as ‘one of them’, one of ‘those’ Christians, and this undoubtedly had an impact on what was relayed to me by other people distant from the culture and praxis of the
projects. Being networked into the local community through the Christian community meant that I was more likely to come into contact with people who were sympathetic to the work of these Christians, as was the case on many occasions, it was project participants or staff that emerged as gatekeepers (Fetterman, 2010), putting me in contact with other members of the community. While I could work hard at the way I presented myself I could not control the identities and roles that others imputed to me (Spickard et al, 2002, p200). Overcoming this did prove difficult. However, I worked around it with something of a compromise: I found that one of the best ways to contact particular individuals whom I wanted to interview about their own ‘takes’ on the projects was to do so once I had actually officially left the placement, this allowed me to capture something of the ‘multivocal reality’ of what was happening (Spickard et al 2002, 9). This physical distance from the projects allowed me to position myself in a way that did not significantly compromise what I was being told. My identity shifted from that of someone who was directly involved in the Christian projects, to someone who, as a university researcher studying the projects, was interested in hearing different takes on the projects. However, I did feel this approach to research made me feel slightly uncomfortable. On one or two occasions it felt like I was slightly ‘digging for dirt’ on the Christian community. Having become good friends with a number of the project staff and volunteers I felt that by researching beyond the placement in this way I was slightly jeopardizing the ‘good standing’ that the volunteers and staff of these ‘incarnational projects’ had worked so hard to build. Essentially probing for disapproval and negative experiences I felt that this journalistic style of research was in some way detrimental to a community of people that I had come to respect and admire so deeply. This did produce a certain conflict of interest. On the one hand, I wanted to be open to hear and take note of the alternative opinions and experiences that others might have, while on the other hand, I wanted to positively support the work of a group of people who had so generously shared their houses, time and friendship with me. In this sense then, critical distance was only partially achieved as I struggled with really reaching out to deeply make space for the views of ‘strangers’, this said, I did not simply turn a blind eye, but instead, where possible, pursued taking account of different opinions and experiences.
Involving less of an emotional minefield I found that by the very nature of the research I could reflexively achieve critical distance in three other ways, firstly, by the critical nature of some of my research questions, secondly, through the process of retreating from the field to write up my thesis, and thirdly through relying on intersubjective dialogue.

Firstly then, as I made it clear in chapter two, I did not want to brush aside the critical nature of some theoretical conceptualizations of incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in deprived areas, instead, for the integrity of the research, I wished to hold them in balance with other alternative ways of perceiving of these practices and process. Consequently, this meant that by carrying these critical questions through the process of the research I was reflexively aware that some of what I experienced, involved myself in, and observed, might have been translated rather differently under the critical frameworks employed by other scholars. Necessarily then, I constantly tried to hold up my involvement in the projects against the backdrop of these critical questions. This produced something of an insightful critical edge, bringing the critical distance held by others into dialogical rapport with my own insights.

Secondly, the actual act of finishing the placements and returning to the University bought to life a certain critical distance. Literally speaking, by leaving the projects I slowly found, that as my context changed, so did my reflective opinion and interpretation of the practices and people change. Whereas being involved in the project full-time meant it was sometimes difficult to step back and make sense of what was going on in a more dialogical and reflexive manner, by removing myself from the place of praxis I saw things in a different light. Some of this analytical perspective was bought to the fore by speaking about the projects and my involvement out loud with others, here aspects surfaced that I did not notice so visibly when involved in all the immediate ‘doing’ of the projects. Contrastingly, I am also aware that by leaving the projects something of the projects certainly got lost in the necessity to represent the life of these geographies in a written form. While I may have gained some critical depth by leaving I also potentially lost some of the practical understanding of engagement.
Thirdly, I was able to build critical distance into my research through facilitating an approach that relied on a form of intersubjective dialogical reflexivity (Fetterman, 2010). Rather than just making sense of the processes and practices alone, much of what I reflected upon I did so with others, both in, and alongside, praxis. Avoiding the arrogance of upholding that it is solely me, the researcher, who has the ability to be critical of the processes and practices, I inevitably and humbly found that on many occasions, whether staff or volunteers, other participants were willing to critically reflect with me on their own situation, and the nature and dynamics of this Christian praxis. This meant that while the writing and representation of the life of the projects was inevitably done just by me reflecting with others, I was changed by the polyphony of opinions which distinctly made their way into the written thesis. Critical distance was achieved through putting my own, maybe less grounded and more theoretical opinions, into play with those of others who, while not necessarily knowing much more, had a longevity and depth to their participation in the projects, one that I could in no way achieve through my short and temporary involvement in the projects.

In this section I have outlined, reflected upon, and evaluated the ways in which my Christian positionality enabled me to embrace a critical approach. I termed this: critical proximity, and I argued that within this there was both a communal faith-fuelled critique, something I labeled as being ‘grounded-in-proximity’, and a critical edge that emerged out of my own personal breakaway from the views and acts of other Christians, something I termed as ‘distance-within-proximity’. In the second half of this sixth section of the chapter I moved on to review and evaluate how I searched to use certain techniques to integrate a certain critical distance within my thesis. I tentatively suggested that this was incorporated through the types of questions I asked, the way I tried to build space for the voices and experiences of others beyond the confines of the projects, the actual experience of leaving the field and distancing myself from the whole experience, and, through continual attempts to facilitate and be co-productive of an intersubjective reflexive dialogue that was attentive to raising critical discussion. Moving onto the final section of this chapter I want to now turn to describe, comment on, and justify, why I wrote the three main empirical chapters of
the thesis in the style and manner that I did.

**Section 7: Writing and representing ‘incarnational geographies’**

The ultimatum is that within this thesis language “sits in” for life (Ellis and Brocher, 1996). Actions are described, feelings and thoughts are re-presented, and life is molded into text; ‘lived research and the experiences that accompany it are represented and mediated by text’ (Grills, 1998, 199). This does not necessarily mean that the writing is futile; it just means that there is a need to carefully question and be honest about the purpose of ethnographic writing. For me this purpose revolves around drawing the audience into an unfamiliar story world and allowing them, as far as possible, to see, hear, and feel as the fieldworker saw, heard, and felt (Van Maanen, 1989). In line with many other ethnographers, my writing is to attempt to ‘describe, and to capture something of the texture and richness and underlying sense of a way of being and doing that could not otherwise be captured in writing’ (Graeber, 2009, 15).

Writing up ethnographic research involves making decisions about the story that is told, the way that story is made theoretically interesting, and what questions will be useful for analysing what we experience (Grills, 1998). An ethnographer is a storyteller and because the position of the storyteller is a privileged one (Grills, 1998), an ethnographer needs to make it clear why he or she told the stories in the way that he or she did. This necessarily involves articulating the purpose of the writing, the style used and the place of the author in these stories (Fetterman, 2010).

The way I have written the empirical chapters is based on a decision that I wanted to actively and intentionally keep something of the lived experience of participating while also balancing such accounts of what took place with a critical examination of such praxis. I have also had to balance thick description of events with participant’s narratives and feelings drawn from interviews. Within the writing this has meant that I have sometimes included large sections of auto-ethnographic narrative and at other times I have drawn upon much more conventional styles of writing that layer and draw together quotes from interviews to explore a particular topic. Writing using this mixed writing style is a fairly common pursuit within contemporary ethnography and narrative styles connected to ethnographic writing have been continually blurred and
altered in recent years to even include poetry and drama (Richardson, 2000). The point for me is that in mixing these styles my aim is to try to show the nuances in the landscape, providing something of the colour and shape rather than making one big point in my writing through one style (Graeber, 2009). I aim to ‘describe the contours of a social and conceptual universe in a way that is theoretically influenced but not designed to advocate a simple argument or theory’ (Graeber, 2009, vii), hopefully this will leave the reader with an impression of what ‘incarnational geographies’ look and feel like through drawing out different aspects of this one particular case study.

Drawing upon a mixture of conventions, pulling together moments when as a researcher I was actively present within the text through impressionistic ethnography and narrative ethnography, and moments in the writing when I actively stepped back from the liveliness of participation to comment, critique and analyse what is described, I felt I was able to write in a way that meant the fieldwork was the ‘actual material of the ethnography’ rather than ‘the hidden face of ethnography’ (Baszinger and Dodier, 2004, 17). Subsequently this meant that the result was something that offered the reader a first person narrative of events (ibid, 10) while introducing a complementary balance of commentary, critique and analysis, sometimes lost if the ethnography is only written through a firsthand account of participation. This meant carefully balancing how much I just let the impressionistic ethnographic writing speak for itself and when I chose not to hold back on interpretation as not always could I simply write by the mantra ‘here is this world, make of it what you will’ (Van Maanen, 1989, 103).

While it is important that I employed a strategy that ‘demands that wizards come out from behind the curtain’ it is important that they should ‘not come out naked’ (Ellis, 2004, 133). I therefore had to carefully question how I would avoid a style of first person writing that would tend towards being overly idiosyncratic and inattentive of others experiences, views or voices, and this meant deciding ‘the right type and amount of self-revelation and getting it in the right places’ (Ellis, 2004, 133). On a positive note though, incorporating elements of writing that directly incorporated my own experiences as a researcher allowed the actual events of the fieldwork to form a
key part of the narrative by not banishing myself, the ethnographer, from the text (Baszinger and Dodier, 2004). Representing ‘the doing of fieldwork rather than the doer or the done’ (Van Maanen, 1988, 102) situated myself within the text as a co-producer of events (Denzin, 2003) therefore grounding my authorial voice in participation and coproduction rather than distancing myself from the social context whereby as an author I would come across as a ‘neutral, authoritative or scientific’ (Ellis, 2004, 18). It also enabled me to write in such a way that the writing was itself at times performative (Denzin, 2003) showing the events as well as telling of them. In this sense, the writing could be seen as productive as well as simply a product (Denzin, 2003). Incorporating aspects of performative writing did not mean that the events were described in direct signification but it allowed the writing to enact the affective force of the performative event and again this helped place the reader in the field (Phelan 1997).
Chapter 4: Socio-temporal landscapes of Incarnation

This fourth chapter is the first of two key empirical chapters. In it I critically examine the historical development of the Message Trust and the Eden-network and draw upon ethnographic research from the Eden/SA614UK case study to critically explore the experiences of volunteers and staff ‘living amongst’. Through a socio-temporal lens this chapter argues that ‘incarnational geographies’ are dynamic and processual. This argument is developed by exploring the evolving direction of engagement; the change in motivations; the change in theological vision and practice; and the change in the subjectivities of those involved in implicating this faith-inspired landscape.

This chapter is structured in two sections. Sections one critically analyses the evolving development of the Message Trust and the Eden-network. Through three analytical interventions this first part analyses what initially fuelled and subsequently reshaped this FBO to embrace an ‘incarnational’ approach and it critically assesses the changing structure, vision and theologies that influence the grounded faith-inspired expressions found in the specific case of Eden/SA614UK. Section two gives an account and analysis of the experiences of volunteers and staff in joining, doing and in some cases leaving the Eden/SA614UK initiative. Examining why people joined the project, what their experiences of doing the project were, and why in some cases people left, builds a critical examination of the motivations that trigger involvement, the practicalities, imaginaries and feelings caught up in actually doing the project as well as examining the changing expectations and understandings of rational for self-involvement. Unpicking these narratives of joining, doing and leaving discloses an appreciation of how these practiced landscapes are often charaterised by other-orientated practices and notions of care (see chapter 5). It also presents an account of how particular evangelistic discourses can cause some volunteers and staff to question their sense of commitment to the projects because there is a mismatch between personal expectations and outcomes.
Section 1: The history of the Eden-network and the Message Trust.

Founded in 1993, the Message Trust was started in order to create more opportunity for young people of Manchester to have the chance to hear the teachings of the Christian faith (Hawthorne, 2000). Right from its genesis the aims of the Message Trust were explicitly ‘evangelistic’, it sought to share the Christian faith with others both verbally and through action.

The origins of the Message Trust can be traced back to two youth orientated ‘mission’ events that took place in the Manchester Apollo in 1988 and 1989 (Hawthorne, 2000). Before these events the current Message Trust CEO, Andy Hawthorne, and his brother, Simon Hawthorne, ran a fashion accessories business on the Longsight Industrial Estate in Manchester. In the late 1980s their business experienced a sharp increase in consumer demand and subsequently the Hawthorne brothers extended their recruitment to include local young people from the surrounding area. This had a profound effect on both the brothers as many of the young people that they employed reportedly had either ‘come out of Strangeways Prison or had got sacked by every other employer in the area’ (Hawthorne, 2000, 19). Encountering these young people, the brothers soon realized that ‘the lads knew nothing about Jesus’ (Ibid, 19) and this lack of knowledge about the Christian faith prompted the brothers to dedicate their energy towards making sure that young people of Manchester had the opportunity to hear about the Christian faith and how it was founded on the belief that Jesus Christ was the ‘risen son of God’ (Ibid, 20).

In response to encountering these young men the Hawthorne brothers decided to book the Manchester Apollo Theatre for an event that would both showcase contemporary Christian music and provide a short talk sharing the Christian gospel. This event, branded ‘the Message 88’ and financed by Manchester churches, aimed to ‘reach the city’s toughest areas’ and targeted the kind of young people the brothers had recently employed in their business (Ibid, 20). 20,000 young people were reported to have attended the event. The perceived success of this venture led to a follow up event, titled: ‘The Christmas Message ’89’ (Ibid, 2000). Soon after this event
the brothers were encouraged by Mark Pennells to start an initiative called ‘Message to Schools’. Andy Hawthorne soon decided to leave his previous work in the private sector and become involved fulltime in the ‘The Message to Schools Trust’ (see Hawthorne 2000).

The creation of ‘The Message to Schools Trust’ also saw the creation of a band: the World Wide Message Tribe (WWMT). Involving both the brothers, WWMT used the contemporary relevance of dance music as a ‘tool’ with which to share the Christian faith in schools around Manchester (Ibid, 2000). By 1991 with WWMT composed of the brothers and two other Christian music artists from Manchester, the Message Trust had agreed on its founding principles. These were that, firstly, Manchester would be the primary focus, secondly, that the Bible was to be at the heart of everything they undertook and that, thirdly, in an evangelistic spirit non-Christian young people were their focus. In addition to the three principles an agreement was established at the outset of creating the Trust that the band would endeavor to feed all of the WWMT’s royalties back into the schools-work across Manchester (Hawthorne, 2000).

**Intervention 1: Becoming relevant: Encountering young factory workers, forming the band and moving into schools ministry.**

Three important points need to be highlighted in the analysis of the genesis and early development of the Message Trust. Firstly that their evangelistic motive: that of giving the opportunity to young people to hear and personally respond to a public presentation of the Christian faith, was carried through from the conception of the concert-events to the undertaking of the schools based ministry. Secondly that a large part of their motivation to share the Christian faith, particularly to young people, was birthed out of the perceived increasing secularization of British society, the decline of church attendance by young people and, in the case of young people who did in fact attend church at all, the concern that the wider church was incapable of ‘getting them to stay in church’ (Hawthorne, 2000, 5) Thirdly, the genesis of the Message Trust to Schools and the creation of the WWMT placed Andy Hawthorne and other founding
workers and volunteers into a new geographic context: local schools whose catchment was some of the most deprived areas of Manchester. This was later to be very influential in the creation of the first Eden initiative. More immediately however, the Message Trust and WWMT were soon to find that as their Christian music became more popular, they became distracted from this founding focus.

**Reaching stardom, rediscovering purpose and stumbling across ‘Eden’**

Between 1993 and 1996 the WWMT developed a broad Christian fan base across the UK and the US and released a couple of singles into the charts. While the relative success of the band saw financial capital repeatedly turned back into the Message to Schools Trust, the success inadvertently meant that WWMT and the Message Trust found that they somewhat diverged their attention from that which was their original focus: the most deprived schools and regions of Manchester. In 1996 the Trust sought to refocus its attention towards the most deprived areas of the city of Manchester by concentrating its efforts towards one particularly deprived area of Manchester, booking two one week ‘missions’ in two local schools in Wythenshaw (Hawthorne, 2000). According to Andy Hawthorne (2000) these two weeks had a profound influence on the band; they ‘found that something had happened to each of us, and couldn’t shake the area from our minds’ (2000, 90). Rather unexpectedly this readjustment provided the kernel that continues to shape and structure present day Eden initiatives (Wilson, 2005).

During these two one week ‘missions’ in 1996 the Message Trust ran lessons and took assemblies in two local secondary schools with the aim of sharing and promoting the Christian faith. The two-week ‘mission’ culminated in a Christian music concert and an evangelistic message that challenged young people to consider the Christian faith. As with many of the other evangelistic gigs that the Message Trust had previously organized the evangelistic talk was concluded with an opportunity to ‘respond’ (see Hawthorne, 2000). According to Hawthorne (2000) what was unexpected was that out of the seven hundred people who attended the gig, one hundred young people reportedly responded to the ‘call to faith’ and these young people all appeared the
following Sunday at the small church with which the Message had partnered for the two weeks.

This church was largely under resourced and contained no more than fourteen adults, inadequately equipped to support the young people who had shown an interest in Christianity at the concert. In Hawthorne’s account (2000) of the next fortnight he noted that there was a drastic decline in attendance, and within a few weeks of the two week ‘mission’ many of the young people who had shown an interest in the Christian faith no longer attended the church on Sundays. This led Andy Hawthorne to question what could be done to see these young people continue ‘to attend church and grow in faith’ (2000, 90). Along with another Manchester-based church leader, Frank Green, he began to speculate on ‘what a small church would need to be able to cope with one hundred new Christians?’ (Ibid, 2000, 90). Hawthorne realized that if he were in the position of the small under-resourced church he would have hoped for a resource pool of Christian youth workers who could live and work in the local area, supporting the young people that had made a commitment to the Christian faith. This idea was then presented to a network of church leaders across Manchester receiving enthusiastic support and prompting the launch of the idea at Soul Survivor, a Christian festival aimed at young people. Andy Hawthorne presented the idea at the conference ‘challenging young people to move into Manchester’ (2000, 94), and ‘to pack up and move to Wynthenshaw, to get their hands dirty and not take the soft option’ (ibid, 94). According to Hawthorne (2000), hundreds volunteered, and thirty were selected to move into Wynthenshaw over the next few months. In partnership with the King’s Church, Wynthenshaw, this formed the first official Eden team.

**Intervention 2: Coping with converts: placing youth workers in community**

Even though these developments led to the Message Trust engaging with new forms of praxis, facilitating the emergence of the first Eden initiative through seeking ‘to embody a radically transformative theology of social engagement based on habitual social praxis’ (Cloke, 2011, p 249), the motivational discourses that prompted such new forms of engagement, in broad terms at least, could be seen primarily as
evangelistic. These evangelistic motivations are founded on the perceived concern that local churches inadequately engage with, and retain, young people and that such inability is one of the primary reasons the church in the UK is in significant decline. This point is clear from the response of Andy Hawthorne to the recognition that local young people in Wythenshaw quickly lost interest in Church after the school based ‘mission weeks’.

In the shifting development of the Message Trust this new approach of facilitating youth workers to live and ‘share faith’ from within these local socio-economically deprived areas became paramount to the future development of how the Message Trust conceived faith being ‘shared’. While the first milestone in the development of the Message Trust was the venture into local schools, the second was the commitment made to local communities through the establishment of the first Eden initiative. However, it is important to highlight that embedded in this new geographic commitment was still a large expectation that first and foremost these new initiatives were about evangelising to local young people, but doing so as a local neighbour.

**Festival events and the birth of more Eden initiatives**

Soon after the original Eden initiative had begun, Andrew Hawthorne and others planned a series of similar projects across Manchester (see Wilson, 2005; 2012) to establish ‘missional communities’ within many other of the most socio-economically deprived parts of the city (Hawthorne, 2000, 95). Aiming to partner with churches already present in these areas, the Message Trust made use of a Manchester city ‘prayer network’ (see Green, 2008) to recruit further Christians willing to move into some of the most socio-economically deprived areas of the city. It was not long before The Message established a second Eden initiative in conjunction with Mount Chapel Church in Salford. The local church leaders backed the project idea and the area identified was Langworthy, a densely packed area of Victorian terrace houses. This project was launched in 1999 and coincided with the area being designated under the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), leading to members of the Salford Eden team becoming long-term serving members on the SRB local action groups, while a segment
of the SRB money was dedicated to the construction of the ‘LifeCentre’, a youth drop-in centre ran by Salford Eden volunteers (Wilson, 2005).

The profile of both the Message Trust and the Eden initiatives began to build across evangelical Christian networks and as a result was the topic of much discussion at various annual Christian conferences across the country (see Hawthorne, 2000; Wilson, 2012). In the run up to the annual Christian Youth Conference, Soul Survivor, in 2000, the organizer Mike Pilavachi and Message Trust founder Andy Hawthorne decided to divert the conference from its usual venue at the Bath and West Show ground in Somerset to create a two week ‘mission’ across Manchester (Wilson, 2005). In conjunction with the Message Trust, the recently established Eden initiatives, and a number of other Christian charities, including Oasis and Youth for Christ, the event drew in over 20,000 young people from around the country and was titled Soul Survivor: The Message 2000 (M2K).

According to Andy Hawthorne the festival style event was a ‘climax of a whole year that was stuffed full of missions and outreaches’ (Hawthorne, 2000, 104). The aim of the summer event was, as Hawthorne writes, ‘to fulfill our calling to see every young person in Manchester being given repeated opportunities to accept or reject Jesus’ (2000, 105). This verbal message was intentionally combined with social action initiatives across the city, making use of the vast pools of human resources that had come to Manchester for the two weeks. Hawthorne clarified that at the heart of this event was the intention ‘to present a holistic gospel; not just beat people over the head with the bible, but to meet their real needs’ (2000, 102). Accordingly 40 percent of the young Christian people from around the UK that attended the conference were organized by the Christian charity Oasis to deliver a range of short-term social action projects. These short-term community projects were undertaken in conjunction with local councils, residents associations and housing trusts across Manchester’s deprived inner city and housing estates. Each day young people engaged in estate clear ups, mural paintings, garden clearance and numerous other practical activities (Wilson, 2005).

In conjunction with the M2K summer festival three more Eden projects were started,
one in Longsight, where Andy Hawthorne had been profoundly affected by those he encountered in his business with his brother, and the second in Openshaw, the first partnership with the Salvation Army. The third Eden initiative focused on a council estate in Swinton Valley.

**Intervention 3: Going beyond evangelism and the success of the festival**

From this third stage of the Message Trust’s history and the development of the Eden initiatives there are two significant points to draw out. First, that Eden Salford’s involvement in the local SRB action group signified that Eden initiatives were quickly going to develop into initiatives that were much wider than just about doing Christian youth work and evangelizing to young people in these deprived areas. And second, that the successive collaborations between the Message Trust and the Christian youth organisation Soul Survivor, that resulted in the emergence of the M2K festival became key catalysts in the recruitment of new volunteers and staff workers for these new Eden initiatives. Similar to the new engagements of Eden Salford, M2K signified a deeper commitment to a method of sharing the Christian faith that was done both in words and in actions (see Hawthorne, 2009) blending expressions of faith through ‘citizenry action’ with personal and corporate acts of ‘telling the story’ (Graham and Lowe, 2009).

The development of the second Eden initiative and the involvement of this team in New Labour’s Single Regeneration Budget local action groups signified an important stage in the early development of the Eden initiatives. Primarily it signified that an involvement in Eden had in practice turned from something that was constructed solely around doing youth work in the local community, with the aim of hoping to evangelise to these local young people, towards a multifaceted approach that was constructed around engaging with the community and expressing faith through local acts of citizenry involvement, organizing and service provision, as well as seeking to see the local church grow through successful evangelisation. Something Andy Hawthorne describes as ‘word and deed evangelism’ (2009). Involved in this way Eden volunteers and staff began to discover that ‘mission’ was as much about
discovering their place as local citizen, ‘contributing to a language of the common good’ and assisting ‘a debate about ‘what makes a good city’ (Graham and Lowe, 2009, 10), as it was about seeking to see church growth and personal conversion. This mix of word and deed evangelism, combining citizenry action with evangelistic motivations, is another milestone in the complex story of how incarnational approaches are fuelled and envisioned.

Furthermore the structure and format of the M2K festival meant that as a result many young Christian people attending the festival could discover ways of appropriately matching a faith-fuelled ethic to do something about something with voluntary short term citizenry engagements. Fundamental to this was that these series of social action ventures opened up a series of encounters between well intending young Christian citizens and their guardians, with marginal-others living in different social and economic circumstances. Whereas perhaps these young people would normatively not have had much engagement with these ‘other’ parts of the City, these events opened many young Christian people to these areas of urban deprivation and bridged aspects of the City that so often do not coalesce in any positive or progressive way. These ‘bridging’ moments (see Swanson and Williams, 2010) enlivened many Christians involved in the events to the possibility and potential of radically putting faith into action through relocation, something that the Message Trust was presenting as a viable option through the device of Eden. I will return to examine the significance of this in the context of a number of volunteer biographies in the second part of this chapter.

More Eden initiatives and another festival:

In the following five years, five more Eden ‘communities’ were initiated, all but one in conjunction with churches already present in these local areas. The fifth of these new Eden initiatives was launched as the second partnership with the Salvation Army 614UK network. In 2003 it was agreed by local church networks across the northern mill town of Oldham that this latest Eden initiative would be launched and linked into the cross-city ‘mission’ called: Festival Manchester (see Green, 2008). Overseen by the
Message Trust, Festival Manchester aimed to build upon what had been achieved in the year 2000 with the M2Kfestival. *Festival Manchester* was coordinated around a week-long series of presentations of the Christian faith, music events and social action projects. This festival culminated in a celebration of the Christian faith in Heaton Park, Manchester, where reportedly thirty thousand people gathered to enjoy Christian music, extreme sports and family fun (Green, 2008). For *Festival Manchester* ‘the US-based Luis Palau Evangelistic Association and Manchester’s Message Trust partnered with over five hundred churches, the Manchester and Salford City Councils, Greater Manchester Police, and dozens of corporate and private supporters’ (Green, 2008, 94). Under the supervision of the Message Trust, several teams of young people and youth workers from around the country partnered with the new Eden community on Fitton Hill, Oldham, to engage in a number of ‘social action’ projects: providing summer activities for local young people, undertaking community space clear ups and opening a drop-in centre to bridge the gap in the younger years youth provision. This marked the beginning of the Fitton Hill Eden project and partnership with the newly established Salvation Army 614UK ‘church plant’ on the estate.

Today Eden teams are firmly established on five founding principles, and four out of five of these ‘cornerstone’ principles emerged out of this first immediate response to establish a presence in Wythenshaw in 1996. Essentially, 1. All Eden communities commit themselves to being ‘rooted in a local church’; 2. They are ‘focused on the toughest neighbourhoods’; 3. They develop a ‘large team with homes right in the heart of the community’; 4. They focus on ‘making the first priority reaching youth to see their full potential unlocked’, and growing out of the development that Eden teams are now found across England; 5. That Eden teams ‘commit to belonging to a wider relational network’, compromised of other Eden teams across the same region (Wilson, 2012, 86). Alongside these five foundational principles, Eden teams define themselves through five key adjectives, forging lifestyles that are based around; 1. ‘being incarnational’; 2. ‘being relational’; 3. ‘being purposeful’; 4. ‘being countercultural’ and 5. ‘being holistic’ (Eden-network, 2012). Performing these five core characteristics they anticipate they will display an authentic commitment, a willingness to be shaped and to shape others, an element of Christian distinctiveness.
and an interest in social, physical and spiritual change (Wilson, 2012).

**Section 1- Concluding Remarks**

The argument of this chapter so far has been defined by the analysis of the history of the Message Trust and the Eden initiatives. Through three analytical interventions the main point made in the case of this FBO is that the move to ‘live amongst’ and express the Christian faith in an ‘incarnational’ manner emerged out of various stages of the FBO’s development. This section has also argued that from an organisational perspective the purpose of this ‘incarnational’ approach has shifted and been extended through time. Tracing the development and evolution of the Message Trust and Eden-networks adoption of an ‘incarnational’ approach highlights how important it is that these particular faith-inspired landscapes are understood through a socio-temporal lens. In terms of the broader thesis as a whole this organizational analysis also helps to contribute towards the re-reading of these incarnational geographies. Rather than being simply understood as spaces of proselytisation (see Woods, 2012) and/or spaces of self-betterment (see Allahyari, 2000) the analysis of the history of the Message Trust and Eden-network has shown that these incarnational geographies are much more complex and nuanced. In the case of the Message trust and the Eden-network the practice of ‘living amongst’ went from being adopted as a new form of proclamational evangelism and discipleship to being stretched and extended into a more holistic approach that saw participation and placement in deprived neighbourhoods as a way of enacting citizenry action, evangelism, discipleship and service. Originally adopted as a response to the inability of the local church to adequately support and follow up young Christian converts the ‘incarnational' approach saw different Eden teams venture into also supporting local community regeneration initiatives and discovering how to contribute towards the common good (Graham and Lowe, 2009). Developing this holistic sense of praxis has meant Eden initiatives searched for progressive postsecular partnerships and pursued the common good (see Hollenbach, 2002; Cloke et al, 2012).

Turning to consider the actual experiences of volunteers and staff in adopting an
‘incarnational’ approach in socio-economically deprived areas the focus of this chapter now shifts from an examination of the organizational to the personnel who embrace ‘living amongst’. This second section of the chapter extends the argument that through adopting an ‘incarnational’ approach a number of significant shifts in rationale and praxis occur. However, concerned to acknowledge the individual agency of volunteers and staff involved, similar to the research of Cloke et al (2005), in this next section due care is taken not to assume a perfect transition between organisational ethos and praxis as it is enacted on the ground by different personnel.

Part 2: Biographic insights into joining, doing and leaving the project: tales of ‘living amongst’.

(All names in this section have been changed to ensure anonymity)

This second section is structured in three parts. Firstly, I examine the factors that motivated staff and volunteers to join Eden/SA614UK. Secondly, I explore and analyse the actual practical and emotional hardships that staff and volunteers experienced and thirdly, in reflection of these hardships, I review and analyse the reasons why some staff and volunteers left Eden/SA614UK. This analysis gives a flavor of what it is like for these Christian actors to embed themselves in these praxis based landscapes and it points to a need to appreciate the dynamic and evolving nature of how these Christian actors perceive and make sense of their involvement in and through these socio-temporal landscapes. A formative conclusion that arises from this argument is that the subjectivities of these Christian actors must be understood as subject to change and contestation, and that this dynamism is grounded in both the outworking of faith-praxis in and through local place, and in connection with the development of deepening relationships with others within these places over time.

There are a number of significant points that emerge from the analysis of these biographic narratives. Firstly, examining what compelled different individuals to join the Eden network it is clear that many of the volunteers and staff were challenged by their participation in the summer festival events: Soul Survivor: The Message 2000 and Festival Manchester in 2003, and that participation in these short term social
action projects contributed significantly towards numerous staff and volunteers making the decision to sign up to the Eden-network and move onto the estate. What is also apparent is that the evangelistic discourses that have been forged from the historic emergence of the Eden-network out of the Message Trust play an important role in motivating staff and volunteers to initially join the Fitton Hill Eden project. However, thirdly, in addition, many volunteers and staff also made it clear that what initially attracted them to sign up to the Eden-network and join a local Eden initiative was the given opportunity to put their faith into action in a way that many of the staff and volunteers felt was not available in their previous church circumstances. Here, in relation to this new found sense of opportunity to ‘live faith out in action’, I argue that to those staff and volunteers joining Eden/SA614UK, the local Eden initiative provided an organisational ‘device’ through which they could ground and embody faith in practical action (Barnett et al, 2005). I subsequently argue that this opportunity to ‘act out faith’ as a local resident in a socio-economically deprived neighbourhood re-enchanted former individualistic personal understandings of the Christian faith, reconfiguring it instead as something more communal, worked out locally in place, and with and for others. Similar to the research of Gerhardt (2008) on American evangelicals, my argument in this section focuses on the actual formative nature of encountering others embedded in different circumstances and how such alterity encourages a sense of proximate care which emerges from a ‘sense for the other which is emotional, connected and committed’ (Cloke, 2002, pg 594). However, as a number of participant accounts testify, these initial encounters with alterity are sometimes initially layered with rather colonial viewpoints, and it is often only through a time-enriched proximate understanding of the worlds and lives of these ‘others’ that these initial colonial views are deconstructed and reconstructed around different arrangements of power. Relating this specific argument to the broader point made by this chapter, this section emphasizes that through an ongoing grounded involvement over time in practical other-focused practices, the normative evangelistic discourses so apparent in part one of this chapter and in the joining narratives in the first part of this second section become reinterpreted with greater emphasis into an ethic of care that centers around serving others in their current circumstance through more equal arrangements of power based around mutual friendship.
Another major development of examining these biographic narratives is that it brings to the fore the actual testified experience of ‘doing faith’ in these circumstances, and exploring different staff and volunteer experiences of living out an embedded and embodied Christian faith incarnationally in this socio-economically deprived neighbourhood highlights how such praxis is personally demanding, both practically and emotionally. In this section I emphasise how the negative experiences endured by those seeking to express their Christian faith out incarnationally in a socio-economically deprived place like Fitton Hill is as much a consequence of trying to balance the organisational demands and expectations placed on them, as it is a result of personal fatigue from constantly serving others and from not being able to come to terms with how their involvement does not live up to their own individual expectations. Lastly, these different frustrations appear as key contributing reasons as to why some volunteers and staff made the decision to leave the project. Exploring these burnout narratives helps to give further clarity to the experiences of volunteers and staff and it highlights the temporal and often finite nature of these incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economic deprived areas. Each of these three analytical themes will now be developed in turn.

**Figure 1.1 : Table of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation and Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>A graduate from medical school and the director of Hope Citedal Medical Practice. She is married to Gareth and they have three young boys. Moved to the area when she married Gareth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>A secondary music teacher and regular volunteer for Eden/SA614UK. Moved to the area to be involved in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married to Frank, regular volunteer for Eden/SA614UK. Full time mum. Moved to the area to be involved in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>A physiotherapist who moved onto the estate to be involved in the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mel</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Secondary school teacher and regular volunteer for Eden/SA614UK. Moved to the area after finishing her Gap Year with the Message Trust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phil, 22  | Theological student who regularly volunteers for Eden/SA614UK. Moved to the area after finishing his Gap Year with the Message Trust.
Lucy, 24  | A trainee doctor and regular volunteer for Eden/SA614UK. Moved to the area after finishing a BA degree at Manchester University in Bioscience.
Kate, 32  | A part time salaried family's worker for Eden/SA614UK. Married to Luke, they have two young children. She moved to the estate to volunteer for the project.
Luke, 32  | A salaried youth worker for Eden/SA614UK. Born on the estate he is trained chef who returned to the area when he became a Christian. Team leader for local Eden youth work.
Gareth, 35 | The pastor of the local Salvation Army 614UK church. Married to Amanda. Moved to Manchester after finishing degree to be involved in Openshaw Eden project. Asked to start new team on Fitton Hill.

ʻJoining Edenʼ

ʻwhat I began to realize that day was that in many cases the transformation that has taken place has been far more inside of me than inside the different characters that I have come into contact withʼ  
Gary Bishop (2004, 89)

As I became familiar with the biographies of Eden Fitton Hill Volunteers and staff, it became clear that many of the volunteers had been recruited to join Eden through involvement with either of the major Manchester Christian festivals: *Soul Survivor 2000- The Message (M2K)*, or *Festival Manchester* held in 2003. For some of the volunteers or staff workers, joining an Eden ‘team’ was a natural progression after the two-week summer festival. This took several different forms. For some volunteers it was a gradual process of moving home, leaving church communities, finding new jobs and becoming enrolled into a team as a new volunteer, while in more extreme cases it literally resulted from staying put after the festival, continuing with what had been undertaken during the preceding weeks when the festivals were underway. This was the case for Amanda.
Running up to the summer of the year 2000 Amanda had become interested in the *Soul Survivor 2000-The Message (M2K)* festival when it was being ‘plugged’ at another Christian conference, *Spring Harvest*, earlier in the year. Amanda felt inviting her sister to be a part of the M2K festival would be a good opportunity for her sister, who was not a Christian, to experience something of ‘Christianity in action’. Amanda felt excited that asking her sister to join her for this week in Manchester would highlight to her the ‘cultural relevance’ and ‘practical expression’ of Christianity. Amanda, at the time an eighteen year old school leaver, was also keen to attend the festival as it would give her the chance to meet other young people who shared her Christian faith.

For Amanda, a young person with a recent personal conversion story, this event presented an opportunity to evangelistically share faith with her sister in a way that was not just cognitive but was also grounded in expressing practical action. A clear motivation behind inviting her sister was that she too might be converted to the Christian faith, and that through seeing its practical and applied relevance her sister might become interested in the Christian faith for herself. This biographic narrative resonates with the evangelistic discourses so prevalent within the Message Trust explored in section 1. However, what also was very clear from Amanda’s narrative is that while she initially signed up to the two-week festival because of its social element and because it presented itself as an appropriate opportunity for her to evangelistically share her Christian faith with her sister, her compulsion to sign up to an Eden initiative was also grounded in her discovering an exciting and practical way of ‘living out’ her Christian faith.

For the first festival week Amanda was in charge of overseeing a group of Manchester University Christian students to litter pick and clear gardens on a designated social housing estate in inner city Manchester. Hearing the repeated call for volunteers to join the Eden ‘movement’ Amanda urgently felt that she should be one of those who joined an Eden team. She explained that her interest in the Eden initiatives was that they required a big commitment where ones Christian faith could not just be ‘shoved into the background somewhere’. Amanda explained to me that previous to her visit
to the New Wine conference where she had first heard about the M2K event, her encounter with the Christian faith had been limited to being a chorister at a well known private school, being involved in these social action projects was ‘far from boring’ and it appealed as a really relevant way of ‘doing something meaningful with your Christian faith’. However, upon enquiring how to join, Amanda felt deterred by those who had questioned her on what applicable skills she would be able to bring to one of the projects. Amanda had had no formal experience of secular youth work or Christian youth ministry and was advised to return to her home church in the South of England seeking the advice of her own church youth worker. Despite this however, Amanda stayed for the second week of the festival, feeling a building urgency about continuing with the ‘social action’ she had undertaken during the first week of the festival. Undertaking the clean up projects she had also had a number of opportunities to share her faith evangelistically with residents and Amanda described how this social action project provided her with an opportunity to both ‘tell her story and to live it’, something that she had not really had much opportunity to do before.

Amanda described herself as someone who had always had a ‘heart’ for social action, volunteering for Shelter during her Christmas holidays when she was in sixth form before she became a Christian. But she explained that in comparison to her work at Shelter, her involvement in the summer social action projects fulfilled both her desire for ‘service’ and her new found passion to share her Christian testimony1 with others. Amanda told me that she had always ‘just been passionate about people’ and that the M2K event and the Eden initiatives presented her with both an opportunity to carry this forward, and the opportunity to evangelistically share faith with those she was ‘serving’.

Once the festival ended, rather than returning home, Amanda felt a compulsion to stay in Manchester, returning to the same housing estate each day to continue to build friendships and provide activities for local young people where and how she could. Amanda explained this to me.

1 ‘Testimony’ is a narrated account of ones own coming to faith and detail of Christian experience.
“Literally the last night [of the two week festival] I still had no money and I still had no where to stay and I did not know what I was going to do and then one of the university students said I could stay in their house ‘cos it was empty for the summer, so I stayed there. I told my dad that I was staying in Manchester, which I don’t know how he let me do it, to be honest, an eighteen-year-old girl, ‘yeah I am just going to hook up with some students, and um, I applied for loads of jobs’. I applied for waitressing jobs and I had done it all before, and I applied for pizza hut and restaurants and had loads and loads of jobs and in between applying for jobs I went back to Switon Valley every day, cos that is where I had done the thing [the social action projects]. It was weird cos, urm, I turned up on the estate and people kinda recognized me and the estate was really friendly and had this really funny edge to it and people were like ‘oh you are one of the Christians aren’t you.”

As the above quote illustrates, compelled to continue what she had started on the estate, Amanda made her own housing arrangements living in an empty student house in another part of the City. She was surprised that local residents remembered her from the two-week clean up project and she felt warmly welcomed. Returning to Swinton Valley most days, Amanda told me how she organized a small kids club in the local park and met elderly women from the estate for cups of tea. Alongside these social activities she met with a group of local young people who were willing to read the bible together with her. Her involvement continued to be structured around both evangelism and action, ‘sharing’ the Christian faith through a small bible reading group and acting out a faith fuelled ethics of care through befriending elderly residents and running a summer activity club for local young people.

In time Amanda contacted the Message Trust to explain that she never returned home to the South of England and was busy regularly returning to the estate. Amanda explained that Andy Hawthorne, the Message Trust’s CEO, decided she was ‘obviously doing brilliantly there and agreed to support her financially each week.’ Amanda carried on visiting the estate and through liaising with the Message Trust facilitated
the development of a new football pitch for the community.

However, as both Amanda explained to me, and as Matt Wilson (2006) describes in his written account of the development of Eden Swinton Valley, local residents of Swinton Valley did not remain receptive to the work of the ‘Christians’ like Amanda on the estate. ‘Some of the residents felt disappointed by the abrupt end of M2K and the failure to complete a number of tasks which had been promised’ (Wilson, 2005,61). For Amanda, still visiting the estate regularly, she soon became the target of resident’s frustration.

’It turned quite nasty on the estate ‘cos people weren’t followed up really, and then it got darker and I had a couple of fire crackers fired at me, November/October time and it just turned quickly and people were disappointed really.’

Although there had been many valid achievements through the organized events of M2K, the involvement of these teams of willing volunteers on the estate had clearly created a number of unresolved issues and Amanda became the target of these frustrations. This two week short term show of solidarity had left many residents with unfulfilled expectations and this had led to understandable anger over why what had been promised had not come to fruition. What Amanda felt had started well with receptive interest from local residents soon turned, taking on a ‘darker’ and less receptive tone. Amanda expressed that once things turned in this way she felt uncomfortable returning to the estate so frequently. With the direction of the Message Trust Amanda became involved in more admin work at the Message’s headquarters and she spent less time on the estate and more time working directly for the Message Trust. This continued until Amanda was transfered to another Eden project else where in the city. Amanda is now married to Gareth, the Eden Fitton Hill Project leader and together they oversea the Fitton Hill Eden project.

Amanda’s account of how she came to join the Eden-network is an uncommon story, but her underlying reasons for joining an Eden initiative resonate with the biographic
accounts of other Eden staff and volunteers. For a number of other volunteers, joining Eden was a gradual process, but as with Amanda’s account these other accounts highlight how many of the volunteers involved in the local Eden project signed up to the Eden-network because it opened up an opportunity for them to express their Christian faith in ways that had not previously been presented to them. This was certainly the case for Frank and Grace.

Frank and Grace are a mid thirties couple who joined Eden Fitton Hill not long after taking part in Festival Manchester in 2003. Before joining Eden they lived in a middle class area of Manchester, Sale, and attended a relatively large, and affluent, Salvation Army Church. This middle class context bore significant influence on their joint decision to join Eden after the summer festival, expressing a desire to get involved with something that was ‘more of a challenge’ and involved ‘a greater sense of being embedded in a local Community’. The church they attended before joining Eden attracted people from across South Manchester, commuting to attend worship and celebrate their Christian faith together (see Ellingson, 2009). Expressing their concerns about the lack of ‘community engagement’ both Frank and Grace explained that their previous church circumstances left them feeling detached from any recognizable framework of putting faith into action, staying in this church they were worried that as there was little corporate opportunity to radically express faith in ways that had much influence on the wider non-church community. They were extremely despondent with this expression of church and felt uneasy that it too easily reflected the surrounding broader cultural values, being built on personal consumption and individual gain. Rather than being involved in a church that centered around creating a culturally appropriate Sunday service with values complicit with an individualistic consumer society (see Metzger, 2007; Hunt, 1997) they wished to be a part of something that was counter-cultural and focused on developing meaningful other-focused spiritual selves where Christian discipleship was something learnt through serving (see Hatmaker, 2001). Comparing their previous church circumstances with what they felt compelled them to initially join Eden it was clear from the accounts of Grace and Frank that they believed Eden potentially offered an opportunity through which they could enact their hope of acting
out there Christian faith in ways that were both practical and local, embedded in a local community. Their concern was that rather than attending a church whose concerns were predominantly internal, they wished to be a part of something that was outward looking and focused on the wider community beyond the church walls (see Rusaw and Swanson, 2007; 2010). According to both Frank and Grace the church they attended before joining Eden ‘felt like there were already a lot of talented people doing a lot of things and that they were unlikely to be stretched.’ They sought an expression of church where they would have more opportunity and where their involvement would seemingly have greater impact. They expressed that originally they felt that Eden offered them this opportunity. It offered both of them a way that they could put some of their ‘skills into action’ in a community in which their skills and personal resources would perhaps be more beneficial. Grace and Frank saw Eden as an opportunity to be ‘pushed out of (our) comfort zones’ and, because at the time they had no kids, they felt ‘free to make that choice’, to venture into something that would allow them to be more effective, more challenged and more applied with their Christian faith. In broad terms Eden presented itself as an ‘organisational device’ through which ‘oughts could be practically turned into cans’ (Barnett et al, 2005, 31). Conceived as a ‘device’ for enacting personal action, Eden presented volunteers like Frank and Grace with opportunity through which ethical conduct could be shaped, ‘reworking moral selves from places of obligation to places of actual ethical conduct’ (Barnett et al, 2005, 31).

Interviewing many of the Eden volunteers on the Fitton Hill project it became apparent that the discourse that Frank and Grace relayed to me of a ‘home’ church that lacked community engagement was a familiar experience among many of the volunteers. These collective narratives appear reflective of a broader trend of discontent amongst Christians seeking opportunity to embody for themselves the narratives and lifestyle of Jesus Christ. In chapter two I explored how a resurgent move to be incarnationally present in marginal places has emerged out of a dissatisfaction with how the western Church relates to ‘the poor’ (see Bishop, 2007; Claibourne, 2006; Wilson, 2005) and how as a result of centuries of Christendom (See Murray, 2004) there are many Christians dissatisfied with the lack of connection
between the theological story that they personally uphold as meaningful, and the lack of application of this story in their everyday worlds. Upon further analysis these biographic narratives resonate with this trend quite clearly and the frustrations expressed by volunteers like Grace and Frank correlates with wider commentary and analysis of the Western Church as being at times detached, concerned with its own internal private agendas (Eder, 2006), and with little meaningful opportunity to live out ones faith-fuelled ethics in, and through, deepened relationships alongside marginal people and within marginal places (see Drane, 2002; Claiborne, 2006; Halter and Smay, 2008). This lack of connection with local community was a clear motivating factor in Rachel’s account of how she came to be involved in the local Eden initiative. Like Frank and Grace she drew on deep comparisons between the middle class context of her previous church and that of the place and purpose of the Salvation Army church that was in partnership with the Eden initiative on Fitton Hill estate.

Rachel joined Eden/SA614UK soon after qualifying from university as a physiotherapist. She explained that the church that she had grown up in was in a ‘middle class area’ where ‘everybody kept to themselves’. She also explained that her frustrations were grounded in the fact that the church she attended was some distance from the village in which she lived. Rachel expressed discomfort with the fact that ‘to get to church you had to drive through five other villages and most of the congregation were made up of people who did not live in the surrounding area’. In contrast to this experience, Rachel felt that Eden was different as it was ‘part of community’, as volunteers lived on the estate and where involved in a ‘local expression of church’. For Rachel it was the physical disconnection between her everyday world of routines, friendships and work, with that of the world of the church she attended that led her to be dissatisfied. Clearly what Rachel desired was to participate in a local church who’s theology and teaching was lived out in the local community, seeking to be a catalyst for social change and transformation (see Duncan, 2007). The church Rachel attended previously to her joining Eden correlates strongly with broader sociological findings that indicate that while many small charismatic evangelical churches present themselves as ‘community churches’, in fact, they have little direct impact on local community (see Bruce, 2011). Her previous experience of
driving out of her local geographic community to attend church some distance from her home highlights the increasing mobility of contemporary middle class lifestyles (Adey, 2010) and how this is reflected in the geographies of many contemporary middle class churches, church plants and the response of the church to such societal changes (see Connel, 2005; Bruce 2011; Feeney et al, 2004). Different from this model of church, Rachel felt Eden contrastingly presented her with a version of church that was by its very design built around a different set of principles and to these she was attracted. Similar to the narratives of Grace and Frank whereby Eden presented an organisational device (see Barnett et al, 2005) through which they could meaningfully take part and enact a faith-fuelled ethic, for Rachel, Eden presented her with a meaningful re-connection of, on the one hand her participation in church community and, on the other, her participation in local neighbourhood community; a suture that she felt church, by way of design, was meant to reflect. This suture would allow her to intentionally seek to be embedded in the community’s local social, cultural, political and economic context, and it was from this context as local neighbour that she could adequately respond.

Contrastingly, two of the younger members of the Eden community joined the Fitton Hill Eden team at the end of a one-year youth work training gap year placement run by the Message Trust, entitled Genetic². Both Mel and Phil were encouraged to join an Eden team upon nearing the completion of the year out programme. For both volunteers this programme involved placement work alongside one of the Eden teams and both Phil and Mel felt that they wanted to carry on expressing their Christian faith through one of the Eden initiatives. Having moved to join the Fitton Hill Eden project, signing up to degree courses at a small independent theological college, both volunteers explained that the nature of the gap year project meant they felt a compulsion to share their faith in ‘overtly’ evangelistic ways. In other words, when first joining Eden Fitton Hill they felt a necessity to verbally share about their Christian faith whenever they had the chance. It became clear throughout my

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² Genetic is the Message Trust’s ‘ten month intensive hands-on (Christian) youth work training programme’, it involves practical placements alongside a number of Message initiatives, including the Eden initiatives, alongside practical theological training (Genetik, 2012).
ethnographic placement that both Mel and Phil had in time changed their approach to sharing their faith with other local residents. On more than one occasion other volunteers reminisced over ‘Mel’s early days on the project’ when ‘all she seemed to want to do was knock on peoples doors and tell them about Jesus’. Relatively similarly, Phil explained to me his earlier ‘calling’ to be an ‘evangelist’ to Manchester.

‘In one of the meetings they asked people to stand to receive prayer if they felt they wished to receive direction, you know, calling with their lives, so I went up the front for prayer. During that time I felt very clearly that I wanted to be an evangelist, you know someone who shares the Christian message. We had received a Message Trust presentation on the work they do in Manchester and the development of Eden projects around the city and I was like, yes, I am an evangelist. I just knew I was going to come to Manchester to tell people about Jesus.’

Phil, on more than one occasion shared with me how through time and experience being involved in the Fitton Hill Eden project he had come to interpret ‘being a bearer of good news’, which he told me was what he meant by being an evangelist, in a broader light than just verbally sharing with others his Christian faith and the Christian message. Phil considered his participation in many of the Eden activities and projects to be part of a process of enacting this process of ‘bearing the good news’, and he told me that although he is still keen to verbally share his Christian faith with others he now sees this as ‘part of something much wider’. Coming to terms with daily life on Fitton Hill Phil now feels that the way he expresses his Christian faith is a discerned balance between witnessing his faith through verbal communication and witnessing his faith through an intentional practical engagement in local community. Whereas once, when he had undertaken his training year, Phil had felt that his Christian faith was something that others would best understand if he verbally explained it to them, now Phil made it clear to me on several occasions it is something

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3 ‘calling’ is often a term used by Christians to denote a strong faith fuelled urge or commitment towards a particular vocation.
4 ‘evangelist’ in many contemporary evangelical Christian churches defines someone who feels a passionate about sharing the key tenets of Christian gospel with others, primarily through conversation.
he felt others would best grasp through him acting and participating in a certain way in the local community.

This account from Phil is interesting as it reflects a wider trend that I found apparent in nearly all of the biographic narratives of volunteers as they explained what motivated them to join a local Eden initiative and how this understanding of purpose changed in and through incarnational engagement within these marginal geographies. Where as in some cases the conscious decision to join Eden was seen as an opportunity to put their Christian faith and a faith-fuelled ethics for marginal others into action through local community based efforts, for others like Phil, the purpose of joining Eden underwent a process of re-translation as his original desire to join Eden was re-interpreted from that of an understanding of himself primarily as ‘missionary’, which he originally interpreted as ‘telling others about Jesus’ to one that was reinterpreted into a wider framework of activism, participation and practical engagement as a local neighbour (see Thompson, 2012). In this process of re-interpretation his desire to ‘share faith’ went from something he primarily saw as grounded in evangelistic techniques of giving a verbal account of ones own personal story of coming to faith, ‘sharing his testimony’, to a faith that was envisioned in broader terms as something primarily performed through certain virtuous understandings of self that were re-framed around serving and caring for others in the local community (See Cloke et al., 2012). Phil’s narrative illustrates and exemplifies the broader trend Cloke et al (2012) have argued to be emerging from within evangelicalism, whereby there is a clear shift among some groups of evangelical Christians to move from entrenched dogmatic positions to positions of engaging in radical forms of praxis. As is clear from these biographic narratives it is clearly often through an embedded incarnational participation in these marginal landscapes that Christian actors ‘discover something significant about their faith-identity’ ( Cloke et al, 2012, pg 2) and that these spaces of incarnational engagement themselves become active agents of change in the reshaping of Christian theologies and motivation to engage with others. As with the case of so many of the other volunteers and staff members I interviewed, the case of Phil also illustrates that there are numerous and
complex connections between theological discourse and praxis (see Cloke et al, 2012). With many volunteers and staff there was a gradual coming to terms with the fact that their Christian faith motivates them to see opportunities to enact their faith in ways that have political and civic consequence (Bretherton, 2010). This process of renegotiation of motivation could be seen to reflect what Bartley has termed the radicalisation of faith (2006) and it chimes with what Cray argues to be part embodying a transformational expression of the Christian faith that is grounded in everyday actions (2007). While the proclamation of the Christian gospel still remains of paramount concern to Evangelical Christians like Phil, his own understanding of what to do with his Christian faith in the here and now has become recast as something that is ‘best understood in the context of loving actions and loving community’ (Cluster, 2004 pg 176). It is these reformulated self-understandings of Christian faith identity, emerging from and through participation within these marginal spaces, from which something of a post-evangelical Christian position might emerge (see Tomlinson, 1995), as it is through actual time deepened participation and experience that some of the given and learnt configurations of an evangelical faith are re-ordered and reconfigured as these Christians volunteers and staff seek how best to express faith in the context of the very real situations and relationships they develop in these marginal places. While for volunteers like Phil ‘telling the story’ remains important, there is a clear shift in emphasis from ‘teller’ to ‘doer’ that is prompted and provoked by the actual reality of the circumstances facing many other people living and inhabiting these previously distant and ‘nearly forgotten worlds’ (Tompson, 2011, 120). Comparing my own experiences of taking part in Soul Survivor- The Message 2000 (M2K), with the experiences of Eden volunteers and staff who had also taken part in either M2K or Festival Manchester it was clear that in many cases this initial involvement had been a formative experience for different people, and, that as a consequence, these memorable immanent moments, or ‘becomings’ (see Deleuze, 1977), through which volunteers had become deeply affected, had led many to question whether they felt compelled to join an Eden initiative. Volunteers and staff gave examples of how, in stepping into the worlds of others (see Cloke, 2002), they had been profoundly shaped through what they witnessed. These ‘event-encounters’ (see Deleuze, 1977; 1987; Dole; 1999) appear as individual immanent moments or
events that have a deep affectual impact on the self and, whether as in other research where the encounter with otherness is between different people (see Popke, 2009; McCormack, 2003), people and animals (see Cloke and Perkins 2005; Johnson, 2008) or people and objects (see Cloke, P. and Jones, O., 2002), these encounters with different others shaped knowledges and responses to these other worlds (see Vanier, 2006; Jarman, 2011). For the volunteers and staff I interviewed it was individual event-encounters with marginal-others during the social action projects on the estates that influenced their decision to join an Eden team. These mediated and structured ventures into the worlds of these others opened up what could be termed a certain ‘contact space’, ‘the space in which geographically and historically separated peoples come into contact with each other and relate to each other’ (Cloke, 2002, 97). The experience of being faced with perceived social and economic differences through this ‘contact space’ gave rise to many participants feeling compelled to act upon these emotional and very visual events (Cloke, 2002).

These encounters appeared to be moments when, in working as part of a wider team of volunteers, volunteers felt a overwhelming sense of compassion towards those they sought to ‘serve’ through practical activities like garden clearance, mural painting or the vitalization of unused common space. As well as providing a ‘contact space’ through which different worlds collided these short-term projects provided the initial chance for these project participants to enact faith in practical and tangible ways alongside others they had previously had little contact or connection with. This ‘device’ provided a ‘potential bridge between ordinary ethics and a more deliberate performance of ethical citizenship through volunteering’ (Cloke et al, 2007, 1092) in other more marginal landscapes. In this way participants (including myself as a 16 year old individual -see thesis introduction) were exposed to other more marginal landscapes where social-economic conditions were often sharply in contrast to what these participating individuals and groups were accustomed (see Dewsbury, 2003). These ‘event-encounters’ and relational moments were seminal for many of the Eden volunteers, as my dialogue below with Grace and Frank illustrates:

Me: Thinking back to the first festival, the one that I was personally involved in
with my church youth group, it seems really different from actually being involved with the day to day of an Eden project. I mean, what I have been involved in here is pretty mundane stuff, day to day stuff that does not have the flashiness or the intensity of one of the festival social action projects. How do you remember your involvement in the second festival, Festival Manchester? How does it fit into your own story of moving to Fitton Hill to become involved in the Eden project here?

Frank: Well I guess with the Festival projects you did see immediate effects of communities being improved, real life Eden is mundane, real stuff, so you don’t always see results, but I think actually the thing that I noticed that affected me deeply was the feeling of compassion towards the children that used to come out and help us with the projects. In those tough areas, in Gorton we were digging a football pitch, or something. The kids would come and help you and that sort of thing, and they just looked really poor and dirty and not very well looked after. I think for me doing those things, those projects, gave you that picture of how other people live and that compassion for children that live on tough estates.

Grace: I remember this mum coming out of her house, and there were these two really scruffy kids who had obviously been out on the streets and for most of the day, and were really dirty, the mum came out with a box of ice lollies for the workers, the project volunteers, in spite of all the poverty there was a level of generosity that I don’t know, it just really struck me, cos for her that box of ice lollies was probably quite a luxury and yet she came out and was prepared to share that what must have been was fairly significant for her. Meeting people who lived in those different circumstances just got into me, it affected me for a while after.’

Upon analysis of how these Eden volunteers and staff initially came to terms with these estate-spaces and the ‘other worlds’ they represented it is clear that many of these perceptions and experiences gave rise to colonial views of these others in need of their help. While, on the one hand undertaking these social action projects led to
something of a re-enchantment of a number of different individuals Christian faith, temporarily providing a device through which they could enter into other worlds, provoking and encouraging a practical activist response of wanting to ‘get off your arse and do something’ (Cloke, 2002, pg 92), it also led to colonial views of estate ‘others’.

Clearly, as the short extract illustrates, these ‘othered’ juvenile strangers presented a ‘disturbance in the order of being’ for Grace (Amhed, 2000, 149). As an encounter that was ‘ontologically productive of difference’ (Amhed, 2000, 144), or in other words, a interaction that highlighted how different Grace’s own experience of living in an other part of Manchester had been, these young others and the appearance of the ‘generous mother’ moved and ‘got to’ Grace. While in its description this testimonial piece is tarnished with representations of these juvenile ‘others’ as lacking care, dirty, scruffy, uncared for, being inbuilt with a whole host of assumptions and qualifications over the acts of generosity of the ‘poor mum’, it also illustrates how deeply affected Grace and Frank were by being in this ‘contact space’. As Grace and Frank temporarily entered this estate-space, areas they described as ‘tough’ places, these encounters presented them with experiential comparisons, resulting in a rising sense of compassion for these others whose physical appearance alone presented them with something ‘other’. ‘Meeting people who lived in those different circumstances’ ‘struck’, ‘got to’ and ‘affected’ them, and as Frank explained, it presented ‘a picture how other people live’. In one sense these accounts reflect the naivety or lack of awareness of different socio-economic circumstances facing different people in other areas of the same city in which they lived, but in a hopeful and progressive sense it was what opened up both Grace and Frank to the every real circumstances facing others inhabiting these ‘other’ neighbourhoods and it proved to be an important way mark in their personal journey from contact to commitment (see Cloke, 2002). While the core of this testimonial narrative spoke of an initial contact that was couched in terms of ‘us and them’ it played a key part in prompting Grace and Frank to consider a deeper sense of encounter that was built around a sense for the other (Auge, 1998), an ethic that emerged out of them finally coming to terms with the conviction that they had to personally relocate to live alongside these ‘others’ showing solidarity through
‘making it a place of residence’ (Gutierrez, 1988, 73). Placing this somewhat colonial encounter within this wider development of Frank and Grace’s biographic narrative gives account of the significance this short term participation played in them personally choosing to embrace a lifestyle that was open to a ‘recognition of a vulnerability to alterity’ (Shapiro, 1999, 63) and it highlights how experiences like the one given in the above dialogue shape and influence ethical action.

Comparing such an ‘event-encounter’ with the theories put forward by Jane Bennett on the crucial nature of personal experience in motivating ethical behavior (2001), experiences of encountering the other gained through these short term Christian social action projects can be seen to have crucial significance in re-enchanting everyday life, resulting in new and hopeful actions to and for the sake of others. The encounters with the young children and mother on the estate surprised and disturbed Frank and Grace, and these momentary subjective experiences of being faced with the ‘other’ on the estate stimulated a sense of compassion. Theorising further on this account not only does it provide a rupture, punctuation, or moment of enchantment (Bennett, 2001) in the way Frank and Grace previously understood and made sense of estate spaces and those ‘other’ people who inhabited them, but, in resonance with some of the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (see Peperzak et al, 1996) such a face-to-face encounter with the other in this moment is important because of the actual primacy of ethics drawn from the immanent experience of such an encounter. This primacy, being phenomenological in nature, is an irreducible relation, hence potentially why, in representational terms, it is re-presented in stark language that rears its head with colonial undertones demarcating significant differences. However, on examination of the actual experience of such a relational moment it might be better conceived and understood as a privileged phenomenological moment in which the others proximity and distance are both strongly felt in this encounter, as on the one hand the immediacy and immanence of the encounter was strongly felt by both grace and Frank, on the other hand it reinforced the reality of contrasts emotionally felt in this event encounter.

While in early parts of this chapter I have highlighted the place of evangelistic
discourse in motivating a number of volunteers, like Phil and Amanda, to join an Eden initiative, this example illustrates that experience also plays a key part in motivating these Christian actors to relocate to express their faith incarnationally within the actual confines of the estate-space. Not only was it the actual experience of stepping into and encountering other worlds, in this case the world of the deprived estate, that motivated volunteers to sign up to join Eden, but, as illustrated through the earlier accounts of Grace, Frank and Rachel, it was also the actual experience of what volunteers felt was missing in their previous church circumstances that motivated them to seek out a new expression of the Christian faith that more explicitly fitted their imaginaries of what church and the Christian faith should look like in action. All of these accounts could be seen as a move to re-enchant Christianity, a move that seeks to contemplate and act upon an emerging understanding of how ‘church life’ and a personal place within it is best expressed in the context of contemporary experience (see Tomlinson, 2008). This move to see Christianity re-enchanted actually resonates with some of the earlier discussion of Jane Bennett’s theories of enchantment, as Tomlinson’s case of how Christianity is actually re-enchanted draws some of its strength from ‘connecting our Christian faith with other aspects of our life and experience’ (2008, 15)6. Tomlinson also affirms, however, that such a re-chanted Christianity, put forward as ‘progressive orthodoxy’ (Ibid, 15) must draw upon ‘the importance of Christianity’s past: of the events and sacred texts that have given it shape and form and content’ (Ibid, 21).

Drawing from Christianity’s past, remaining open for this past to be interweaved into the here and now of personal experience, therefore shaping insight and personal direction, was also clearly another shaping factor in the joining narratives of volunteers and staff of the Eden project. This is illustrated in the accounts of Grace who explained how her understanding of theology and prophetic discourse shaped her desire to act and express such action within the organizational setting of an Eden initiative.

6 There is also an interesting crossover here between the re-emphasis of the nature of phenomenological experience found in the work of Bennett (2001) as there is in the Radical Orthodoxy scholars. (see Smith, 2005; Milbank et al, 1999).
While Grace’s experience of participating in the short-term social action project was seminal in leading her to make the decision to join Eden, this decision was not made over night. Instead the actual experience and ethics that emerged out of encountering others within the context of these marginal landscapes was drawn into a self-questioning process of what was the ‘right thing to do’, a process that involved her grappling with biblical narrative and prophetic discourse. Grace explained that one part of this process emerged out of theological reflection of what God was like and what he did, and another part of it emerged out of what she felt God had historically promised through biblical prophecy.

‘After we went and did the festival I guess it was a six to eight month process really, we knew God was moving us on to something new but we did not know what, then there was this day when I was driving to work and it was a really dark day, really black clouds in the sky and a rainbow and a beam of light, I was driving through Salford where there is a Eden project and I was just singing, you know the song ‘all for loves sake became poor’, and that just came across to me in a real sense, you know, and that I really felt like God was saying about the heart he had for the poor and that he wanted us to be with the poor, leave our comfort zones and our affluence and move in. I felt like he wanted to be the light in this, you know, that area.’

As the quote illustrates, Grace felt a spiritual impulsion that ‘something new’ was going to happen for her and her husband Frank, but it was only on deeper reflection over the nature of God, as a God who had a heart for the oppressed, a God who himself ‘became poor’, that led Grace to deeply consider ‘leaving comfort zones’ and ‘affluence’ to ‘be with the poor’. Her ethical desire to move in and be in solidarity with the oppressed was made more significant by her reflection of the nature and action of God found in biblical narrative (see also chapter 2). In this instance she was reminded of God’s nature through a Christian worship song and held such understanding up against the reality of Salford and the existence of an Eden initiative within this particular locality.
Remembering another influential point in their decision as a couple to join an Eden initiative Grace highlighted the importance of biblical prophecy in helping come to a place of self-acceptance that it is was indeed ‘right’ that they relocate and join an Eden initiative. Grace detailed to me how she had visited another Christian conference and had been given a series of verses from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. She explained that these really struck a chord with her. Grace read me the verse that she had been given.

‘See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in wasteland.’ (Isaiah Chapter 43)

Grace and Frank explained to me how, upon finding out a bit more about the ethos of Eden, the Message Trust and the vision of Andy Hawthorne, both Frank and Grace had been surprised to learn that this verse was central to the Message Trust and the Eden projects. Learning this, both Grace and Frank felt more inspired to consider joining an Eden team certain that they were to play a part in this ‘new thing’. Their hope was bound up in wanting to see ‘streams in the wasteland’ and getting involved in a local Eden initiative was a plausible way that they felt this might become something of a reality. Similar to the findings of Gutterman (2005) in his analysis of the place of biblical narratives in shaping Christian social movements in the US, this account given by Grace shows the agency of biblical historic prophetic narrative in shaping contemporary action, both in the case of her own decisions and in the way that the Message Trust and the Eden initiatives storied and represented their own involvement in these socio-economic areas. Rather than Grace residing and remaining in a place of complaint, dissatisfied with both her previous church circumstances and the state of deprivation facing residents on the socio-economic margins of Manchester, the personalization of this prophetic discourse opened up new and alternative possibilities (Brueggemann, 2001; 2012; Wallis, 2005). In this light, as important as the actual face-to-face encounter was to Grace in moving her to a place of action, the introduction of these prophetic biblical verses also acted as a catalyst for action; bringing to the fore a hopeful imagination (see Brueggeman,
1986); placing her own desire to act in solidarity with the poor within the broader historical prophetic tradition (see Wallis, 1994), while also enlivening a set of prophetic discourses that, seen as dangerous memories, promises and criticism (see Frost, 2006), might help consolidate and pronounce her own emotive feeling and desire to put faith into action through joining one of the Eden initiatives.

**Experiences of doing Eden:**

While staff and volunteers of Eden/SA614UK gave many examples of the positive experiences that emerged out of their participation in the initiative, there were clearly a number of practical and emotional hardships endured. In a positive light many of the volunteers and staff expressed that their involvement in the initiative firstly, deepened their Christian faith, secondly, gave them a real sense of purpose and thirdly, did, as they had expected, give them increased opportunities to put faith into action through various acts of serving and caring for others in the local community. However, in many of the biographic narratives, and in my general ethnographic observation and participation in the project and church community, it was clear that nearly all the volunteers and staff involved experienced a number of different issues and frustrations.

Accounting for these emotional experiences (see Bondi, 2008; Milligan, 2001) importantly helps ‘to create more lively and creative accounts’ of the involvement of people in varied dimensions of social action, volunteerism and participation (Conradson, 2003, 1989) and it also gives space for an appreciation of the ‘everyday interactions, practices and feelings’ involved in these forms of faith inspired praxis (Jupp, 2008, 341). Accordingly, taking account of these experiential accounts definitively enriches what it is actually like to express faith incarnationally in socio-economically deprived communities. And in overarching terms, making sense of these accounts deepens an understanding of these geographies in three ways. Firstly, it deepens an understanding as they help to provide a thick account of the actual nature and dynamics of incarnationally performing faith in these circumstances. Secondly, they illustrate the faith-based organizational culture within which, and out of which,
many of these performances emerge. Thirdly, they help to foreground the everyday social and cultural context of deprived estate-spaces. This importantly ties together how many of the emotional geographies (see Bondi et al, 2005), emergent from these faith-fuelled ethical practices, and enacted and situated in place (see Smith et al, 2010; Read, 2010), are explicitly linked to the actual nature of socio-economic deprivation in these places. Bought together these three points give a strong sense of how intensely time consuming, demanding, and at times, personally unfulfilling the actual everyday experience of living and ‘doing faith’ through these organizational frameworks in these places can be. Obviously, linking through to the final section of this chapter, these experiential accounts provide some of the context as to why a number of volunteers and staff have left the project.

Always caring for others, what about me?

For many of the volunteers the biggest issue was practically having little time to rest, get some ‘personal space’, or do something other than serve the local community through the initiative. In fact, shortly before I arrived to volunteer on the project the number of Eden drop-in youth clubs had been reduced by Luke the Eden team leader because of the real concern that the team of volunteers were overworked and in need of a significant personal and team re-energizing. During my research, John, an Eden volunteer and my housemate for the duration of my placement, was reading a book by Mark Buchanan book entitled ‘The Rest of God: restoring the soul by restoring the Sabbath’ (2010). Questioning Phil on the trials of ‘doing Eden’ he articulated that it was just the lack of balance that got to him.

Phil was a third year theology University Student and throughout my time house sharing and volunteering alongside each other I learnt that John was increasingly finding it difficult to balance keeping up with his studies and being out of the house helping to coordinate, on average, three to four services a week. Luke was at University in the centre of Manchester and his commute from Oldham to the centre of Manchester by bus led to tiring long days. Once home on a near nightly basis John’s regular routine revolved around a quick turnaround. He’d quickly put together
something to eat before heading off to unlock the Eden office. In at 6pm, the young people's drop-in club was soon to start at 7. On more than several occasions Phil unloaded his frustrations. He expressed that at times ‘being there’ was just relentless, with little let up. One day I drove John out to a local reservoir on the edge of the Pennines and, walking and talking together, he expressed that he could not remember the last time he actually left the local neighbourhood to enjoy a walk, ‘escape for a bit’, or do something other than attend meetings, run services, or answer the phone to someone in the local neighbourhood wanting him ‘to listen to their issues’. ‘Doing Eden’ took up the majority of his time and he rarely left the estate other than to do a grocery shop or attend university lectures. Phil explained that many of his friendships on the estate were hard work, he enjoyed the company and the friendship but felt that he was always caring for, listening, and being attentive to the particular needs and circumstances of others.

Phil would receive daily calls from a number of other local residents, each one would have some request of Phil and each one would want to know if he could help. I sincerely got the feeling that Phil just sometimes didn’t have the energy to answer the phone, but he always did. Phil was personally committed to each of these people, he would have them round for dinner, show a sincere interest in their concerns and would follow up with various attempts to support them. This was clearly the case with Phil’s friend Michael.

Michael had just separated from his wife when Phil invited him to stay for a few weeks. According to Phil, Michael had various learning difficulties and John quickly found himself being as much Michael’s carer as he did his friend. Witnessing John’s support of another local resident it was clear that Phil constantly went the extra mile, on more than several occasions he accompanied her to court, organized for the Salvation Army to give her some second hand furniture, and cleared her heavily overgrown back garden. Phil’s lifestyle was clearly constructed around rhythms of serving and supporting others, building in little time for himself. This was also the case for Amanda.
Amanda dedicated every moment of her day to serving the local community through directing Hope Citadel a community interest health company. Amada also was a mother of three young boys. Amanda never left work; work was the estate on which she lived. There was no commute on which to wind down, there was no emotional or physical distance from the company. The patients were her neighbours, numerous church and Eden volunteers were her staff team. It was this personal context that led Amanda to express that she just wished she had some ‘normal friends’. She explained what she meant to me one evening over dinner:

“I love what I do, I love this estate, and I love the people I’m surrounded by, I just need a level of normality. I probably would not know what that looks like, but just feel like I need someone to hang out with, have a drink with, someone who is not in need of a health check up or someone who is not one of my employees. Someone else.’

Amanda was not alone in expressing a frustration that what she felt was missing was ‘someone else’, a friend who was not connected to them, as either a colleague, or as a service user. In many of the accounts this lack of someone was expressed as a personal feeling of isolation or loneliness. In one individual case, this lack of peer support and friendship led to several waves of depression.

**Feeling isolated and alone**

Facing the reality of not feeling like she fitted the ambit of the project and concerned she was going to spend the rest of her life moving between part time work, Lucy explained how she had constantly battled with her initial decision to have moved onto the estate. She found it extremely hard to settle into the routine of Eden/SA614UK, did not feel like her skills fitted the project, and was faced with the frustration of not having been given a place on a local medical degree course:

“I did all the youth clubs and stuff and did not enjoy it, it was not natural for me, it was not particularly what I want to do’
“I did temping for six months which was horrendous and then I went to work as a health care assistant at Rochdale which is miles away, an hour every day, I was like this is crap, I have got all these amazing Alevel results and a year later I have still not got a uni place I am temping, I am working as a assistant miles away, this sucks, laughs, this is like really crap.”

Lucy explained that although she was extremely busy getting stuck into the project, getting to know her surrounding neighbours and volunteering on a number of the regular projects, she just found the first year and a half extremely hard going. She had relocated without her boyfriend and she felt estranged from family and friends. Facing her first winter on the estate Lucy described her struggles and the onset of her depression:

“I really struggled. I felt it was permanent. I had committed for at least five years, the rest of life seemed to just be moving on without me. Friends were getting stuck into degree courses, enjoying all that university life had to offer and here I was questioning my whole decision. The first winter on the estate was really really tough. I would get very depressed and I would cry all the time, everywhere. It did not matter where I was, I would be crying, urm, I did not want to do anything, I was generally quite angry and just got to the point where literally all I could do was sit in the bath and cry, and be like, God you have to do something, like, where are you....I would go home and I would have Christmas and I would come back and be really homesick, and be even worse, for two years I was on antidepressants.”

Where is the work/life balance?

The commitment of living on the estate also led to other volunteers facing different practical trials. Heather indicated that for her the practical vexation was living directly within catchment. As a local secondary school teacher Heather had no space from work and she was immersed in the lives of her school pupils. Heather would dismiss
the students at school and see many of them minutes later at the drop-in club. While this proximity gave Heather a particular insight into the difficult circumstances facing many of these pupils and it provoked an alternative ethic of care and commitment between herself and her pupils Heather expressed that it also presented her with moments when living and volunteering felt relentless. ‘Always being the teacher’ and ‘constantly looking out for these young people took its toll’. Similarly for Luke, the Eden staff youth worker, even though like Mel, most of the time he enjoyed being surround and involved in the lives of the local young people, sometimes the out of hours knocks at the house door were wearing:

“I don’t mind it you know, it’s just sometimes you wanted a break. You’d be putting the kids to bed; sitting having ten minutes catching up with your wife and the doorbell would go. One of the young people would have had a bust up with mum or dad; someone needed to borrow a couple of quid, things like that you know, they just never ceased.’

In some cases putting in these long hours of service was met with the reward of knowing that the effort put in had been worth it, young people from the estate displayed their gratitude for the services put on offer and volunteers could see the tangible difference that one-to-one support and friendship made to lives of local neighbours.

**Does this actually make any difference?**

In other cases however, part of the trial and angst experienced was that regardless of the support offered, the hours of advice given or the time spent mentoring a young person, some volunteers felt extremely disillusioned with the indifference, apathy and lack of measurable difference their involvement seemed to make. Heather’s own dismay illustrates this quite succinctly:

‘What upset me was just people not being willing to change their own lifestyle. A lot of the time it is the choices people have made and they know how to change
and they know how to get out of debt, and they know why not to buy chips or chilli for tea every night, but they choose not to change. We give them all these opportunities and yet they still fall into the same trap. I think often it is a choice, but it is really frustrating to watch when you have walked alongside someone for all this time, seen them go from strength to strength, and then they just lapse into old habits: drug use, bad relationships, stop taking good care of themselves and all that’

Similarly for Kate, employed by the Salvation Army as the local Eden/SA614UK families worker, what emotionally exhausted her was witnessing others repeatedly recommit to destructive relationships and remain indifferent to making repeated bad personal choices. Being surrounded by unresolved personal issues and witnessing people embedded in chaotic life took its toll on Kate. Often feeling unable to make sense of if her being there had led to any positive change Kate explained how she after five years on the project she found home visits deeply upsetting:

“I think sometimes I get upset or cry or something and I come out of some houses and they are dirty minging, like one kid was born five days before Kiara was born and I used to go round and see him, there was no heating in the house and all he was wearing was a vest and it was freezing and it was manky, drinking cold cups of tea. You just don't know how long they have been there, he was playing with a lightbulb on the floor. Taping it on an ashtray. Like you wanna say, like give hints like... oh is it not a bit cold or whatever. Flippin’ heck, you wanna say, put some clothes on your kid, give him a wash, and does he not want some food? He goes around drinking cold cups of tea. Yeah, so sometimes I find it a bit draining. I have got to someone’s house, and I have probably known the family now for like five years or so, and you go round and it is, like, still kind of like the same, it is infuriating to see that it isn't any different. Like flippin’ heck I am still seeing them spend 90 quid a week on weed and having these shitty relationships that are just really destructive and horrible, and you are like what am I doing? Like I have gone around here for so long and is it making any kinda difference, so yeah I think it can be a bit frustrating and a bit
draining personally, and I think it is hard cos you can’t measure any outcomes of it, like oooh I’ve been a rubbish person for five years and do you know what I mean, what can I say, oh nothing, they are still with their boyfriend who beats them up whatever.”

**Juggling personal expectations**

Analysing the accounts of other volunteers it was clear that other emotional struggles emerged from a subjective coming to terms with personal expectations. The examples presented above of Mel and Kate, whose frustrations reflected something of the social and economic deprivation of the local community, stand in contrast to the emotional frustrations of other volunteers and staff that reflected something of the subjective coming to terms with the broader organizational culture and the discourses driving engagement. In these accounts volunteers clearly battled to reconcile their changing personal faith-motives for engagement with both the differing faith-motives of other individuals and with the wider supporting organizations: The Message Trust/Eden-network and the Salvation Army. Here the experience of being embedded in the life of the Eden project and the Church community was emotionally exhausting because it involved so much personal renegotiation of assumed outcomes, faith-motives, and perceptions of purpose.

Critically analysing these types of accounts are important in two regards. Firstly, because it gives weight to the actual influence of the broader organizational evangelistic discourses explored in the first part of this chapter, upon local Eden volunteers and staff. And secondly, in reflection of balancing these discourses against the actual reality of living and relationally working out faith-inspired ethics within these places, critically making sense of these experiential accounts supports the wider argument made in this chapter that many of those involved in the actual performative working out of faith in these socio-economic deprived places were repeatedly faced with the dilemma of whether they were first and foremost there to *serve others* or to *evangelize to others*. This second point supports the broader conclusion inherent
within this chapter that the subjectivities of Christians involved in this project were subject to change and contestation, and that such a conclusion emphasizes the socio-temporal nature of enacting faith incarnationally in socio-economically deprived communities. This is best illustrated in the biographic narratives of Grace and Frank.

Grace and Frank had been a part of the SA 614 church and community projects for just over five years, Frank was a music teacher at a school in another part of greater Manchester and, having had their son Jacob while living on the estate, Grace had left her job as a nurse to be a stay at home mum. Frank and Grace made it clear to me that they both had particular expectations when they first arrived on the estate and that these were bound up in the way that a narrative of transformation had been depicted to them. Grace and Frank had heard Andy Hawthorne speak on several occasions about how Christians involved in Eden projects were seeing many young local people from the estates ‘come to Christ’ or express something of being converted to follow the Christian faith for themselves. This particular narrative of transformation considerably shaped what both Grace and Frank envisaged they would see happen during their time on the estate, as Frank explained to me:

“I think the main thing that I went with was really high expectations of loads of kids becoming Christians and becoming changed and all that, ‘cos they are all the preaches you hear Andy Hawthorne preaching about and telling”

Similarly Grace, his wife, added that she:

“certainly wanted to go and see kids become Christians and all that miraculous change and all those sort of stories, I wanted to be part of all that.”

For both Frank and Grace, part of coming to terms with their involvement in the Eden initiative was a re-shaping of their expectations and imaginaries of what outcomes might result from their involvement in the initiative. This process of reshaping came as a result of their involvement in the actual praxis of living and serving on the estate. Similar to the example of Phil, given earlier in this chapter, Grace and Frank’s
understanding of involvement had moved from that of ‘missionary’ to that of local ‘neighbour’ (see Thompson, 2012), whereby their actual involvement in these geographies had sufficiently shaped their theologies and their subjectivities. Both Grace and Frank explained that while they had experienced several young people from the estate ‘become Christians’, much of the transformation that they had witnessed took on a different appearance. Change was something that they felt was gradual and, most of the time, rather ‘un-miraculous’. Grace explained that ‘the everyday life of living on Eden is sometimes quite different to all those sensational stories’. This is not to say that Frank and Grace no longer had a belief that personal transformation of this nature does occur, or that the young people they got to know, spent time with, and shared many common experiences together with, did not sometimes experience a personal change in understanding that resulted in them ‘becoming a Christian’, it is just better to place their articulation and understanding of transformation as a process that is far less dramatic and often difficult to configure and match up against organizational ‘wham, bam, conversion stories’. Frank’s quote below illustrates this point:

“while a two minute sermon illustration from Andy Hawthorne might give a sense of miraculous change overnight, when you are there you realize that the miraculous change takes years”

Frank explained that ‘You do get those results’ (seeing young people ‘become Christians’) but they are not quite as overnight. While coming to accept that this type of transformation is not as instant as they first expected, very importantly Grace and Frank expressed that they also now saw transformation to be something much wider than a narrative of ‘becoming Christian’. As the quote from Frank begins to illustrate:

“We look at it a lot more differently now, and although we have had kids become Christians, ‘change their lives round and all the rest of it’, we look at it now as just being there for people. Whether they ended up becoming Christian or not, there are lots of times when we can say that we helped our neighbour out. He would come and knock on and we would have a cup of tea with him, or that sort
of thing, or talking to people in the street, or building relationships and not even them coming near a church, but just being a presence in the neighbourhood and building relationships.”

Frank’s expectations of change transferred from an idea that change was wrapped up in a rather black and white process of people ‘becoming Christian’ towards an idea that the very act of being present, available, and friendly, had a transformative impact. Rather than being about getting people to church, and reverently adhering to evangelise, for Frank and Grace, their involvement over the years was reinterpreted in a way that extended beyond a simplistic idea of conversion and towards a much more dialogical and relational account centered around displaying good virtue, service and sharing life. This is exemplified by two quotes from Frank:

‘Sometimes it was just about trying to behave like you are different and stuff, setting an example and being a part of all of that is positive, we definitely felt we made a small difference in this way while we lived there’

‘ Over the years we have had loads of conversations together about how we measure the whole success of Eden, is it really about getting people to church and that? My father who is also a Christian would probably see the success of Eden to be measured like that, but I guess for us, now our expectations have changed, this has drastically changed too. Success is far more difficult to measure, but it has something to do with what kind of an influence you are in the local area I guess..’

Speaking to Frank and Grace in some depth about how they measured the success of their involvement, both of them drew on one particular friendship that had developed during their time living on the estate. Their account of this particular friendship with Lydia, a young women from the estate, highlights how they had journeyed from seeing success as something solely caught up in people joining them in membership at church towards a much more relational and less bounded idea of positive transformation through simply getting alongside particular people. This narrative of
friendship illustrates quite definitively the shift of self-other relations embodied in the dynamics of care that emerged between Grace, Frank and Lydia. A shift in relational dynamics that had an effect on the way they both made sense of their own sense of self-purpose on the estate.

Lydia had shown an initial interest in attending both the youth drop-in clubs and the overtly Christian cell group, however, as both Frank and Grace got to know her through time she had become dis-engaged with any official programmed activities put on by Eden. While Frank and Grace expressed to me that they were sure Lydia had made a ‘genuine commitment to the Christian faith at an earlier stage’, she no longer attended church or appeared particularly interested in being a part of any corporate expression of the Christian faith. Preferring instead to informally catch up with both Frank and Grace either at their house or out and about on the estate, Lydia had still developed a close friendship with the couple. She turned to Grace and Frank for advice and support over different aspects of her life and would seek advice on the difficulty she had coping with her turbulent home life, and then in later years, her first pregnancy as a teenager. Grace and Frank described it as just one of those ‘God given opportunities’ as Lydia had one day sent them both a text saying that she wanted to meet up and chat. Previously Grace and Frank had tried enrolling Lydia onto the mentoring programme that they ran, but as Frank explained to me, Lydia was rather disregarding of any type of authority or structure and saw this programme as too similar to her school experience, and too closely akin to a normative teacher-pupil dynamic. During Frank and Grace’s time living on the estate they felt that it was this particular friendship that best exemplified something of relational transformation for them. Although being a type of transformation that was not the one they had envisaged, based on their early expectations of involvement in the projects and corporate church life, Grace expressed how Lydia had grown in confidence, become far less argumentative with her mother and, without Grace being that conscious of it at the time, Lydia was apparently really thankful for the role models that both Grace and Frank had been in the way that they had started family life with their first son, Jacob. Lydia now felt compelled to bring her own son up in the same way; she had told Grace how well cared for and loved Jacob appeared to be, and Lydia now expressed
how she had started to take her son, Theo, to the local nursery, so that like Jacob, he would be able to read well and get the best chance possible in life.

Grace and Frank made it clear that while they felt extremely privileged to have shared and learnt so much through their friendship with Lydia, the process of renegotiating how and why to engage with Lydia had been frustrating, both personally and corporately. Personally Frank described ‘doing Eden’ as something of ‘an emotional rollercoaster, deeply getting you to question the purpose in being there’, and corporately it was clear from Grace and Frank that there biggest frustration was the battle to reconcile the recasting of their own motivations, perceptions and outcomes against those of other volunteers who, in contrast and conflict, did not have the same reconfiguration of convictions.

**This lifestyle has its consequences elsewhere:**

Similar to the research of Smith et al (2010) the narrated experiences of volunteering on Eden reflected a configuration of issues that related to ‘other people and spaces in and beyond the actual direct context of voluntary activity’ (pg 263). The biographic narratives illustrated that while many of the experiences were situated in place, the excessive nature of volunteering as connected and linked to wider networks, practices and people meant that the dynamic and interconnected nature of these faith-practices were ‘entangled with individual life-course events, social networks, family life, work life, and more’ (Ibid, pg 261). These ‘entanglements’ clearly produced various hardships. Reconciling a personal commitment to the estate with the expectations of friends, family and potential future employers clearly had its tensions. For Phil these broader concerns and expectations were tied up in his relationship with his girlfriend, while for Gareth, the project leader, his concern was whether, if he did one day leave the project, he would have anything recognizable to offer to non-faithbased, non-charitable, employers.

Phil explained that for him the personal strain was that his girlfriend didn’t ‘get it’. Phil had hopes of getting married and was very conscious that his girlfriend did not
have the conviction or the desire to join him in what he did. ‘Living in this type of community was not an option for her’ and Phil expressed that having different life ambitions resulted in ‘serious fractures’. Phil explained that what she wanted ‘was a nice leafy suburb with an active social life, a good job and big church’; a lifestyle that was an extreme contrast to the one Phil had carved out for himself, living in, serving and supporting the immediate community to which he felt a faith-led desire to commit, and to which he had become so personally attached. Reflecting a different tension Gareth’s anxiety was over whether having not pursued a ‘normal career path before’ he would have anything to offer future employers. Since leaving university after his undergraduate degree Gareth had spent his mid twenties and early thirties devoted to estate communities and his concern was whether this would in fact give him much credibility to employers in the future. Gareth also had other expectations to live up to.

Organisational expectations:

Funded by the Salvation Army, a large part of Gareth’s frustration culminated around the lack of cohesion between what he was trying to achieve through the 614UK/Eden local initiative and what the Salvation Army more widely expected of him and his team of staff and volunteers. Gareth was accountable to the Divisional Salvation Army headquarters (DHQ) as to how he spent the budget, to what he dedicated staff and volunteers’ time and to what he envisioned would be the outcome of the local church plant and community projects. Attending several of the accountability meetings between Gareth and DHQ it was clear that these ‘reporting back’ sessions often infuriated Gareth. What was clear from these meetings was that Gareth was routinely under scrutiny about the number of people who regularly attended the Sunday service. A discourse repeatedly emerged that tallied up financial expenditure against church attendance. The governance of the project by the Salvation Army, although having very little direct impact on what was allowed to occur, put pressure on Gareth to give an account of why attendance numbers were falling and what could be done to see this change. Gareth repeatedly found this very frustrating, suggesting that the DHQ did not truly understand the nature of his endeavors. Gareth made it clear to me that
‘numbers and bums on seats’ was not his priority; rather; he avidly wanted to see lasting change on the estate. ‘Having to repeatedly give an account for why the church was not growing was a distraction’ from what he envisaged to be the real issues and direction he wanted the faith community to remain focused on: ‘getting alongside others in the local community, participating in positive change that worked towards social justice and creating real and integral relationships with others in the neighbourhood.’

In her work as the paid Eden/SA614UK family support worker Kelly also felt the pressure of sometimes having to put numbers before impact. Interviewing Kelly about the pressures and frustrations she faced, it was clear that she felt some of the organizational pressure facing Gareth was redirected onto her and her role in engaging with families on the estate. Kelly felt uncomfortable being put under pressure to invite a greater number of local families to church social events in the summer, aware that many of them would not respond positively to her follow-up, as this quote illustrates:

“Gareth is like, ‘oh, we need to go round and say we are doing a trip, go round their houses’, but then I feel weird ‘cos, say you have met with this person once now and they have put there name down and they have come along, but you know, they are like ‘I have come on your trip it was really nice thank you for the opportunity, I enjoyed talking to you on the day, but why are you trying to push it? Coming into my house I just don’t get it, I don’t want you as my friend, I don’t really need you for anything’, and yeah, I am just like, some people aren't going to engage with us more than by coming on a summer trip and that is ok, its just the pressure having to follow them up afterwards that gets to me.”

This led Kelly to feel that at times she was being intrusive and that her persistence in following up some families would result in annoyance and disaffection as she explained:
“Some households round here are quite fine as they are they don’t want anybody interfering, or some strange nosy person coming around for a brew once a week to talk to them”

Weighing up her own priorities and commitments against those of the organisation produced various anxieties within Kelly. She began to question whether her previous attempts at befriending and supporting families that had come so naturally to her would be seen as unproductive, labeled as ‘skiving’ with little or no outcomes to show for it as a result. She became concerned that the informal neighbourly support she had previously offered of ‘heading round having brews’, ‘listening to families that no one else seems to listen to’, would be considered as inadequate. As a result Kelly felt under pressure to create some kind of tangible project or service with local families.

**Moving on/Burning out**

When I first moved onto Fitton Hill as a volunteer for Eden, Frank and Grace were in the final stages of arranging to leave the Salvation Army 614UK church and Eden youth project. They had decided it was time to relocate to another part of Manchester. It was obvious that this was a topic of disappointment among other Eden volunteers and Staff. They were a highly valued part of the team and there input would be sorely missed. Among the group however, I noticed that different volunteers and staff were questioning why they felt it was right to return to a ‘more middle class’ part of Manchester. Conducting a telephone interview with both Grace and Frank once they had relocated I was interested to hear their version of why they felt the need to leave Eden.

Grace and Frank expressed to me that fundamentally they had left ‘Eden’ because it was an appropriate time to question: ‘what and where next’. With their son Jacob a few years older, and with only a small house on the estate, they were prompted to ask whether they should commit themselves to another five years, or consider something different. Grace wanted a larger family and so if they were not going to move somewhere else they would have to find another house on the estate. Grace and Frank
also had schools to consider. They explained that while they did not rule out the local primary schools they did hold concerns over the quality of them. They also articulated that while they had made the lifestyle choice to move onto the estate, they did not feel that they could make the decision about what shaped their son’s life so flippantly. Although their decision was prompted by these personal changes in circumstances, both Grace and Frank made it clear to me that there were several aspects about the community projects and the church that deeply made them question how sustainable it was that they remained on the estate, involved in the church in the way that they were. Grace and Frank explained that there decision to leave had been confirmed by these various worries about how likely it was for the project and church to continue under its current modus operandi. Many of these concerns related to the emotional and physical hardships I outline in the previous section, and Grace and Frank explained that, no longer feeling able to personally endure these tensions and points of conflict for much longer, feeling exhausted and frustrated, they felt it was the right time for them to move on as a family. There were two main themes that clearly emerged from their articulation of why they felt burnt-out and ready to leave. Firstly, they felt there were a number of unresolved tensions in the faith community, and secondly, they felt like they lacked various elements of personal support.

Grace and Frank were surprised that what caused them to question leaving the project was actually the internal dynamics of the faith community and not the level of external antagonism they thought they would face from others in the wider neighbourhood. They had heard a number of ‘scare stories’ from other Eden initiatives of the emotional heartache of being the victim of crime and of targeted abuse, and yet in their own situation they were faced with very different issues. Rather than discovering that there primary issue was being faced with some of the social and cultural difficulties of the estate, quite contrastingly, they experienced that it was a fundamental split in the team of volunteers and staff that caused the most problems for them:

“We thought before we moved (onto the estate) that it would be the tough kids, you know, giving you abuse. Egging your windows, breaking into your car, all
that stuff that you hear about, stuff that would be difficult to live with and deal with. But actually, when the kids realize that you are helping them out, they are actually fairly pleasant, well most of them. You get the odd one or two who constantly play up, and fortunately we never had our car broken into, or our windows egged, and other than a few isolated incidences it wasn’t perhaps a difficulty. Instead, actually, the thing that we found difficult was working in the team because there was always a big divide really.”

Frank and Grace’s explanation for this divide in the team centered around the way that different members of the team held very different opinions as to how they should all act as Christians on the estate. In other words, it was the actual differing poetics of performing the Christian faith that created a politics difficult to negotiate amongst themselves. Disagreement appeared to exist amongst the group and, as Frank explained to me, the cause for contention was often, in his opinion, down to the fact that different members of the group felt that it was best they ‘get out there’, meaning, that they focus almost exclusively on telling people about the Christian message rather than being the Christian message through acts of service. This, he unpacked, was something he progressively felt he became uneasy with. Others in the group, as explained, seemed to want to ‘ram it (the Christian message) down peoples throats in a way’. Frank and Grace shared with me that there was an element of arrogance and questionable morality to this approach, which, on several occasions resulted in tension needing to be diffused, as other voluntary members of the group appeared to want to act on the mandate that, regardless of ‘their social issues or anything else like that, you just need to tell them about Jesus and get them to become Christians and all that’.

The nexus between the discourse of being ‘there to serve’ and being ‘there to evangelise’, as this account shows, clearly became a crucial area of conflict and divide, and the fact that these conflicts led to a split in the team reflects the weight of this service/evangelism debate within these localized faith-based landscapes of what it means to ‘do church’, provide localized services, community support and care. With different actors holding different subject positions on this matter, and with certain volunteers clearly facing emergent, formulated from-and-through-praxis shifts in
opinion -as illustrated earlier in the chapter with the example of Phil, Grace and Frank- the continual re-questioning of intentions, and the lack of agreement it produced in the team, was the primary significant factor in leading to Frank and Grace questioning whether they could recommit for a further five years. This burnout factor emphasizes firstly, that different Christians involved in the project had competing imaginaries and expectations, shaped and changed through place based local involvement, and secondly, that such a point of conflict was so significant in the everyday make up of the debates and concerns discursively resonated throughout the initiative.

Analysis of the second factor that influenced Grace and Franks decision to move on illustrates that a large part of the frustration of taking part in this type of expression of church is confounded in the experience of feeling out on the margins, lacking support from wider church networks and feeling personally under resourced in terms of theological teaching and pastoral care. These experiences vivify the point that contained within the ethos and driving force of this expression of church and the projects that emerged out of it is primarily the concern of those in the local neighbourhood who present the most need. Therefore, while various efforts were made to support, encourage and develop the team of volunteers and staff, the burnout testified by Grace and Frank is indicative that as a whole the project’s mandate to be there for marginal others in the community took its toll on those seeking to live out their faith to and for the sake of these others.

In the second section of this chapter I drew on the accounts of Lucy and Amanda to illustrate that part of the personal frustration involved in expressing solidarity in intentionally living alongside marginal others was elucidated in feelings of loneliness. In the case of Grace and Frank it appears that these similar feelings of lacking support and being cut off from, broadly speaking, more ‘normal’ church networks and circles of support, in which their own pastoral and teaching needs were better dealt with, was an influential factor in them seeking to return to their original ‘home’ church.

When Grace and Frank had first moved to the estate they had continued to attend a
mid week biblical discussion group with a group of friends from their old church in
Stockport, but when their son Jacob had been born they had had to stop attending
these meetings. Grace explained that what they lacked whilst being involved in Eden
was a good degree of biblical teaching and support from other Christians their own
age. Initially, Frank explained, that still having a supportive network in Stockport
meant that they could receive the extra Christian teaching and counsel that they felt
they lacked living and gathering with other Christians on the estate under the banner
of the 614uk church. As the mandate of Eden and the 614UK church plant was
explicitly about others in the community, Grace, Frank, and many others felt that there
was not enough attention to their own spiritual and social development as volunteers
on the Eden project. Grace explained that she just felt ‘dried up and needed more
teaching, as constantly giving out stuff without receiving had no longer become very
sustainable.’ For Grace, being involved in Eden and constantly focusing on the lives of
others had resulted in her own motivating force, her Christian faith, becoming rather
dilapidated. Much of the original passion and drive that had first motivated her to join
Eden had slowly faded through a lack of opportunities to be offered support from
other Christians. For Frank a part of the issue was that Eden was inherently focused
on young people as he described:

“Sundays were almost exclusively orientated towards the youth from the estate
and there was little real depth of teaching for those of us who helped support
and keep the thing afloat.”

As the quote illustrates, for Frank, maintaining the role of ‘keeping things afloat’,
which in his case often meant organising the worship music, helping to make the
communal lunch for everyone, or running an activity for the young people who
attended, combined with the focus of the biblical teaching being at the level of the
young people present meant that Frank rarely felt refueled and reenergized in his
Christian faith through these meetings. Heather, who was also soon to be leaving the
project in search of a new challenge in Uganda, expressed similar concerns:

“A lot of us are really frustrated with church at the moment, and where it is, and
our own discipleship I suppose, from a personal point of view we feel like we have been left to get on with it really, which after eight years takes its toll, you can do that for a few years but after a while you actually need something yourself, they are reviewing that now and that is something that they are working on, we had a meeting about a month ago and in the first time in ages everyone was just really honest, ‘like this does not work’ and ‘this is rubbish’ and ‘we feel like Sunday meetings are a waste of time and stuff’ and we chatted it through and prayed for each other and stuff.’

From the above quote it is clear that Heather’s concerns were largely centered around being given little support over the years. Always actively serving and focusing on others had taken its toll on Heather and, as she exclaimed, she needed someone to now input ‘something’ into her. This ‘something’ in the case of Grace and Frank was expressed as greater depth of Christian teaching and a solidarity in fellowship with others who understood the different struggles they faced as they attempted to live out their faith on the estate, while, in similar accord, for Heather it was about her own ‘discipleship’, or lack of growth in her Christian faith that appeared to frustrate her so much. Constantly putting effort into arranging a church meeting in the local school hall felt ‘pointless’. Especially as Heather explained the team had experienced the frustration of seeing numbers in attendance drop so drastically:

We have seen a lot of people come to church and make decisions (‘to become Christians’), or like get really involved and then they just weren’t interested, or not even that, they would just completely reject it outright. About three years ago, four years ago, our church was about 80 people and now there is just a couple of key people left from the estate and the volunteers and staff that moved into the area. That has been quite frustrating!’

This quote from Heather illustrates that a major part of her frustration with the progress of the church was that after eight years of commitment to the estate and with so many friendships having been developed, her expectations of what did happen and what she expected should have happened were completely ill-matched. Heather had
experienced the church attendance rates fall from 80 people after a couple of years of moving onto the estate to less that 20. What appeared to frustrate Heather the most clearly about this was that the type of relational response she had expected to occur had not sufficiently materialized. Linking this back to some of the frustrations I explored in the last section, with the example of the development of the friendship between Grace and Frank and Lydia, similarly for Heather the indifference people showed towards attending church and the experience of having to witness new found friends repeatedly make what Heather saw as ‘bad personal decisions’ led to her feeling disillusioned and disappointed.

Heather expressed to me that although she felt burnt out, she did not leave the estate because of these frustrations. She explained that she felt it was the right time for her to leave the church and local community as her contract at the local secondary school had come to an end. Reflecting on her time spent living on the estate, volunteering on Eden and helping to run the 614UK church Heather was actually surprised at the amount of positive and unexpected transformations that had taken place on the estate. Heather expressed that she never could have imagined the direction certain positive progressive changes took. Heather was overwhelmed with how certain members of the incarnational Christian community had been so influential in setting up the new health surgery on the estate (see chapter 5) and she was surprised by the influence being a part of running the Anew education programme had on certain young people on the estate. However, Heather felt it was time to leave the estate after being involved in the Eden community for eight years because as her contract was ending at the local secondary school she would no longer have a vocation through which to serve the local area. Heather explained that for her, working in the local secondary school was the best way she could participate in local community and her job as a Humanities teacher provided an opportunity for her to actively put her passion for the local young people into practice (see chapter 5). Her school job gave her a device through which to act out her Christian faith and she felt that she could actively make a difference in this setting. Having visited Rwanda during a summer break a few years earlier, Heather shared with me how when her job contract unexpectedly came to an end at the local secondary school she felt it was time to
consider a ‘new adventure’, this, she expressed, manifested itself in the offer of moving to Rwanda to continue to work with deprived communities, albeit in a very different development context, as an education and youth officer with the Anglican church in southern Rwanda.

Moving to Rwanda presented itself as the next step through which Heather could express her faith in action. Heather had secured a job as a regional diocesan teacher trainer for the Anglican Church in Rwanda and this opportunity presented itself as Heathers next opportunity through which she could put her skills as a teacher into action alongside people facing difficult socio-economic circumstances.

**Section 2- Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have argued that incarnational geographies and the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ must be considered as a socio-temporal landscape. This argument significantly develops the central notion of this thesis because it develops a re-reading of these landscapes that is attentive to their dynamicity. Instead of being read as simply spaces of proselytisation (see Woods, 2012) or self-betterment (Allahyari, 2000) the attention of this chapter towards how incarnational geographies are shaped in and through praxis highlights how important it is to understand the complexity of their evolution over time. This helps to reveal the nuances in the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ both in the ethos of the organisation and in the subjectivities of those implicating it on the ground.

While I previously drew out some initial conclusions at the end of the first part of this chapter it is important to reiterate the contribution of this organizational analysis to both the theme of this chapter and the overall thesis. At an organizational level the first part of this chapter argued that the initial adoption of an ‘incarnational approach’ was first and foremost a way of evangelising to young people in deprived areas. However, tracking the development of the Message Trust and the Eden-network as it adopted an ‘incarnational’ approach and repeated the ‘Eden model’ in other socio-economically deprived areas of Manchester, I traced how the ethos behind being
‘incarnational’ has evolved from a purely evangelistic outlook to one that includes a focus on local community development, service and empowerment. The significance of this analysis is that it illustrates how the purpose and rationale for adopting an ‘incarnational’ approach at an organizational level has developed and shifted.

Examining the biographic accounts of various volunteers and staff involved in one local Eden initiative this analysis has revealed how ‘living amongst’ has reshaped the subjectivities of those embracing the praxis of ‘living amongst’. Rather than being read and understood as spaces of proselytism (see Woods, 2012) or spaces of self-betterment (Allahyari, 2000) the conclusion that can be drawn from the biographic analysis of staff and volunteers is that these geographies must be understood as a complex and nuanced mix of self-orientated and other-orientated practices that develop and evolve through proximate participation. This conclusion arises from three major findings in this chapter.

The first is that staff and volunteers who embraced ‘living amongst’ not only did so with the intent to ‘share faith’ but also in search of more ‘radical’ forms of personal faith-activism. While many of the volunteers and staff were motivated to embrace ‘living amongst’ out of a personal desire to share faith and evangelise, the analysis also revealed how Eden and its ‘incarnational’ approach could also be conceived of as an organisational ‘device’ through which faith-activism could be enacted (Barnett et al., 2005). In many cases adopting this proximate and habitual way of relating to marginal others often led to a re-enchantment of former individualistic personal understandings of the Christian faith that were reconfigured around something more communal, worked out in place and with others over time.

The second is that the proximate and participatory nature of ‘living amongst’ led to the reconfiguration of both motive and ways of relating. Examining the personal encounters between Christian-self and neighbourly-other illustrated how these proximate encounters were formative in developing notions of care and responsibility to and for these often ‘forgotten places’ and marginalized people (Thompson, 2010). These encounters and relationships acted as a form of exposure to alterity and they
encouraged a sense of proximate care that emerged from a sense for the other that was ‘emotional, connected and committed’ (Cloke, 2002, 594). While initially some of these encounters with ‘others’ were replete with imbalances of power I argued that through a time-enriched proximate understanding of the worlds and lives of these ‘others’ these dynamics were denconstructed and reconstructed around more equal arrangements of power and mutual friendship. Similarly, motivations to serve and care for others were reconfigured as relationships deepened. Whereas initial dynamics of care were imbued with evangelical discourses, where care for the other was seen as a means of sharing faith, in time these shifted to be reconfigured around an ethic of care that centred on serving others in their current circumstance.

The third is that the actual experience of ‘living amongst’ was imbued with practical and emotional hardships. These experiences indicate the complex and often multifaceted nature of ‘living amongst’, in many cases being overtly other-orientated yet in other ways continuing to be self-orientated. For example, the experiences of never having time for oneself or struggling with a work/life balance on the one hand testified of repeated ‘reasoned or instinctive reaching out beyond self-interest’ (Cloke et al, 2005, 387). While on the other hand, for example, the expectations and frustrations facing volunteers and staff over how local residents responded to their faith were indicative of the still sometimes self-orientated natures of these practices.
Chapter 5: Incarnational geographies as ethical landscapes?

(All names in this chapter have been changed to ensure anonymity)

In the previous chapter I argued that ‘incarnational geographies’ could be re-read through a socio-temporal lens. In this fifth chapter I extend the argument that the faith-inspired praxis can be re-read by analysing the types of community engagement that emerge from the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’. The re-reading this chapter presents is one that relies upon an acknowledgement of the diversity of how and why these Christians involve themselves in the local community. This involvement stretches across and beyond both public and voluntary welfare provision. Undertaking a critical examination of these different areas of engagement answers how, through praxis, ‘incarnational geographies’ could be considered and conceived as co-constitutive of ethical landscapes.

This chapter has three distinct sections. Drawing upon ethnographic observation and interviews in the first section I critically examine a weekly drop-in space for young people started and run by Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers. I argue that in plugging a gap in provision what has performatively emerged is an important space of hospitality and care on the estate. In the second section I examine the participation of Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers in the public sector both in the start up of a health centre and in volunteering at the local secondary school. What is clear in both of these two ventures is that the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ led to key actors acting upon insight and frustrations to initiate new services for the local community. Key to this section is an examination of how their involvement in these two arms of the public sector leads to a negotiation and resistance of neoliberalism. This section also argues that the particular way that faith is and isn’t performed in these public arenas is significant in the emergence of progressive postsecular partnerships (see Beaumont and Baker, 2011). The third section examines the involvement of Eden/614UK staff and volunteers beyond the remit of organized
public and voluntary welfare provision. In this section I focus on both a weekly group organized for local young people interested in the Christian faith and neighbourly relations between Christian-self and other. In the case of the first part I critically examine how evangelism is performed and I explore how the encouragement of citizenry relations is also a key facet while in the critical examination of neighbourly relations I explore the motivations, dynamics and particular acts of care that emerge from specific neighbourly relations and consider how in some cases these friendships lead to the re-shaping Christian selves.

**Section 1: Plugging the gap and creating a space of hospitality**

This first section critically examines how a gap in the local youth service provision was filled as a result of Eden/614UK staff ‘living amongst’. By focusing on the performative actions, or ‘doings’, of organizational space (see Conradson, 2003), I argue that the nature of interrelations between Eden staff, volunteers and young people creates a caring space of hospitality and welcome on the estate. This micro-public space of encounter plays an important role in creating spaces of transformation on the estate as both local young people and Eden volunteers and staff coalesce in this context (see Amin, 2002; Sandercock, 2003). Triangulating together my own ethnographic observations, the experiences of young people who attended the club, and a number of statutory agencies who partner with the Eden drop-in club I illustrate how the responsive and intersubjective nature of this drop-in space performatively bought into being a space that was imbued with a sense of welcome, care and hospitality.

**Drop-in clubs: an ethnographic intervention**

The weekly Eden drop-in clubs for young people started as a response to a gap in government provision. The local statutory youth club is only situated a hundred yards from the small Eden offices but historically it has not catered for young people between the ages of 11-14. In an attempt to provide an open and friendly space where young people of this age can come and relax with friends, Eden/Sa614UK decided to run an evening drop-in youth café. Initially the sessions were run twice a
week, but with all the other commitments and fatigue facing Eden volunteers and staff (see chapter 4), when I joined as a volunteer this had been reduced to a once a week initiative. For the duration of my placement I helped staff with this drop in café as a regular volunteer. An extract from my research journal illustrates the general structure of the session:

Diary extract: Eden drop-in club

‘Once a week the small Eden offices are transformed. The usual round of daily phone calls, team meetings, funding bids, prayer meetings and mentoring sessions are replaced by the noise and hubbub of young people filling the space, interacting with staff and volunteers. Immediately after work Eden volunteers join the staff members- Gareth and Luke- and the space is quickly transformed in anticipation of the young people arriving. The pool table is loaded with balls and the cues are stacked in the stand. Volunteers, as if without hardly thinking, unlock cupboards and set out the Nintendo Wii and electronic drum kit. Several Playstations are plugged in and the kettle is filled up. Someone seems to usually pop to the shop and returns with a couple of loaves of white bread. I have already become pretty accustomed to this mundane routine, however, once the doors are opened, everything quickly changes.

Laughter, raised voices, a dramatic increase in both pitch and volume. A play fight often ensues on the sofas and a volunteer takes an order for ‘brews’ and toast. A brief moment of collective calm is orchestrated moments earlier as staff and volunteers gather to pray: Gareth asks some one to say a brief prayer. Routine dictates that nearly always the prayer contain the phrases: ‘God we pray that the young people will have fun this evening’; ‘may your spirit be with us’, or, ‘we pray that the young people sense something of you here’. The odd relational disagreement between individual young people is sometimes bought to prayer. Pretty soon prayers are quickly rounded up as one of the young people repeatedly knocks on the door shouting to be let in. Without a doubt there is a rush for the pool table, the Playstation and the Wii. Volunteers mingle. The usual replies, ‘it was crap’, ‘can't remember’, and ‘boring’, come from the young people when asked about their day at school. A number of young
people begin a heated mock debate with Hannah, an Eden volunteer and local secondary school teacher. The outcome of the conversation was undecided: some felt Humanities was a dull subject; others loved it. A young person was sent to the shop for a third loaf of bread. On dry evenings a group of lads play outside on their bikes, or a group is taken over to the football pitch to play a friendly game of five-a-side. At half eight someone collects the feedback folder and a quick summary of the evenings events is written down before set down.’

‘Doing care’: performing hospitality

It is clear from this ethnographic account that the drop-in club was defined by the relational interaction between young people, staff and volunteers. In this sense the space of the drop-in club was constructed intersubjectively (Raghuram et al, 2009) and faith was ‘demonstrated’ through performances of care (Thompson, 2010). Having toast and ‘a brew’ formed a big part of the club. Young people were encouraged to make tea and toast for others and this simple act of encouraging hospitality often set the tone for the duration of the remainder of the evening. The smallest acts or performances of consideration like this gave the space its ‘feel’. A staff member or volunteer would suggest a board game and through volunteer and young person interactions you could sense encouragement, time for laughter, and ease in conversation. All these performative gestures gave the drop-in club its distinctive flavour. As staff and volunteers took time to build strong and integral relationships with the young people the drop-in space was emotionally infused with a certain care ethic embodied in generosity and hospitality. There were however occasions when things would work out differently. Things could sometimes ‘kick off’. On several occasions during my placement an argument would escalate and a fight would have to be broken up. However, during my time volunteering on Eden/614uk these were very rare occurrences.

On the whole a certain care was bought into being through the enactment of a certain dynamic of self-other relations. These relational performances can be construed as bringing into being a certain ‘asymmetrical reciprocity’ whereby through enacting
embodied dispositions of ‘attending and responding’ to these young-others relationships weighted with generosity were established. (Barnet and Land, 2007, 21). In and through these drop-in spaces something of the volunteer-self was given away to these young-others; welcoming them amounted to the readjustment of identities (Volf, 1996), creating space for hybrid and blurred selves to emerge in the process (see Baker, 2007; Reader, 2005). ‘Here the negotiation of the immediate present provides a space not for the application of pre-given moral tenets, but for the emergence and cultivation of ethical sensibilities which value moments of generosity and open engagements with difference’ (Darling, 2010, pg 241). Staff and volunteers spent most of their evening engaging one-on-one with individuals over a game of Fifa on the Playstation, or with a group of youngsters on Band Hero on the Wii. At the end of a long day of work, staff and volunteers made a concerted effort to turn attention towards moments of play and interaction with young people. Listening, taking interest, and offering counsel, staff and volunteers intentionally focused on young-others. These acts of listening and support intentionally provided a way through which young-others could become participants in the making and discernment of meaning in this shared space (Muers, 2004). As a number of volunteers and staff were trained in informal education there were often clear moments when play, chat and just hanging out could also be interpreted as subtle yet conscious pedagogical interventions. I often observed moments when young people were encouraged to fairly share a game of pool or a volunteer gave up their turn to let another young person join in. A racist comment about the local Asian shopkeeper was turned into a positive conversation about race and attitudes towards ethnic difference. These moments of engagement add to the informal yet calm nature of the club.

Findings from conversations with several young people triangulated significantly with my own reading of the space. Asking young people to detail their experiences of the drop-in club I found that the overall themes that emerged were that that young people felt like it was ‘a good chill out space’, ‘a place to go that kept you from getting bored’, ‘a friendly atmosphere’, ‘a chance to get away from Mum/Dad’ or ‘a place just to relax with a cup of tea’. For some young people certain relationships between themselves and Eden volunteers/staff appeared to be key. Interviewing two young drop-in club
attendees, Diana and Robert, each spoke of having ‘a favorite’: a member of the Eden team that they just felt totally relaxed around; ‘someone who listens’ when life was ‘getting hectic’ or when things were ‘too much at home’. Similarly, talking to Peter, another young attendee, at the end of a session one evening he explained:

“ The main thing is that we are all like friends. Heather loves Band Hero and the Wii and I can play Gareth and Luke for hours at Fifa. Every now and then Gareth will ask me how I am and listen to me. We can just joke and I can take the piss out of him for being rubbish at Fifa. But, lol, no its just being mates.”

Similar to Jonathan Darling’s analysis of a drop-in space for asylum seekers, the Eden drop-in club could easily have been described as a ‘constantly demanding environment, one in which one’s very presence is structured around an expectation of response. The demand to listen, the demand to talk…all bombard you from an array of angles, yet it is in the moments of openness which responding offers that responsible ethical gestures come to be actualized’. (2011, 252). The responsive ethics of the youth drop-in space were assembled out of the ‘varied relations, encounters and negotiations’ between young people, staff and volunteers (Darling, 2011, 252). This relational assemblage could easily be conceptualized such that the performative nature of the space led to an ‘ethics of dispositional cultivation, an ethics of active, practiced and embodied work, wherein ethical judgments are recognized as responsive, situational processes’ (Ibid, 255). This situational ethics of response was not only simply performed in this drop-in space, but rather, this drop-in space ‘played an active part in performing such an ethics in giving it license, potential and presence’ (Ibid, 256).

In a small collection of offices on the middle of the estate these acts and interactions brought a new affectual and psychosocial spatial texture into being (Conradson, 2003). As Bondi (2003) argues, rather than place being simply a backdrop in which caring relations are enacted, care was relationally productive of a particular emotional space. Endowed with certain positive registers this particular microgeography on the estate was relationally productive of an affective environment in which the
psychogeographies - or the embodied experience of certain spaces - was translated as open, friendly, welcoming and peaceful. ‘Not only did the space create an ever changing space of encounter’ between young people and Eden volunteers/staff it also became a space in which ‘ethical dispositions could be attuned, worked up and practiced’ (Darling, 2011, 256). These localised performative spaces of encounter and hospitality (see Cloke et al, 2008) were felt and testified to by others who visited the drop-in club. This experiential texture (Conradson, 2003) was notably not only the viewpoint of volunteers, staff, or of myself, as an embedded researcher-in-participation, but also featured in the testified experience of other regular visitors who supported this sense of place. These testimonial accounts support ‘the affective potentialities lurking within events and encounters’, depicting how such moments can become ‘constituted as the locus of a shared sense of conviviality and solidarity’ (Darling, 2011, 256). One of the local PCSOs (Amanda) provided this description about how she felt when she visited the Eden drop-in club:

‘...it is always very welcoming, and to be honest with you, Luke really makes me laugh; its just personalities. I get on well with Gareth as well. And even though they are a faith based group, in that the Eden project is run by the Salvation Army, they don’t throw the Church in your face or anything like that, they don’t try and change you, you are what you are, they treat every person as you are what you are and I do believe that the kids have more respect here and stuff like that. When you are in the youth club (statutory provision,) you are dealing with issues, when I come here I can relax and I can play pool, there is just no issues, it’s dead chilled, I could sit on the couch and the kids would come round me, you see if I sat in there (statutory provision), you would not have any kids round you, you gotta go to the kids, here the kids will come to you, speak to you, it is a lot more chilled, it is a lot more like family, you know what I mean?’

Amanda’s testimony of the club as always ‘very welcoming’ matches my own description and analysis of the nature of the space as hospitable and friendly. Similarly, attributing the dynamics of the club to ‘just personalities’ confirms my argument that the club gained its character from the relational performances between
volunteers, staff, young people and regular visitors. Amanda’s description draws upon a comparison with the statutory run youth centre and it is interesting to hear how she draws out differences between the ‘feel’ of the two clubs.

Contrasting the two clubs, Amanda makes two interesting comparisons. Amanda felt the young people’s attitude and levels of respect towards her differed significantly between the two clubs. She also felt prompted to respond differently in the two settings. In context of the Eden drop-in club Amanda claims that the young people are more respectful, enabling her to feel relaxed and able to relationally engage with the young people over a game of pool or through conversation, while in the context of the statutory club, Amanda expresses that she has to deal with ‘issues’, giving her little chance to relax or relationally get to know the young people. This marked testimonial difference between the two youth-spaces is intriguing. Evoking a certain ‘swirl of relations, emotions, affects and dispositions’ (Darling, 2010, 246), Amanda’s different experience of the two intersubjectively created spaces prompts her to respond in a different manner. While in the context of the statutory club Amanda feels provoked to bring about order and deal with ‘issues’, in the context of the Eden Drop-in club Amanda can present a different sense of public identity, one that is more open to engaging and relaxing with the young people.

The experiential contrasts between these two youth-spaces were also explained to me by some of the young people who attend both clubs:

*Diana:* ‘Whats different? Urm.... you get toast!’

*Me:* “yeah, I do love having a good munch on toast at club, but how would you describe the differences in how you feel visiting the other club?”

*Robert:* “well, like, its calm innit here, I mean at youth club (statutory provision) you have to look out for yourself a lot more, you know, watch that no one is trying to threaten ya or nuffin’

*Diana:* ‘yeah like people throwing cue balls across the room and stuff, its just
hectic sometimes’

_Me_: ‘But can’t this club get hectic sometimes, a fight breaks out or something?’

_Robert_: ‘Yeah it does, but Luke and Gareth are pretty good at breaking it up, sitting people down, sorting it out, you know, getting to the bottom of the whole thing and being fair, like’

_Diana_: ‘its just knowing people better here I guess’

_Robert_: ‘Yeah, you know, like Luke is always there for ya when you need him, like, even after club, like you can knock on his door and stuff and he will often come out and play a game of footy on the street, cricket on the square.’

This short dialogue with Diane and Robert exemplifies something I heard the young people voice on many occasions: that the Eden drop-in club feels comparatively much ‘safer’ than the statutory youth club. Comparing the two a contrast appears that marks the ‘vibe’ of the Eden club as significantly more friendly. Just as Amanda (the PSCO) felt she could more comfortably let her guard down at the Eden drop-in club, both Diane and Robert contrast the Eden club to a more ‘hectic’ and unsafe statutory youth club. A large part of these testimonies appears to hinge on three particular character traits of the Eden staff.

Firstly, they are described as friendly, making Amanda the PSCO laugh, or by giving extra time and support to young people like Robert after club hours. Secondly, (and this was bought up in conversation on a regular basis throughout my time on the estate) the young people attending the Eden drop-in club felt they knew the boundaries of acceptable behavior within the setting of the drop-in club. Frequently at the Eden drop-in club I observed a quiet word or a warning being given to a young person beginning to mistreat other young people. Throughout my time helping staff the Eden drop-in club there was only one instance when a young person was banned from the club for two consecutive weeks. And while the Eden drop-in club received its praise for being staffed by friendly and approachable staff it is interesting to note that
the active intentions of staff to immediately ‘get to the bottom’ of disputes, arguments or fallouts, helped create a spatially constituted dynamic within which the young people felt comfortable. Setting boundaries, following up warnings and ‘being fair’ instilled the club with a culture of respect. Thirdly, the approachability of staff and volunteers both in and beyond the setting of the drop-in club had a considerable effect on how relationships with various ‘hard to reach’ young people developed. As the above quotes from Robert and Diana demonstrate, the marked difference that they expressed between the two clubs was in the currency of the depth of relationships. The idea of ‘going the extra mile’ was significantly galvanized among Eden staff and volunteers, as were the discourses of proximity, presence and perseverance (see chapter 2 and 4). Similarly, as one of the main tenets of ‘incarnationally’ expressing ones Christian faith on the estate was to be generously other-focused, many of the staff workers and volunteers found moments to engage with the young people who visited the club in other ways beyond the confines of the club setting. These beyond-club encounters were significant in the constitutive make up of what happened at the Eden drop-in club. The fact that relationships between staff, volunteers and young people extended beyond the spatial confines of the drop-in club had a marked difference on the interrelations between both club providers and young people attending the club. I was very aware that staff and volunteers of the Eden drop-in club knew the intimate highs and lows of different young peoples’ lives. A weekly regular prayer letter sent out to all the 614UK faith community brought resonance to the issues different young people faced. In this vein, the active ‘spiritual capital’ of the faith community (see Baker and Skinner, 2006) was often a catalyst for creating sensibilities of solidarity, compassion and empathy towards the young people as the lives of young-others were aired and discussed with the faithful hope that unfortunate, tough, or far from ideal relational circumstances would improve.

Section 2: Public sector provision, neoliberalism and postecular stirrings

In this second section I critically examine the involvement of Eden/614UK volunteers and staff in local public sector welfare provision as a result of their incarnational expression of the Christian faith on the estate. This looks specifically at the involvement of volunteers and staff in the local secondary school and in the setting up
and provision of a health care practice on the estate. Examining the involvement of Eden/614UK staff and volunteers in both of these public services I argue that their participation and contribution in this sector was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly their involvement led to the creation of particular services that were otherwise missing on the estate. Secondly, considering the increasing neoliberalisation of the public sector (see Peck et al, 2002), the involvement of Eden/volunteers within these spaces of provision led to a resistance of certain neoliberal values and to the re-valorisation of provision through certain alternatively framed discourses and performances (see Williams et al, 2012). Thirdly, while being motivated by the Christian faith to see local transformation through the public sector, the manner in which faith was enrolled and drawn upon in these two sectors of provision increased the opportunity for progressive partnership and postsecular rapprochement (see Cloke, 2010; Beaumont et al, 2011).

**Imagining a healthier community**

Hilltop health surgery opened in July 2009, seven months before I joined the Eden/SA614UK faith community for my ethnographic placement. With a board of trustees, Amanda, the wife of the project leader, felt compelled to compete for the tender to provide health care on the estate. Once the newly established community interest company 'Hope Citadel' found out that they had won the tender to run a health surgery on Fitton Hill Amanda temporarily shelved her own medical training to oversee the launch of the health practice on Fitton Hill.

Amanda’s imagination to envisage something better for her neighbours and her family drew upon her first hand insight and frustration of the current state of provision on the estate. The anger and frustration that Amanda felt was reflective of the injustice she explained she witnessed holding her community ‘captive’ (see Craddock, 2004; Eyles and Wood, 1983). ‘Living amongst’ led her to being infuriated with the lack of decent care her neighbours received:

‘I just got really angry at the health care my neighbours were receiving. It was
substandard and it made me angry to think that this community, the community that I am now a part of, got lumbered with crappy care and medical treatment. Everybody knew that the doctors were crap and they gave prescriptions for ridiculous things, and they were just referred on, but nobody could do anything about it, the system just didn’t seem to care’

Repeatedly advocating on behalf of other residents Amanda’s frustrations with how little the ‘system seemed to care’ quickly translated from personal frustrations into other-centered action through the arduous process of setting up a community interest company and tendering for the bid to open a health care centre on the estate. Amanda retold the story of tendering for this bid:

‘We went to the interview and we went to the boardroom at Oldham and they were really quite aggressive and oh, they were like oh we have to listen to this community group. I had been annoying the PCT (Primary Care Trust) for year about the fact there wasn’t a GP on Fitton hill and I’d fallen out with lots of different people there about it and they were drilling us on lots of different polices: What was our infection control policy, fire, referrals, and it was really difficult, but we had this opportunity to do a presentation and as part of the presentation I showed this video that Mike had made, I had put the words together and Mike had put it to a video for me, and all the rest of the bid team were really nervous about showing the video because it is ‘just cheesey’, and I was like ‘yeah’, but we showed it and it completely changed the atmosphere’

Amanda explained that the video clip was a combination of lots of photos of the local community: community fun days Eden/SA614UK had arranged; youth events; a local parent and toddler groups and specific landmarks on the estate. It was set to the Take That song: ‘Shine’. Amanda relayed a verse to me:

“The song just fitted our scenario, it was all about people being lifted out of difficult circumstances. You know, there is that verse that goes: ‘So come on, so come on, get it on. Don’t know what you’re waiting for’ and,
'But you’re stuck in a big hole and I want you to get out. I don’t know what there is to see. But I know it is time for you to leave. We’re all pushing along, trying to figure it out, out, out …’

Amanda went on to explain that she felt showing the video changed the tone of the meeting completely. Suddenly the PCT board was engaged in a completely different way:

‘The thing is that all the PCT work in offices and ‘talk’ about community. They go to work in their suits and everything, but they just don’t get it, and I know it was cheesy, but because it was cheesy and cos’ it was lo-tech; it made it a bit more real. When the video finished they didn’t laugh, which was really funny, they obviously took it really seriously. But their eyes were like this: (showing surprise), looking at each other, like: ‘what the heck do we do now?’ but after that the whole thing lasted a quarter of an hour longer, and the discussion changed from like, all these different targets into like people and community and how one of them was like: ‘oh yeah I walked through Fitton Hill once’, so the whole atmosphere changed, and that is the mandate that they have given us, that is why. We didn’t win ‘cos we had the most slick presentation or because we had the most figures from the past or because we had 25 other practices, that are doing really well, the reason that we won is ‘cos they have taken a gamble that community and medicine, and doing it in that context might work.’

The heart of this approach to health care was about embedding provision within the context of the local community. Amanda was passionate that ‘living amongst’ marginal-others with very inadequate health care provision something had to change. She explained how the mandate of Hope Citadel was to undo embedded systematic injustices in health care by providing quality local health care to local residents. For Amanda part of her commitment through Hope Citadel was about undoing the normative trend that the availability of good medical care tends to vary inversely with the need for it in the population served. (Hart, 1971; see also Coburn, 2004)
To counter this trend in medical care Hope Citadel had several aims listed on their organizational website: they aimed to address this unjust situation locally by ‘employing brilliant doctors, supporting them with a brilliant team of highly motivated staff, employing counselors and community nurses ‘to unlock the strands of family dynamics, life events, and complex social issues’ (HC, 2012). They also aimed to employ reception staff who are passionate ‘to see patients get well’ and who ‘genuinely love their job’.

While being a separate charitable entity from the local Eden/SA614UK partnership, Hope Citadel was very closely linked. Part and parcel of what Amanda envisaged as delivering good community-based health care was reliant on genuine support from SA614UK/Eden as this organisation offered ‘valuable support, friendship and chaplaincy’. Throughout my ethnographic placement it became explicitly clear that while there was a separate board of trustees overseeing the governance of Hope Citadel, the board overseeing the work of the Eden and 614UK initiatives were very interested in the progress, sustainability and issues facing Hope Citadel. Attending a quarterly review meeting with the Gareth, the leader of Eden/SA614UK on Fitton Hill, I realised just how important the health surgery was in terms of the synergy between what Eden/SA614UK as a whole hopes will be realised for Fitton Hill, and what was being worked out through Hope Citadel at Hill Top surgery. However, a big part of the battle for Hope Citadel and Eden/SA614UK was resisting being co-opted by the neoliberal agendas of neoliberal governance and regulation explicit within local health care provision.

**Beyond neoliberal statistics: prioritizing the lives of local people**

While the successful tender had given members of the Eden/614UK team a chance to put their idea of just and successful health care into action, it also meant that a number of the Eden/SA614UK volunteers were now caught in the tension of working out how they would be more than just ‘pawns of the neoliberal state’ (see Williams et al, 2012). Wanting neither to be simply ‘providing public services on the cheap’ or to be enrolled into a form of provision that, being tightly regulated, would amount to the
authoritative control and management of local ‘deprived’ residents lifestyles (see Williams et al, 2012) the team of doctors, health care workers, nurses and administration staff carefully had to reflect on how and why they were motivated to improve health care provision on the estate. It became clear through my research that key to Hope Citadel’s approach to community-based health care was the prioritization of the lives of local people over statistical outcomes and neoliberal measurement frameworks. Being present at a practice retreat day half way through my ethnographic placement it was clear that for Steven, the main general practice doctor, his ‘heart’ for the local community as a local resident was about not loosing focus on the ‘main thing’: the lives and livelihoods of people in the local community.

Stephen reminded everyone present of his journey into discovering that his passion in medicine was the people who are his patients:

‘When I was growing up, you’ve all seen my boffin side, I wanted to look down a microscope and cure disease and sort of ignore sick people and just have a little white coat and my glasses. But along the way, becoming a Christian, I sort of fell out of love with disease and I just fell in love with people. I just really enjoy people a lot more than these little things…’

Drawing on a quote from the film Patch Adams, Steven went on to explain that a quote in the film really resonated with the way he felt about health care: ‘you treat a disease, you win, you lose, you treat a person I guarantee you’ll win no matter what the outcome’.

Giving a brief introduction to the purpose for the day of reflection Steven made it clear that as the practice doctor he wanted the main thing at Hill Top practice (here after HT practice), and for the staff who worked there, to be the lives of the patients. He highlighted that rather than focusing on the illness, the targets, the QOF assessments\(^7\) he wanted the surgery to focus on the lives of the people and a deep

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\(^7\)QOF is the Quality and Outcomes Framework that measures general practice achievement through outcomes.
understanding of their lives:

‘If we talk about blood pressure and diabetes we are going to win and we are going to lose, but if we talk about the people and the peoples lives and where they fit into their communities then we are always going to win because it is not the outcome it is the people that we have turned up to serve and help.’

This theme of patients as real local people with personal contexts embedded in the local estate community was also a pertinent theme for Amanda the director and founder of Hope Citadel. On several occasions Amanda shared how important she felt it was not to get side tracked by the up and coming QOF assessments. The QOF assessment came right in the middle of my time spent living and volunteering on the estate and I was made very aware of the frustrations, dilemmas and distractions that QOF presented to the team at the HT Practice. Having dinner one night with both Gareth and Amanda, days before QOF was due in for assessment, Amanda, vented her frustrations to me:

‘QOF isn’t easy for us here on Fitton Hill, its easy to show how you have been combating diabetes in a wealthy area where dealing with diabetes isn’t as often connected to a bunch of other social and physiological issues, its as if sometimes QOF has it in for poorer areas, I mean its not the main focus for us really, yeah its important to measure, yeah its important to account for changes and progress, and to find areas to improve on, but the numbers are definitely not the main thing.’

To Amanda, QOF put the patient second and the outcome first, and she found this particularly frustrating. Furthermore, considering the context of multiple deprivation from which much of the health care needs of the local community emanated, the nature of the QOF statistical framework caused Amanda to feel that the very design of the measurement framework ‘had it in’ for the local community’ (see Wright et al, 2006; Johnson, 1990). Being a public provider of health care and taking on the responsibility of being regulated by the primary care trust created numerable
tensions for Amanda and the health care team.

In contrast to the priorities of QOF, that emphasized statistical change and measured improvement, Stephen explained that one of the most important moments for him was the actual *encounter* with a patient. QOF measured ill health and patient improvement whereas what was of more importance to Stephen was the encounter moment with the patient when he began to understand the person behind the ill health. Steven was convinced that the best medical care they could offer as a practice would come from ‘addressing key issues that are behind the ill health’. He explained these at the retreat:

“ I see ill health in people who don’t put themselves to work, they just sit their at home and watch TV all day, that is often where ill health comes from. You don’t need a job to work; you work raising a family, looking after your neighbour, you work running a multimillion-pound business. That is one of the main reasons why our patients have got ill health... a lot of our patients we see they have not learnt how to take a rest, there is no night and day and no rest.. also they don’t know how to deal with their guilt, some of the ill health that I see is people who cannot deal with a load of stuff they have done or a load of stuff they have had done to them... and also they cannot deal with their expectations of themselves as mums and dads...”

Critically examining the position of Stephen, Amanda and the other Eden/SA614UK volunteers who worked at HT health practice there are however several power-relation issues that emerge. In as much as Stephen counters the mechanisms of regulation such as QOF with a focus on the actual experience of encountering and treating the patient/neighbour. The successful bid to publicly provide health care for local residents meant that certain relational power frameworks shifted between Eden volunteers ‘living amongst’ the community and other residential occupants. Now being providers of health care positioned Eden volunteers in a considerable place of authority and power over other local residents. Stephen knew and grappled with these tensions as he explained to me in an interview:
“It’s a strange position to be in. In one instance I am a friend and neighbour and in another, professional context, I am suddenly giving them advice on what they should cut out of their lifestyle and what personal changes they can make that will enable them to be more healthy, fit and well. I’m never just a neighbour now, I’m always someone with a bit of clout.”

Trying to counterbalance these dynamics Stephen placed an emphasis on being personally reflexive as public providers of care on the estate. Stephen made it clear on the practice retreat day that while he empathetically wanted his staff team to focus on the lives of others, he was also adamant that providing good health care in a community setting would depend upon putting a reflexive emphasis on their own lifestyles and identities.

**Community health, reflexive selves and postsecular rapprochement.**

Providing health care on the estate was not only about patient-others it was also about care-giving selves. Amanda was convinced that the lives and health of local people was only going to be improved significantly when the practice took the idea of community health very seriously. Amanda explained:

“I really do believe people get restored and healed in community, it is just not possible on your own, all these Americans that go off to detox centres and therapy. Tiger Woods has gone off for what two months to some hideaway thing, it is just not real, and our community is incredible. People on Fitton Hill are quirky and bizarre, but they are also really beautiful and they have lots of potential, and often that potential doesn't get unlocked unless it is like, with other people round them’

This ‘unlocking’, Amanda explained, involved lots of different people standing side-by-side and deeply caring for others in the community, a deep contradiction in comparison to the neoliberal ideology that enamored the ‘autonomous individual’
(Fries, 2008; see also Coburn, 2006; Pratt, 2006). While health transformation relied on structures and attitudes being changed beyond the confines of the estate, on a local scale however, as inhabitants of the local community, both Amanda and Stephen sketched out how central the attitudes and actions of staff as care-givers were to seeing community transformation. Steven was adamant that the best way to engage with the lives of others was to reflexively engage with their own selves. This meant carefully questioning what purpose and place grounded each and every one of them. Steven highlighted that rather than just ‘knowing the right stuff we have to answer these questions as individuals and as an organization… questioning how we can be a part of building community on Fitton Hill and we need to find out what we can do and what is our purpose.’

This sense of self reflection and character questioning was something that Steven wanted his staff to do for themselves first before they attempted to engage in the complex medical and social lives of others living on the estate. Illustrating this with reference to his own life, during the HT practice retreat day Steven went on to explain that if he was going to have any impact in the lives of others struggling with alcohol then it is something that he was going to have to try and empathise with himself. Telling the story of Mattma Ghandi and a little boy whose mother asked Ghandi to help persuade her son to stop eating so much sugar, Steven explained to the staff that Ghandi’s approach was to give up sugar himself so that he could experience something of what he was asking of the young boy. Steven shared how for him this meant choosing to temporarily give up drinking alcohol:

“ I felt really challenged about telling our patients to give up alcohol, I felt really challenged, so I gave up alcohol for February. It is the shortest month of the year, but it has killed me to give up alcohol for a month, but actually doing it, during the month I have noticed that I have spent a little more time with patients, it has given me a little more understanding and we have had our successes recently haven’t we. So we need to answer these questions for ourselves.”
For Steven, a part of the best approach with patients was to sincerely and reflexively be willing to put the caring-self in the situation of the patient-other. What was it that was being asked of them? And was there a personal self-commitment to take on the same sort of challenges, advice and re-direction? On the HT practice retreat day it was obvious that to Stephen and Amanda how they the practice administered health care, and what effect it had, was intrinsically linked to how they themselves as other local residents ‘placed’ themselves in the local context of the neighbourhood. Stephen’s example of being willing to give up alcohol was backed up with some questions to the staff team from Amanda about living with integrity:

“For me, working in the health practice and living on the estate it is about asking myself repeatedly am I living with integrity here. If we as a practice are going to be offering medical advice that suggests that people change how they live, what they eat, how they look after their children, are we willing challenge ourselves to live with integrity? Are we searching to be a significant contributor of the community and are we open to being changed?”

As the short challenge from Amanda suggests, seeing change in the health of the community was about being willing to be open to change and challenge in ones own self. Transformation in this regard then relied on a dialogical and self-reflexive process and doing health care on the estate was as much about questioning ones own position, posture and purpose of living (see Halter et al, 2008) as it was about questioning the lifestyles and circumstances of others. This was clearly a virtuous process that the HT practice wanted to encourage whether the member of staff involved was a Christian or a non-Christian. Stephen was explicit about the place of faith in the organisation:

“We have a Christian basis but we haven’t got a Christian bias. That is really important. I have seen loads of Christians and they haven’t got any love or humility in them. Yes for many of us our foundation is a belief in Jesus, and trying to follow his teachings, but our foundation is to be completely inclusive, be humble enough to recognize that anyone and everyone can be healed and be
a healer. We wanna work with people of good heart whatever their faith is”

Transformation of the local community was broadly considered to be something that could be enacted by all staff regardless of their religious beliefs and, as the quote from Stephen suggests, it was about the display of virtuous behavior that mattered in the context of the health surgery. Stephen highlighted that such virtue was not a bounded capability of the ‘Christian’. He emphasized this point by drawing on the example of an absent staff member who did not profess to be a Christian and yet cared, was integral, and committed to the cause:

“Think about our district nurse Naomi, she is the most caring district nurse, and I don't think she has a Christian faith, but she might just have a faith in the community or in the people, what ever it is she has a good heart and we want her to feel she can be a healer with us in this organisation”

Being a healer was clearly Stephen’s label for being someone who could positively impact the local community by working to see the health and wellbeing of local residents improved. Naomi’s inclusion was based simply on her display of virtue, being described as ‘most caring’ and with ‘a good heart’.

However, while Stephen and Amanda did not place the Christian-self above the non-Christian self in terms of ones capability to act and work for the good of the broader community, an emphasis was put on the recognition of the motivational value or ‘spiritual capital’ (see Baker and Skinner, 2006) that being Christian bought to ‘living amongst’ and serving the community through the health practice. Stephen made it clear to staff that being Christian was something that should not be hidden and he encouraged his fellow Christian colleagues that they should not loose sight of this central motivating factor: their Christian Faith.

**Volunteering in School**

The informal partnership between the Eden/SA 614UK and the local secondary school
started in 2006. The Eden youth worker, Luke, approached the school to suggest starting a breakfast club. According to Maggie, the school’s head of learning and support, living amongst many of the local students Luke became very aware of their situation:

“Luke new that some of the children were not having breakfast, dragging themselves out of bed, while others who did eat something were stopping off at the local cafe eating really unhealthy food on a daily basis.”

Luke described these feelings to me in a later interview:

“I was quite indignant and that, I mean you chat to them, like oh have you had your breakfast and they are like, ‘no’ or they are like ‘yeah I had one sausage and one piece of toast from the buttie shop’ and it was a quid odd, so un-healthy and damaging, you know what I mean, so I set up a breakfast club which had forty kids going to it”.

However the school soon found internal funding for the breakfast club and it was taken over by a newly appointed member of staff. In this particular instance Luke’s situation living ‘incarnationally’ within the local community prompted him to ‘fill a gap’ in public welfare. Even though it soon became something that was incorporated into school provision the key here was not that Luke bought something different to the public sector but that he had the insight and the passion to initiate something that was originally missing from the school setting. This initial voluntary intervention sparked a range of commitments to the local secondary school, all of which appeared to be built upon Luke’s particular ability to engage students that were labeled ‘hard to reach’.

With the handover of the breakfast club to an internal member of staff Luke was asked if he felt there was any other way he could continue to contribute to ‘school life’. Having previously been a chef Luke proposed an after-school cooking club for students at risk of exclusion. Like many after-school initiatives this gave Luke and the
teachers involved a great opportunity to work alongside young people in a context beyond the classroom (see Halpern, 1995) and provided a space of continued participation, supportive relationships, learning and safety for students on the risk of exclusion from school (see Strobel et al, 2008).

**The after-school cookery club**

Luke the Eden youth worker, Nathan the Eden intern, two assisting teachers and on occasions myself staffed the after-school cookery club. The extract below is taken from my research diary and it gives an indication of the nature of these types of sessions:

### Diary extract: making Moroccan soup

Nathan, the intern, oversaw this particular session, as Luke wanted Nathan to have ample opportunities at running and being responsible for the sessions while he was ‘under his wing’. Run in one of the home economic rooms at the back of the school there were nine young people present. All six of the young people who had been asked to attend were at risk of permanent exclusion. The other three were accompanying friends. The two teachers assisting told me they were on a rota of teachers who expressed an interest in helping Luke with the cooking club. Both had a particular fondness for these young people and felt that the club gave them a bit more ‘quality time outside the context of the normal lesson with each young person’. The two teachers Katrina and Mark had a good rapport with the young people. For the cooking exercise itself each supervisor was asked to oversee two young people.

Our recipe to follow was Moroccan soup. Clearly the young people felt very familiar with Luke and Nathan. During the delivery of instructions many of the young people chipped in with jokes, laughter and questions. Luke and Nathan were something of a double act as myself and the two teachers took a back seat approach. Young people half listening, half wishing to begin, fiddled with utensils and chatted through whispers.
The session was a great success, and apart from a blender breaking - the contents of which had to rapidly transferred into another blender - all groups produced something nearly resembling an autumnal coloured thick and spicy soup. Varying in thickness and quantity - my group managing to pour half its soup down the sink - everyone of the young people left the session with a container full, or sufficiently loaded with soup.

Between chopping vegetables, blending, and interpreting the seasoning rather loosely on the recipe card, most of the session was filled with the chatter of supervisors and students. Responses to questions about the day were met with supervisors steering students away from long extended monologues about which teacher they detested or which other young person they had a vendetta or a grudge emerging against. The conversation and the group dynamics, while at times appearing like the kitchen was no longer controlled by the adults supervising, was joyful and full of conversation. Encouragement, informal counseling, and general student-supervisor banter gave the session its feel.

The after school cookery club was not ‘overtly’ faith-based. It simply was about Luke using his previous vocational skills as a chef to create a relational space where young people on the risk of exclusion could be given a little extra time and attention in an environment that was creative and productive. The diary extract illustrate how, similar to Litke’s research (2009), the initiation of the cookery club created room for subtle encouragements, lifts in confidence and friendly one-on-one engagement between adults and young people present. This was also clear in the experiences of several young people who attended the club.

In informal discussion with students attending the cookery club the general theme that emerged was that the club provided them with ‘something fun to do after school’, others articulated that ‘it gave them a chance to hang out with Luke and Rachel’ (an assisting teacher),’ something they looked forward to’ each week. Asking students why they enjoyed the company of Luke, and teachers like Rachel, the response from Muhammad during the cookery club typified the response I heard from many
students:

“It’s a boost you know, going home with something you’ve cooked. Tim’s a good Chef and really encouraging. Rachel is just one of those teachers that helps you too.”

Similarly talking at the cookery club one afternoon with a young student called James he responded:

“I get things wrong a lot. I’m not very good with the measurements and stuff but Luke is good at sorting things out. I’m always chuffed when he is in our group, he’s a legend, really friendly and he’s helped me believe in myself more.”

Interviewing Luke about the cookery club he explained how and why he went about searching for opportunities to run after-school activities:

“I think it is a bit relational really, I think for me that is why I have done all of them (school-based activities) as a gateway into relationships with kids, or out of mutual sort of friendship and purpose, like this would be really good for them so, should we do something? So the school, that was to meet kids and that, I can cook so I went in and cooked.”

Luke’s rational for engagement was to ‘meet the kids’ and because he thought it would be ‘really good for the kids’. Secondly, the partnerships that were formed between himself and the local school were done on the back of having a common aim: starting something that would be good for the young people.

Encouraging Luke to reflect upon how his faith-inspired conviction to live amongst the local community shaped his vision for school-based interventions Luke’s response referred back to his initial concern for students not getting the right access to healthy food or having the knowledge of how to cook it. However he went on to explain that all of his school-based voluntary work was motivated by a broader ethos and vision:
“my vision is that as many people as possible experience and know the love of God, the rest is just love as much as you can, and I don’t think that would change if they weren’t interested in God”

The critical examination of Eden/SA614UK biographic narratives in chapter four illustrated how the faith-fuelled conviction to ‘live amongst’ was not necessarily only in pursuit of an evangelistic vision but it was also about a certain care ethic that came from loving them regardless of whether they were interested in the Christian faith. In the particular case of Luke, building relationships and caring for young people through voluntary school-based interventions like the cookery club this mandate of abundant care and love was central:

“Cookery club, for instance, yeah of course on one level it’s is just about cooking with the kids, but actually underneath that it’s about something deeper its about contact time with these young people who need extra attention, a bit of encouragement, support and love, yeah love.”

Luke’s vision was grounded in a hope that through his actions and involvement the young people would experience the ‘love of God’, but he also clarified that whether or not they came to put his actions and his Christian faith together and make the connection he would still continue to keep loving them. In the school-based interventions the voluntary role of Luke was significant not because it necessarily made faith explicit but because his faith and conviction to live among those he wished to serve and support prompted him to start things up for the young people, loving them regardless of whether they were interested in his Christian faith.

His commitment to live in the local community also enabled him to engage with students in a way that was recognized and appreciated by the school staff team, many of who, while passionate about the students, had chosen to live outside of the school’s catchment. Living in the same community as many of the students on the risk of exclusion presented Luke certain advantages to the school. As many of the ‘hard to
reach’ and ‘at risk of exclusion’ students attended Eden/SA614UK youth services beyond the school gate, Luke held a good level of rapport with many of them. Knowing particular students well and leading certain activities Luke had the opportunity to increase participation in school-based activities as ‘hard to reach’ students quickly became ‘easy to reach’ student as Maggie explained:

“He just has a way with these types of young people, what I would term ‘hard to reach students’. They know him well, he puts the hours in with them through different Eden activities and so when he is in school they would come with only a little encouragement needed’.

Living in close proximity to many of the students and being very familiar and friendly with many of these ‘hard to reach’ students in and out of school meant Luke was also able to update teachers of students circumstances and reduce any gaps in knowledge of the circumstances facing students as the quote from Maggie, the head of learning, illustrates:

“Luke comes in and he knows them, cos he lives in their community, he can give us a quick bit of advice and say this child, this has happened, or can you keep an eye on them...”

Sharing in the ups and downs of their daily lives as a youth worker on the estate meant Luke could pass on important information to teachers on how best to individually support this or that young person. It also meant concern and care for particular young people could be carefully passed on as these young people entered the school gate, connecting their lives and circumstances beyond the school with their behavior and attitude within school. Working alongside other teachers Luke’s presence in school also helped reconfigure how some of these students saw and related to some of the teachers and how teachers related to students; re-shaping teacher-student self-other relations in other arenas of school life.

**Shaping teacher-student relations and moving beyond neoliberal agendas**
Schoolteachers who worked with Luke appreciated the qualities and character traits he bought to school life. In my interviews with schoolteachers several testified of how Luke’s character and approach with the young people challenged them in their own interactions and relationships with the students. Teachers appeared under pressure to relate to students in a particular way to maintain grade quotas and school targets. The neoliberalisation of school agendas and the discursive positioning of ‘at risk’ students to be seen as little more than the result of personal failure and achievement (see Francis, 2006; Hill et al, 2009) meant that teachers working ‘within the system’ found Luke’s approach refreshing and inspiring. Luke’s approach in schools and the appeal of his manner to other teachers worked to help co-constitute an alternatively framed set of performances and discourses in school. Rather than simply individualizing blame and responsibility on students at risk of exclusion this approach started from a place of care and support over and above a neoliberal discourse that saw these students as simply ‘failing themselves’. Margaret’s experience illustrates this succinctly:

“I have learnt a lot from Luke in the way that he comes across, the way that he works with young people, urn and if anything he is quite inspirational for me.”

For Margaret, a personal learning journey emerged from having Luke in the school. She was impressed with ‘just the way he approaches the children’. This approach, she explained was built upon the way he encountered the young people:

“I learnt from Luke, the sympathy, the empathy, urn the patience, the kindness, urn really he came across so positive all the time, there is never never a negative comment about the kids, you know which really inspires me.”

Margaret’s account of Luke’s work with the school students illustrates that Luke related to the young people in school through an approach that centered on other-focused displays of virtue while also not casting negative connotations onto these student-others. Having a positive attitude and relating to the students in this manner
inspired Margaret to seek to know her own students in a different way: embracing something of the circumstances facing them, searching to know and appreciate something of their otherness. She described to me how working alongside Luke had changed the way that she appreciated her own role in the school and the way she relates to her students:

“I do have a responsibility of ticking boxes, getting kids to achieve and attain, GCSEs, etc, a real headache, and I suppose considering my role in school, I was very much, ‘this is what I do and this is very much my job’, I did not really take the needs of the students and what happens in their home life seriously. If they (students) have a bad day, or a bad morning, I just saw it as negative behaviour, I did not used to look at the negative behaviour in terms of what contributed towards it and why it was happening”

Working with Luke, Margaret expressed a change in her approach. While previously Margaret had seen her role as ‘just a job’ and did not connect the behaviour of students in school with some of the difficult circumstances they faced at home and in the local community, in time some of the ‘strategies and the way Luke worked’ ‘rubbed off’ on Margaret:

“Luke helped me appreciate and understand that the negative behaviour was a symptom of something else going on in their life, I started to search for what contributed and why it happened”

In this example Luke’s influence in school can be seen not only to fill gaps in provision for the students but to influence teachers in their own approach with students: something that led to teachers like Margaret wanting to search out and understand the social and communal circumstances facing ‘at risk’ students beyond the school gate. Margaret’s testimony of working alongside Luke shows that he was clearly influential in helping to enact and encourage an approach with students that went beyond neoliberal ways of relating and teaching in a secondary school context.
Another important factor in the joint partnership of the local secondary school and the Eden/614UK church was the ways in which the Christian faith was and wasn’t expressed by Luke and other Eden volunteers in school.

**Talking about and doing ‘faith’: postsecular stirrings**

Schoolteachers did not appear to have any concerns with Luke’s Christian ethos. Several teachers expressed that they felt at ease with his way of ‘being Christian’ in the school environment. Lucy’s comments illustrate this quite succinctly:

> “Luke being Christian, and working for a faith-based organisation, has never cropped up as an issue. They (Eden volunteers) have come in and done sessions for me and they have talked about beliefs and things …”

Luke occasionally came into school with other Eden volunteers, or in partnership with the broader Message Trust to run RE lessons, take school assemblies and help with the ‘activities week’. The general feeling amongst staff interviewed was that Christianity was never imposed upon the students or the teachers. As Lucy, a humanities teacher explained:

> “I’m in no ways religious but then they are not ‘bible bashers’, we have had quite good open discussions around that (faith and belief) and why people believe.”

While Margaret, the head of learning, also commented:

> “It is never pushed down our throats or it is never an issue, but it is always on the periphery of the sessions. It is something I have never felt threatened by or worried about.”

As both Teachers comments illustrate, the way the Christian faith was expressed and verbalised in the school environment was never taken as a ‘threat’. Instead Margaret acknowledged the location of faith as something that was on the periphery. The Christian ethos of Luke and other volunteers, while being there on the fringe, was
never something coercively presented, being ‘pushed down throats’, or being expressed in such a way so as to merit the team the term ‘bible bashers’. Instead, as Lucy testifies, although not herself a person of faith, faith and belief were discussed openly and without any hint of coercion. Asking Lucy to describe what she meant by good open discussions she went on to explain:

“Whether it’s with students or us teachers it’s respectfully done, no one is adamantly told that their opinion is wrong or that their Christian view is the only one worth listening to. In fact Eden volunteers like Luke are very good at listening to alternative view points, they don’t close them down or make you feel insignificant”

Lucy’s explanation illustrates that, whether in a classroom context or in the staffroom, the manner by which faith discussions occurred was one that was not based only on one opinion being worthy of attention, instead, viewpoints were exchanged and listened to by different parties. When faith was discussed and bought into conversation it appeared that the main reason for schoolteachers not having any concern was that these discussions took place in a manner that was both respectful and adherent to difference. Luke was cited as being very good at listening to alternative points of view without being reactionary or obnoxious.

The second major reason for teachers not being cautious of partnering with Luke and the Eden initiative was bound up in the way the teachers perceived the broader influence of the Eden initiative on their students. Margaret, not religious herself, explained that she had seen a vast transformation in a number of the schools renowned ‘trouble makers’ after they had got involved with Eden. Margaret was ambiguous as to whether the remarked change was due to ‘the Christian bit’ but either way students had shown themselves to be wholly different in their behaviour at school:

“Kids that are misbehaving at school, dropping out, getting into trouble with the police, urm those sort of kids have gone along to the Eden sessions and their
whole way of thinking has been changed, you know their whole being has changed in respect that they don’t get into trouble any more.’

With exclamation Margaret also shared in an interview how fantastic it was to see a number of young people who had attending the Eden clubs becoming confident enough to stand up on stage and express their own thoughts and feelings on Christianity:

“Now I would not call myself a Christian, or put myself forwards to know much about the Christian faith but I have been pretty impressed with kids who’ve embraced it. We had one of the Message Trust bands in and a number of our students actually stood up on the stage and talked about their faith, I was so proud of them, they gave reasons for why they are involved in the Eden project and believing in God and what it stands for to them.”

The summative point to make here is that the strong partnership that exists between the school and Eden/SA614UK is not only built on the need and effectiveness of Luke working with ‘hard to reach’ students. It is built upon the particular manner in which faith is performed and enacted by Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers, and the positive influence the work of the Eden/SA614UK interventions seem to have had on students engaging with their activities in the community. From the testimonies of staff partnering with Luke and the local Eden/SA614UK initiative these two factors have led to a trusting and transparent context for postsecular partnership (see Cloke 2010; Beaumont and Baker, 2011).

Section 3: Beyond welfare provision

In this third and final section I focus on the involvement of Eden/614UK staff and volunteers in the life of the local estate beyond organised public and voluntary welfare provision. This section has two parts. The first considers a weekly group organised for local young people interested in the Christian faith. Unlike the drop-in club explored in the first section of this chapter this youth-specific space is much more explicitly
Christian; meaning in this case it is constituted by a number of overt performances of volunteers and staff to encourage young participants to embrace and develop a Christian faith for themselves. In this first part I turn an analytical eye to how evangelism is performed in this space. I argue that beyond these performances of evangelism a key feature of this space is the encouragement of citizenry relations. The second part looks specifically at neighbourly relations between Christian-self and neighbourly-other on the estate. Firstly this section critically examines the motivations that underpin a number of these friendships and it argues that in some cases these friendships were primarily motivated by the desire to evangelise the neighbourly-other, expecting certain responses from friendships with local neighbours. Secondly, this final section examines how some friendships forged between Christian-self and other on the estate are imbued with uneven power relations. This critically examines the tensions that arise from Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers trying to build friendships with other neighbours while they hold dual identities in the local community. As Eden/SA614 staff and volunteers are recognized as both a local neighbours and a service providers this section examines how and why this became an issue for Eden/SA614UK staff. Thirdly, and finally, this section explores how acts of generosity, care, and service emerge out of local friendships between Christian-self and neighbourly other, and it examines how such neighbourly relations re-shape Christian-selves; a theme that resonates with the biographic narratives and encounters explored in the previous chapter. Drawing out these three analytical points provides a critical view on how such relationally enacted spaces of care and friendship can be considered to be part constitutive of an emergent ethical landscape.

**Cell group**

Cell was held once a week in the Eden offices. Alongside a few games, an open time on the pool table, or an organized trip the cinema, the woods, or the football pitch, an informal presentation was sometimes given about the Christian faith. Cell was clearly part of the ‘evangelistic’ aims of the Eden/SA614UK partnership. In review of the evangelistic discourses discussed in the fourth chapter, Cell was intentionally structured around evangelistically sharing faith and supporting young people who
had made faith commitments. This was clear from the description of Cell on the Eden Fitton Hill website (EFH, 2012):

“Eden is a Salvation Army Church and we love God. We are really up for people to ask their own questions about life, who they are and why church is boring. Cell is time for you and your mates to ask these questions. But we don’t sit about singing kum-by-yah, we do a load of mad activities, take trips and learn on the move. I believe God is everywhere and is interested in everyone, you will not just find him in church, but on the street, with your friends and in all you do. If God is everywhere, at all times, what does he want with me? And how do I respond? You don’t have to have gone to church before, or have any idea about God, in fact it helps if you don’t.”

Cell was designed as an informal setting in which young people could ask questions about the Christian faith, and as the quote from the website hints, Cell was intended to be a learning space in which questions of identity and purpose could be considered from a Christian perspective. From my ethnographic observations it was clear Cell was intended as a relational bridge between the young people and the wider faith community. There was an intended expectation by both volunteers and staff of the Eden project that Cell was a means by which local young people could progress from having no awareness and understanding of the Christian Faith and Jesus, to being an active member in the faith community; where personal faith reorders every aspect of life, action and thought. In the Cell group there were clearly young people with various levels of interest in the Christian faith. Some of the young people I recognized as regular faces at the Sunday meetings, prayer events and bible discussions, while others quite openly explained to me that they attended the Cell group because it simply presented them with something extra to do on the estate.

The two vignettes that this section draws upon are taken from one particular evening approximately halfway through my four-month placement. The content of these vignettes is the amalgamation of my research diary notes and IPhone voice recordings.
The routine of the Cell group was that the young people gather together at the small office building on a Tuesday night at 7pm. Luke would explain whether we were planning on staying in the building for the evening or whether we were planning on heading out for an activity or trip out. Some of the trips out included a trip to see Huckleberry Fin at the local theatre, a cinema visit and many trips to the local football quadrant. On the evening described in the two vignettes Luke had explained to me that he had planned a bit of a workshop with the young people, firstly to avoid the rain and secondly to leave them with something to think about over the Easter weekend.

Performing evangelism

Vignette 1: ‘That’s my king’

I arrived before the other staff and volunteers. Two of the young guys were playing on the wall, bmx bikes laid strewn on the ground. The weather was atrocious, water poured off the roof of the office, lime from the old roofing tiles built up on the ground. Taylor and Robert did not seemed concerned standing out in the rain; they seemed to rather enjoy it. The three of us waiting for the shutters and the three bolts to be routinely unbolted. The two lads repeatedly attempted to push me under the torrent of water rushing off the overloaded gutter. I was only saved from being soaked when Luke, the Eden youth worker, arrived moments later: unlocking the bolts and letting us in to the office. The strip lights briefly hummed and flickered as Luke and I went about going through the routine of setting up. Luke set up the laptop and projector in the second room. Under Luke’s instruction I set a load of chairs out, persuading the two rather wet guys to help out. Others quickly turned up. Boys heavily dominated tonight, only two girls appeared. The noise of laughter, teasing and general conversation was barely contained by the small back room. A total of fifteen young people were expectantly seated surrounding the projector. I actively called the tea order and one of the young people helped make the toast. Some of the younger lads had found a pile of sports cones and were throwing them at each other; Luke quickly interjected, breaking away from trying to get a YouTube clip to play. Luke called out to the younger boys:
'Remember what I explained about the line? Well the cone hitting someone in the face or smashing the laptop that would be over it.'

Luke dimmed the lights. The YouTube clip was ready to stream. Little explanation was given; Luke just briefly explained:

‘This is just something to think about over the Easter weekend. For us Christians this weekend is when we remember all that Jesus has done for us’

Luke pressed play; most young people were settled. Teas had been passed around and the toast was already being quickly consumed. The video was a montage of a short refrain taken from the most well know sermon by African American pastor and civil rights activist Dr S.M Lockridge. Modern graphics scrolled the words over screen, quickly the words of the sermon were built onto screen capture images and short movie clips from Mel Gibsons ‘the passion of the Christ’. Keyboard Synthesizers and electric guitar music continued to build. The oratory passion of the Dr S.M Lockbridge was fiery:

‘The bible says my King is the King of the Jews, he’s the King of Israel, he’s the King of righteousness, he’s the king of the ages, he’s is the king of heaven. He’s the King of glory. He’s the king of kings and the lord of lords. That’s my King! I wonder if you know him? My King is a sovereign King. No means of measure can define his limitless love. He’s enduringly strong. He’s entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast...’  His passionate sermon continued to build for just over three minutes and finished triumphantly with:

‘Death couldn’t hold him. That's my King! That is my King!’

Luke minimized the YouTube window: “Well, that is something to think about over Easter’.

Much has been written about the use of contemporary media by Christians to share
the story of Jesus Christ. Schultze and Woods (2008) have documented how printed literature, television, videos, dvds and new forms of public visual media on the internet such as YouTube, have been appropriated by Christians to share the story of Jesus with non-Christian others. As Heathershot (2004) has argued, public consumption of these types of media has not only been about producing ‘conversion tools’ but about consuming and performing Christian evangelical identity, establishing and instilling a sense of truth through the daily uptake of media messages and narratives that repeatedly reaffirm a sense of Christian ‘truth’ and purpose. However, as the work of scholars examining the production of the number of ‘Jesus films’ has argued (see Dwight, 2012; Peperkamp, 2005; Johnson, 1998), a major point of the distribution and screening of these films by Christians in the last fifty years has been to produce appropriate and relevant methods of evangelism; something Johnson (1998) has termed ‘videoevangelism’. In fact such methods are not that recent, as even since the production of Cecil Millers’ Jesus film entitled ‘the King of Kings’ in 1927, film has been used to communicate the narrative of Jesus to others (Dwight, 2012). While the most popular of these was significantly the film popularly known as ‘the Jesus Film’ produced by Krish and Sykes in 1979 (Ibid, 2012). Translated into over a thousand languages this film has been shown in over 200 countries across the world and it has reportedly led to over 200 million conversions (JesusFilm, 2012). Most recently Mel Gibsons film ‘the passion of the Christ’ has been used with similar purpose (see Dwight, 2012). Furthermore, while some films have been used to share the live and purpose of Jesus evangelistically with others, there has been an increase in the use of broader secular films within the ‘emerging church’ to engage non-Christian others in discussion about the broad ‘Christian story’ through ‘evangelistic film discussion groups’ (see Smither, 2007). This method of ‘appropriation’ (see Johnston, 1998) has led to a broad range of films being suggested as good tools for creating and provoking discussion on various biblical and theo-ethical topics (see Barsotti et al, 2004). In my own analysis of ‘Cell’ and the critical examination of the use of the YouTube clip, described in the vignette above, there are various points to highlight that relate to these broader academic commentaries on the use of film as an ‘evangelistic tool’.
Firstly, as I made clear in the opening of this section of the chapter, the local Eden and 614UK church on Fitton Hill is the most explicit evangelical space. As a space designated for questions, discussion and teaching on the main tenants of the Christian faith it does not come as much of a surprise that a video was used to present ‘the Jesus story’ to those who regularly attended the weekly group. Questioning Luke, the groups organizer, on his purpose of the film clip in the session he commented:

‘Well its just about a seed really in many cases, urm I guess you know, Cell is about putting the story out there in a pretty straight forward way, and you never know who in the group might be provoked by the video. It’s a chance to use something relevant and inspiring to challenge the young people about their own beliefs and relationship with Jesus, and you know, every young person watches YouTube.’

Interestingly in this quote Luke draws parallels to a ‘seed’ and he frames the use of the video as a method of ‘putting the story out there’. For Luke, showing this film was about making use of a contemporary ‘evangelistic tool’. Communicating the story of Jesus to young people on the estate through the medium of a short YouTube clip was done with the hope that it was would ‘challenge’ and ‘provoke’ the young people. This challenge would lead them to question for themselves their own belief system and where the Jesus story fits into this. It clearly had evangelistic intentions. However, Luke envisaged the film as a ‘seed’: something that potentially, hence his reference to not knowing who in the group might be provoked by the video, would grow into something bigger if the young people viewing it were indeed ‘challenged’. Luke finished the clip announcing that the clip gave the young people something to ‘think about over the Easter weekend’. He envisaged the media clip as a relevant and inspiring provocateur that would engage and culturally fit the nature of youth culture.

Secondly the content of the media clip is significant. It was extremely emotional. The orator Dr S.M Lockbridge was passionate about what he was saying in his sermon. The tone of his voice, the inflection and pace of his short sentences were productive of a resonating piece of public speaking. Repetition, repeated rhetorical questioning of the listener and the dramatic pause culminated in a public sermon extract to which it was
hard not to pay attention. Likewise the combination of speech, image and music had dramatic effect. Combining the speech extract with edited scenes and freeze frame stencil images from Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ gave the speech a visual focal point – the man of Jesus. In these clips Jesus was either seen as being mutilated and executed, or as a man robed and smiling; encountering members of the crowd; acting compassionately and caringly for others. The star of the production, Jim Caviezel, who played Jesus, had an affectionate smile. Moreover, rising keyboard synthesizes and electric guitars throughout the clip created a building sense of awe and wonder and a heightened sense of exultation. The clip was extremely dramatic and provocative. As the diary extract below details, watching it among the young people I felt a series of emotions:

| ‘Immediately I was personally ‘taken’ by the video. But I actually did not like the first few minutes. I found it emotional and overbearing but decided to give it a little longer before I personally wrote it off. Depending on your own position on the Christian faith, it could have easily been interpreted a number of ways: propaganda, dogma, truth, scripture, moving, enticing or empty emotionalism. I had my own views on it, as I am sure others in the room did. When it ended after a brief three minutes I had decided that even amongst its heavy use of emotion, graphic mutilation of the body of Christ, affectual images of a smiling man, supposedly depicting Jesus, the central point for me was that the video asked whether the viewer new Jesus like Dr Lockridge fervently and vigorously exclaimed that Jesus was his ‘King’. |

| Observing the young people they all responded differently. Some seemed silenced by the video, others joked, figeted and seemed disinterested. On appearances alone I felt like the room could be read in different ways, contrast filled the room. One of the older lads sincerely raised his voice for others to be quiet, some settled into the video, others remained dis-interest or fooled around. Everyone used their own agency to respond how they felt moved, indifferent, or repelled. The video was a clear statement of the Christian faith and the atmosphere around the room suggested opinion was divided. My response was going to be different from those around me that did not have the same religious faith. By the end of the video I felt an overwhelming sense of |
gratitude, tears welling, something of what I can only describe as knowledge of divine forgiveness, redemption and reconciliation took over me for a moment. In my own sense of self, it was a moment of taking stock, questioning what I stood for: who was ‘my King’? Who and what things defined me?’

There are several things to draw out of this diary extract and several things that needed to be triangulated against it as it wholly represents my own subjective view and reading of the evening’s events. Analytically unpacking my own experience and the experience of other young people present that night helps to make sense of how the performance of evangelism enacted through the media clip was received and experienced by differently situated people.

This was the first time I had ever seen this media clip. As the extract recalls my own first reactions were to be somewhat initially uncertain of the clip as I found it ‘overbearing’. I was skeptical of the over use of emotional imagery. However, as the reflective piece narrates I felt overall that the media clip had a point to make and that, for me, it was whether the viewer knew the Jesus Dr Lockbridge was dramatically recalling. My subjective response was emotional as the diary extract illustrated. I felt a personal affinity with the video. It re-affirmed my personal faith convictions and it culminated in a feeling of thankfulness and gratitude. As the piece describes I was ‘taken over’ by certain embodied feelings and watching the media clip it emotionally resonated with me. It took me to a place of reflection, the apex of which was a series of reflexive ontological musings. However, this was clearly my own experience and response. While my interpretation of the video and its affect on me was positive I had an inclination even through my own ethnographic observation that the opinion and feeling of others watching differed.

While the purpose of Cell was to explore the Christian faith, throughout my voluntary commitments at the Cell group it became clear that the Cell group meant different things to different young people. Some were there for ‘the whole package’, so to speak: the games, socializing and the exploration of the Christian faith, others were just there to have fun and socialize. This was highlighted in my ethnographic observation during
the showing of the media clip; it was also more obvious in the testimonial accounts of young people interviewed. The accounts of Mark, Alex and Sophie show a considerable spectrum of opinion.

During my ethnographic placement it was clear that from the perspective of Eden staff and volunteers Alex was held up as an example of someone who had ‘really discovered Jesus for himself’. Alex attended the Sunday gathering with the wider Eden/SA614UK faith community and according to various Eden volunteers showed a real interest in learning about the Christian faith and grappling with what it meant to him. Interviewing Alex and questioning him about his own experiences of Cell he explained:

“I wouldn’t miss it. It’s Luke, innit. He’s a local legend. It’s a good thing Cell. I have learnt a lot and you know and that’s how my faith started: through Cell. Its important that we are challenged about what we think and stuff, and that’s Cell for you. It gave me a lot to think about and all the Eden team has been great answering my questions.”

Reviewing what he felt about the particular night under analysis in this section of the chapter Alex’s response was fairly similar to my own:

“I love that video. I’ve put it on facebook a few times. Some people have dissed me for doing it but I’m proud man. Luke’s has shown it to a few of us before when Cell was much smaller but Cell’s grown recently. A lot of the guys play football with Luke on a Wednesday so I guess this is another night to hang out with him. Its irritating ‘cos not that many of them are bothered about the whole Jesus bit and that pisses me off a bit. I mean, I’m here cos I’m serious about this you know. But others just come to mess around.’

Unlike Alex, interviewing Mark it was clear he found the video ‘pretty intrusive’:

“you know don’t get me wrong I love Luke, he’s a quality guy. Always listens and
is right funny. It’s just the God stuff. I mean, sometimes Cell is great, we go on a trip, have a right lark, but other times its one of those evenings in the office when we get one of Luke’s speeches or videos. He loves them but I can’t stand them. They’re really soppy and wet. Emotional crap that harps on about how Jesus did this and Jesus did that. It’s intrusive too. I mean not all of us believe in that kinda religious stuff. Luke ain’t in ya face, he’s chilled with it you know its just like when he gives his little talks or plays us something like that black man’s speech it’s a bit much.’

I heard Mark’s view on Cell repeated by several other young men who attended Cell. They generally explained that they came for the activity nights and were uninterested in the ‘God bits’ or ‘Jesus speeches’. Mark’s experience of the Dr Lockbridge video is remarkably different from both Alex’s and my own interpretation. Clearly Mark’s view of Cell was that it was best without the evangelical interventions. His experience of what I personally found inspiring was instead interpreted as ‘sappy’ and ‘intrusive’. Interestingly, however, he distinguished between the content of the video and Luke’s ‘speeches’ and the nature and character of Luke himself. This was something that also was distinguishable in Sophie’s account of Cell:

“There is nothing about Luke I don’t like. He is amazing and Cell’s good too, in some ways. I really love going to drop-in and Cell’s pretty similar: really friendly and inviting, space to hang out with my mates. It’s just the blatant God pitch I don’t get they just make me uneasy. Its not like you know when it’s going to happen either ‘cos each week is different at Cell. It’s a guessing game if one of the talks is going to be done. Don’t get me wrong it’s not Luke though; it’s just the talk bit.

For Sophie her positive experience of Cell is compared to her enjoyment of the drop-in club described and analysed earlier in this chapter. In her view it was what she described as the ‘blatant God pitch’ that she did not appreciate, in similar regards to the experience of Mark it was not Luke’s personality or character that she found unsettling it was the enactment of these short evangelical talks.
Luke himself explained that he had noticed that numbers dropped significantly when the young people on the estate knew that a special activity out of the office was not happening and so as a response Luke had purposefully not made it clear as to whether the group where going out or staying in the office. Keen to keep the numbers at Cell Luke used this as a tactic to keep the young people ‘guessing’ as to what structure Cell would take on a weekly basis. However, on reflection of Sophie’s experience of Cell this made her uncomfortable as she did not know whether a Christian talk was going to be given or not. This tactic of Lukes, while not overtly being used to ‘trick’ people into staying for the evangelical talk was in his view just a reflection on the fact that some young people were just interested in the exciting bits held beyond the estate. However as the view of Sophie illustrates, this left some young people feeling slightly uncomfortable with the lack of transparency over what was happening on a weekly basis. In some regards the fact that there were these overt performances of evangelism was to be expected considering that Cell was an optional activity clearly marked as exploring the Christian faith, critically speaking however this process lacked transparency.

Encouraging citizenry relations

Vignette 2: ‘Shine your light’

‘So you all know that my relationship with Jesus is the reason why I love you guys like I do’

‘Ah thanks Luke!’ Someone called out.

”No serious though”, Luke pressed on: “You have all heard of the Message band LZ7, we went to see them with Cell last year in central Manchester. Well they are on this campaign and I want us to join in, this video explains it better than I could, John can you flick the lights off again, actually, so does their website. So we’ve been to this website before haven’t we? Well it’s called ‘shine your light’ and LZ7 are just basically
on a campaign to get young people to embrace doing good stuff. So, anyway let me play you this short clip, and then we will listen to the song that LZ7 are releasing to go with the campaign.” The video contained dialogue and a mix of illustrations:

‘2000 years ago Jesus said ‘you are the light of the world, let your light shine before men, that they might praise your father in heaven.’ Shine your light is all about that. Plugging in the power, ripping of the lamp shades, shining brightly and doing all we can to make God famous and good fashionable. We want to see massive changes in our schools, communities, friends and families and you can join us. It is simple. You can start my checking out the challenges on the website. Click on a clip and watch it, then do it. On your own, with your mates, whatever, use our ideas, add your own ideas, just get stuck in. The next step is film it, maybe an interview with someone afterwards. Don’t worry about the quality. Just get it on camera. Then post it. Become a Facebook fan, post a comment about what you have done. Load a clip on our YouTube page. Just make sure you tell the world what you have been up to. That is it, four simple steps to shine your light and cut through the darkness with words and actions. When you add what I am doing, what my youth group is doing and what thousands are doing, maybe millions more, the light starts getting stronger and together we have got a chance to really make a difference.’

*Luke pitched in:* “Ok so you get it, right? LZ7 are encouraging you to: do it, film it, and post it. I’m well up for us being a group of people who just become known for the positive way we act in our community. Anyway, to remind you, cos Im sure we have looked at these once before in Cell, LZ7 have put together a list of suggested activities. I will get the webpage up and maybe you can explore them more in your own time, but basically, what have we got? I will play a few first. Which one shall we click on.”

Someone shouted out: “Checkout chat” The video played:

“Check out chat. Not only do they have to wear that ugly uniform and a name tag. But most of the people that talk to them just grunt or groan. Give them a smile, ask them how they are doing. Make that checkout girl or burger blokes day.”
Figure 1.2: Shine Your Light Campaign Credit: The Message Trust.

Martin, one of the regulars at Cell shouted out: ‘What you mean, talk to the Paki in the shop. No thanks!’

Luke was quick to reply, clearly not wanting to get off track and start one of the usual conversations that is vindictive against the local convenience store assistant: “Yeah, chat to him, ask him how his day was. How many times have I been in that store when one of you for no reason is just giving him slack. This is about taking the time to talk to him. Don’t just get what sweets you want and get out of there.

“No thanks!” Martin replied.


“Hang with Gran, it might be your Gran, it might be someone else’s. Hey it might even be a granddad. Play scrabble or teach them to text. Hanging out with another
generation rocks or fox trots, or whatever it is old people are into.”

“Pretty self explanatory” Luke insisted before he continued: “What I want you to do with a couple of mates your sitting with is come up with a plan of which one you are going to encourage each other to do. There is a whole list, I will leave it up on the web, just come up and click the video of the one you want to see and then get planning. We will watch the video of LZ7’s single in a minute.”

Groups began to chat amongst themselves; lads at the back called out to someone near the front to click the ‘Bless a Bobby’ video. Amidst the building noise the video clip played:

“Bless a bobby. It is not easy working for the police. People swear at you, punch you, but the police put a lot of effort into keeping us safe. Buy some chocolates, a thank you card and drop them round at your local cop shop.”

Luke interjected again: “That’s a great one. Has anyone ever said thank-you to Amanda for getting the funding together for Wednesday night football?” We would not have been able to do that without her.

The groups carried on, small talk about football echoed around the room. Luke asked me and the two other volunteers to work with a group each to come to the point where they had decided on a suitable task. My group needed little prompting, having asked them which one they had chosen to do they explained they were going to do ‘letters to legends’. Mark, the youngest of the group enthusiastically told me that he was going to write a letter to Bobby who ran the boxing club. “He is a true legend” Mark announced. I encouraged them to draft their letters, the teacher in me coming out, I checked everyone had a pen and some paper that Luke had got us to hand out. I asked Mark a little more about his boxing club. Other groups meanwhile were either writing on paper, filming themselves giving each other hugs or just playing with their Camera phones. I caught Lauren, one of the Eden volunteers, chatting to her group
about the ‘forgive and forget’ task. Luke was now making himself a piece of toast having handed a few pieces out to his group. Soon all groups having got somewhere in their planning or execution of which good will gesture they were going to embark upon, Luke felt it was time he played the LZ7 single. Nearly everyone listened while they chatted, planned, or just goofed around. The song was set in the streets of Manchester, scenes of a young lad climbing a tower block stairs were edited in with the band singing the song, a young man performing, snippets of a young mum being comforted by friends on a park bench and an older lady opening the door to be greeted by the young man with a glass bottle of milk. The hip-hop lyrics held the video together. I knew some of the song lyrics well from the Hollywood film Sister Act. Originally composed by Harry Dixon in the 1920s the lyrics from ‘this little light of mine’ had been adapted by LZ7 but the familiar chorus remained the same. There was something resonant between the contemporary rendition by the Christian band LZ7 and the version by Sam Cooke, Fannie Lou Hamer and others who sung it as a protest song during the civil rights movement. LZ7 had clearly wanted to portray that their motivation to make a positive difference in the world came from their Christian faith and the video’s purpose seemed to be about encouraging young people to partake in similar goodwill gestures. As the shine your light campaign website stated the release of this video was about ‘making good fashionable and God famous’ (SYL, 2012).

In recent years notions of youth citizenship have become conceived of as being more than just active participation in legal and political civic frameworks (Hall et al, 1999). Citizenship among young people has become worked up through political processes to be about competency, responsibility and active (community) participation (Hall et al, 1999). This political process has been most prominent through the introduction of a Citizenship curriculum in secondary schools across England in 2002. Pykett (2007; 2009; 2010) has carefully analyzed this political process and its pedagogical outworking in different school spaces. Pykett (2007) has questioned how the Crick report, the main policy behind the introduction of the Citizenship curriculum, is a productive piece of governmental technology in the formation and governance of citizen-subjects and whether, considering poststructural theory, such conceptionalisations of education, citizenship and the political, are adequately broad
enough. Furthermore, complicating the idea of citizenship in education further, Pykett (2010) has argued that the pedagogical performance of teaching citizenship in schools is complex and full of tensions, accordingly she has also argued that citizenship has to be understood to be outworked differently in different place-based school contexts depending on class and social differences (2009).

Beyond the classroom, spaces of informal education have also been scrutinized for how recent governmental notions of citizenship have been put to work in youth provision. Many of these scholarly interventions (see Smith, et al. 2005; Hall et al. 1999) have critically evaluated the value of current governmental and policy based understandings of the young citizen to argue that considering the potential of informal education as space of encouraging citizenry actions and virtues (see Packman, 2008; Hall et al. 2000), current conceptualizations are inadequate and narrow-minded. Considering citizenship-as-practice, Lawy and Biesta (2006) have argued that rethinking youth citizenship as a practiced process reworks current understandings of citizenship to be reordered around work with young people rather than on young people. In this vein notions of citizenship are understood to be more inclusive and relational.

Stepping back from the ethnographic piece presented in the vignette above on the LZ7 campaign, I want to draw out various points from this performance of Luke encouraging the young people present to ‘embrace doing good stuff’. From this ethnographic vignette several points can be said about the nature of the Cell group on the estate and how through the space of the Cell group certain citizenry ethics are encouraged. Making this argument and illustrating it with reference to this one evening at Cell gives a clear picture of how the space of Cell can not just be envisaged as a ‘evangelistic space’ but how through Luke’s ongoing work alongside the young people the space is productive of both a tacit and an explicit encouragement of everyday virtuous living. Tacitly the space of cell was productive of certain virtuous and citizenry ethics through play in and beyond the Eden office, through relational encounters between Eden volunteers and young people and in the encouragement of particular attitudes and ways of relating to other young people attending the Cell
Group. Similar to the argument made in the first section of this chapter on drop-in spaces, volunteers and Eden staff accommodated the young people through being hospitable and open. Listening, responding and building relationships with young people that attended the group. In comparison to the drop-in group however the nature of the Cell group and its explicit Christian stance meant that sometimes workshops, discussions or presentations were given and explicit citizenry ways of being and relating encouraged and these were linked into the Christian faith. The evening described above illustrates this quite clearly.

In the second ethnographic vignette it is clear that Luke’s hope was that the collection of young people attending the Cell group would be a group of young people who became known for the positive way in which they acted in their community. He was certain that they had ‘a chance to really make a difference’. Asking Luke after the club why he chose to use the LZ7 campaign he explained:

“Well firstly the Cell group connect with LZ7, they have seen them in concert in Manchester and they really liked them. And you know, young people around here are repeatedly told they are doing the wrong thing, being anti-social, causing problems, and instead, I think this campaign goes about it a different way. It’s not about the negative stories, the wagging the finger. Plain and simple it’s about suggesting a few fun everyday ways of making a difference in our community. Little tasks, not massive things, just small considerations, but they add up.”

Luke chose to use the campaign in the Cell group for two main reasons. Firstly because he felt the young people in the group would connect with the band LZ7, having seen them perform in Manchester. Secondly, and most importantly, because it presented Luke with a campaign that emphasized the positive potential of young people and did not present a moralized ‘wagging of the finger’, or a negative account of young people that labels them as ‘anti-social’ and ‘causing problems’. This different approach was something Luke saw not as part of correcting young people who lived on the estate but of encouraging them. As the campaign focused on ‘small
considerations’ Luke envisaged the campaign would be both fun and effective: with small acts that ‘add up’.

The LZ7 campaign encouraged Cell group participants to undertake small acts of consideration for others in community. The examples that the campaign drew upon promoted acts of gratitude, generosity and empathy. Some of the examples promoted by the campaign encouraged young people to reflexively consider the position of others in their vocational roles, be this as a policeman or a checkout assistant. In these everyday encounters with others the campaign encouraged young people to empathise with tasks and the reception these others received on a day-to-day basis. For example, encountering the checkout assistant the campaign encouraged the young people to go beyond the norm of consumer behaviour, acknowledging the checkout assistant as another person, smiling, interacting and acting with consideration. Luke drew upon this example to challenge and encourage the young people to step beyond normative interactions with the local Pakistani shop assistant. In other examples, the young people in Cell were encouraged through the campaign to consider those that had positively influenced them, writing ‘letters to legends’. My interactions with Mark in the vignette illustrate how suitable this task was for a number of young people positively influenced by key individuals in the community. Turning feelings of gratitude into small acts of written encouragement was a way of drawing out of young people like Mark the gratitude they held for people like Bobby, the boxing club organizer. Similarly, Luke’s comments about the input of the local PSCO Amanda in finding the funding for the weekly football club highlighted to the group the input of others in the local community. Encouraging the young people to make connections between their own lives and the lives of others was a big part of the Cell group’s task. In drawing out connections between self and other this campaign promoted an awareness and an active engagement with others that was based upon encouraging Cell group participants to embody certain virtues: being kind, being thankful, being considerate and so on. Luke’s use of this campaign turned the space of Cell into a place of encouraging and promoting ways of relating that had positive citizenry implications for how the local young people lived and interacted with others in the local community. Rather than envisaging the Cell participants as empty immoral young-
subjects in need of being filled, or banked, with knowledge of what is good (see Fiere, 1993) the use of this campaign in Cell starts from the point of considering the implicit potential within the young people to enact and embody citizenry performances with others in the local community. Comparing this to the analysis formulated around the first vignette this analysis illustrates quite clearly how Cell was built around a co-constitution of both evangelistic and citizenry performances. Moving now to consider friendships built between Eden volunteers, staff workers and other local residents it is clear that a mix of evangelistic and citizenry motivations also play a major part in the makeup of these friendships.

**Neighbourly relations: Friendship with a motive?**

In chapter four the analysis of Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteer’s biographic narratives illustrated how the original evangelistic expectations of staff and volunteers had been reshaped through their ongoing participation and service in the local community. Looking at two particular friendships it is clear that these same original expectations played a key role in motivating Eden/SA614UK volunteers to initially build friendships with local neighbours.

Interviewing Rebecca about her friendship with a local neighbour, Julie, Rebecca made it clear that when she first moved onto the estate her reason for becoming friends with Julie was in the hope that Julie might ‘become a Christian’. Julie lived opposite Rebecca and together with three other female Eden volunteers Rebecca explained that she often prayed for Julie. Rebecca explained that during the first couple of years of getting to know Julie she was going through a divorce and Rebecca had felt concerned for Julie’s wellbeing. Julie’s then husband had special needs and Julie was his sole carer. As well as praying for Julie’s impending divorce and her wellbeing the group of volunteers often prayed that Julie would become a Christian. Rebecca explained in the interview that Julie was something of a ‘guardian of the street’ and Rebecca made it clear that praying for Julie to become a Christian was in the hope that there would be a ‘break through’ in the rest of the street. Rebecca explained that because of Julie’s social status on the street, Julie’s ‘acceptance of
Christ’ would hopefully result in an attitude shift in the rest of the street.

Critically examining the dynamics of the early stages of this friendship it is clear that Rebecca originally had certain evangelistic intentions with her friendship with Julie. While Rebecca expressed concern and care about Julie as she was going through her divorce, this friendship came with certain strings-attached. Rebecca went on to explain in the interview that her hope was that Julie would start attending church with her once their friendship had developed. Rebecca invited Julie to attend one of the Eden/614UK’s Sunday gatherings and she accepted the invitation. However, Julie made it clear to Rebecca that ‘it was not for her’. In the interview Rebecca expressed her frustration that she felt a number of other Eden/SA614UK volunteers had perhaps come across too overbearing and at times rude. Questioning her about the current status of their friendship Rebecca explained that she had just undergone a significant turning point in her friendship with Julie. Rebecca felt she needed to let go of her evangelistic expectation to see Julie become a Christian and just be friends with no expectations. Struggling to manage this change in expectations Rebecca was struggling to re-balance the friendship. ‘Easing off on the church bit’ meant that Rebecca had to rework how and why they were friends. Rebecca explained in the interview that a large part of her frustration was that the friendship felt considerably one-way:

“my issue with being friends with Julie is that now it is still always me having to go to her, and there will be times when I am going, I am imposing on her, there will be times when I am like I haven't seen her for ages, I must go round, I can’t quite work out the balance, summer times are best cos she is usually out the front smoking so I tend to see her more in the summer, and then feel embarrassed, it always being me who initiates it.”

As well as reflecting on how the friendship felt quite imbalanced Rebecca also explained that she had to come to terms with what she had to offer in the friendship:

“I have got past the point that any conversation I have is actually going to make
them a Christian. It’s been hard, I would have loved Julie to attend church, feel accepted, and grow in faith, but that has not happened. Now I just have to think of it differently. I’d rather be a people person and get to know her as a person; I just want to be there for her. Be a listening ear, have a cup of tea, that sort of thing.”

Rebecca’s original view of the friendship was clearly built upon certain evangelistic expectations and Rebecca had had to deal with the reality of Julie not showing much of an interest in the Christian faith. Interestingly, coming to terms with what the friendship had not led to, Rebecca had begun to re-envisage the friendship as being more about support and presence, something she felt was one of her natural strengths as a people person. This re-negotiation of expectations was something that had also faced Robert.

Robert had first met Tristan at the Eden/SA614UK young drop-in club. Robert was a music teacher at a school in South Manchester but lived on the estate with his wife Toni. They were both regular volunteers at the drop-in club and according to other Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers Tristan had grown close to Robert and his wife Toni. Tristan had a passion for music and as a horn player Robert offered to give Tristan free tuition on the trumpet. Robert explained in an interview his original thoughts on the friendship:

“Getting to know Tristan at the drop-in club we just clicked, he was good lad, no issues really and we both had a common connection through music. Quite quickly it became obvious that if anyone was going to mentor Tristan I guess the team felt I was most suited to the job. Tristan was a pretty regular attendee at Cell and seemed keen to learn about the Christian faith. I suggested to Gareth that I did some music coaching with Tristan as a way of building a bridge to share my faith. In those early days I was certain he had developed a faith, I’m sure it was a pretty new one but he always responded pretty positively to the discussions we had about God and Jesus in ‘Cell’. Tristan used to come to the Eden office after school on a Thursday and I would teach him the basics of
Trumpet. It was great. He continued to come to Drop-in and Cell; he even started attending the Sunday gathering with a small group of lads from Cell. I started doing this mentoring programme organized through the Message Trust and Tristan went from strength to strength with his Christian faith. Then he suddenly lost interest.”

Robert was keen to use music to build a ‘bridge’ with Tristan and he saw this ‘bridge’ as a good opportunity through which he could share his faith. As the interview extract illustrates, Robert felt Tristan was making lots of progress with his Christian faith until he suddenly lost interest. Similar to the friendship between Rebecca and Julie, Robert’s friendship with Tristan has certain parallels. There was clearly certain intentionality in the friendship. This friendship was built on the hope that engaging Tristan through music would hopefully provide a bridge for faith to be evangelistically shared and encouraged. Robert clearly placed a lot of expectation on Tristan showing an interest in the Christian faith; attending the Christian discussion group and the Sunday gathering. Questioning Robert about how things changed when Tristan lost interest Robert explained:

“Tristan had really fallen in love with playing trumpet. It was not that he just gave up the instrument like so many other young people do with music. It was his interest in Christianity. He just totally stopped attending the Cell group and didn’t want to know when it came to the mentoring scheme. I can’t place my finger on it. He would occasionally come to the drop-in club if we had an organised outing but would never be at the Sunday gathering. It was a bit difficult at first, all the sudden changes. I did not know really how to deal with it. In the end we arranged to carry on with the Trumpet lessons as he was totally keen but I gauged that talking about God and Jesus just became a no go.’

The dynamics and purpose of friendship between Robert and Tristan had to totally change when Tristan lost interest in Christianity. From Robert’s point of view talking about Christianity and faith were no longer easy subjects to bring up with Tristan. In Robert’s experience this made their friendship difficult to deal with at first. As much
of Robert’s time and energy had gone into supporting Tristan as he explored the Christian faith, suddenly relinquishing all interest left Robert feeling uncertain of how to progress with the friendship. Asking Robert what had become of the friendship since Tristan had stepped back from showing an interest in Christianity Robert explained:

“It’s actually worked out really well and things have settled into place. I have had to learn to adjust what to expect and not what to expect. I guess a massive part of it is that as much as possible I have had to learn to come to this friendship without an agenda. I mean I would love Tristan to be fully involved in Eden; coming to church and growing in faith, but at the end of the day I still get the opportunity to hang out with him and input into his life how I can through the music lessons, so I guess that is a really positive thing.’

Robert has clearly had to re-adjust his expectations of the friendship. And although he still desires to see Tristan grow in faith and be fully involved in Eden, like Rebecca, Robert has realized that there is still a significant place for friendship beyond one that comes with particular evangelistic expectations.

**Negotiating the complexities of being both a service provider and neighbour.**

Living in one of the most renowned ‘problem spots’ of the estate, known locally as ‘the Spur’, Hannah’s focus became how she could improve both the feel and the reputation of the area. Hannah lived with Nat another Eden volunteer and a few doors down, Tom and Ruth, Eden volunteers and Hope Citadel health practice staff also lived on the corner of ‘the Spur’. On the estate ‘the Spur’ was perceived as where many of the ‘problem families’ lived. The local housing association community development officer, Trudy, had told me in an interview how she was quite surprised to initially hear that these four volunteers had specifically wanted to rent homes in what she described as the ‘toughest spot’ on the estate:

“When they first got here Eden came to me and said that some of their new
volunteers wanted to be placed in the more troubled areas of the estate and I said that Villages (the housing association) were happy to oblige. Actually we were quite taken a back; anyway, we suggested they use a couple of empty houses on the Spur. The spur was renowned then for anti-social behaviour: drug dealing, and we had a particular problem with a few ‘problem families’. This has improved since the police have targeted crime and criminal behaviour in that square but it still has the reputation, whether or not it deserves it.”

By the time I arrived on Fitton Hill to undertake my research, Hannah and the other volunteers living on the Spur had been there for five years and had made a number of significant friendships. In some cases however getting to know local neighbours through the remit of Eden activities came with certain disappointments. This was the case with Hannah and a teenager called Tracy who lived two doors down on ‘the Spur’. Hannah was disappointed with how the dynamics of their friendship were perceived after she had spent her free time supporting her through her own family issues:

“Tracy and I met when Eden had arranged a community hanging basket event. Three summers ago those of us from Eden who lived on the Spur decided that we could get the local residents together by painting the fence along the pathway that leads through to the other side of the estate. I came up with the idea that we all make hanging baskets as well, we got some funding from somewhere for this. Anyway, that’s when I met Tracy and she started coming along to the odd Eden event, nothing explicitly Christian just the drop-in clubs and the odd summer holiday event. We really got on well, and then her dad got summoned to court and stuff for robbery, so I agreed to give them a lift to the courts and back. After he was jailed I used to drive her to the prison for family visits. This went on for some months and we really got to share each other’s lives with each other, it was pretty hard for her having her dad in prison and her mum is an alcoholic. But, anyway that’s when I felt gutted, one day she introduced me to a friend of hers and was like: ‘oh, Sharron, this is Hannah; she is kind of my social worker.”
Coming into contact with local residents under the banner of ‘Eden’ had particular connotations for Hannah. Hannah viewed the development of friendship with Tracy as somewhat didactic, sharing aspects of each other’s lives. However the introduction of Hannah to one of Tracy’s contemporaries as ‘kind of my social worker’ made Hannah realise, disappointingly, that she was considered more as a ‘professional person’ who cared for Tracy, than simply another local resident caring for Tracy. As well as depicting something of the assumed power relations intrinsic in these acts of care, this response from Tracy interestingly indicates as much as it does about perceived networks of care on the estate as it does about the actual relationship between Hannah and Tracy. Professionalised relations of care are embedded in the social landscapes of ‘marginal estates’ and the increased moralisation of ‘marginal neighbourhoods’ through the enactment of contemporary governmental policy (see Ward, 2011) has meant that both statutory and voluntary services map onto such spaces relations of care that are structured upon conventional welfare notions of care performed by ‘caring professional’ to ‘local client’. The array of services for particular marginal populations means that public sector care agencies like social services, statutory youth provision, children’s centres and community centres, ascribe these places with particular structures and relations of care. These ascribed networks of care, whether intentional or not, are quickly mapped onto other voluntary community based organizations, staff and volunteers. This had consequences for the way Tracy viewed her friendship with Hannah. While wanting to perform differently, caring for others in community from the grounded perspective of a local neighbour, Hannah’s support and friendship with Tracy was assumed to be something done out of a sense of professional obligation rather than as a personally motivated performance of ordinary ethics in extraordinary circumstances (Cloke et al, 2007)).

During my ethnographic placement it became clear that many of the local residents viewed staff and volunteers of Eden as part of an agency rather than purely as local neighbours forged together under the banner of a faith community. The lexicon of ‘Eden’ was used by local residents to describe a set of services rather than a collection of faith motivated people who lived in the community who happened to run several
services for other neighbours. Although on first consideration this might appear just a pragmatic labeling, by the end of my placement volunteering for Eden it became clear that ‘Eden’ was used either to describe a set of youth services or to describe the church meetings. Accepting this label and all the connotations it implied was clearly an uncomfortable reality for certain volunteers and staff trying to build friendships with others on the estate. Hannah illustrated this point succinctly:

“I guess that is the difficulty with Eden is that you are never just a neighbour, you know, like a friend or something you are always associated with an organisation, not that Eden is a bad badge to have at all here on the estate, its well respected and, like, its just that I feel really disappointed that Tracy does not see me as just a friend helping out some one who cares for her and loves her.”

Crucial to how Hannah wished the dynamics unveiled between her and Tracy was the notion of ‘just a friend’, however this was contradicted on many occasions by the way that Eden was viewed in line with other organisations and agencies ‘seeking to help’. While Eden/SA614UK was ideologically built on notions of ‘being-alongside’ and ‘mutuality’, whereby distinctions between self and other in the neighbourhood were ideally not arrange around provider-receiver or client-professional, sometimes some of these assumed power relations were inescapable. Interviewing several young people about their relationships with Eden volunteers and staff it was clear that in some cases the young people viewed the relationships as having clear distinctions from other local neighbours on the estate. In a number of cases young people referred to Eden/SA614UK volunteers and staff as ‘the team’, and in one particular instance questioning one young person about his friendship with Luke, the Eden youth worker, it was clear that he saw Luke as similar to his school teacher and distinguished between youth workers and other neighbours explaining that ‘Luke was paid to live on the estate’. However, interviewing other local neighbours it was clear that some residents did not make any obvious distinction nor did they appear to comprehend of Eden volunteers and staff as different or in anyway superior or of different status to themselves. This was clearly the case with Susan and Nicola who in
their own view spoke highly of the Eden volunteers they got to know as friends on the estate, especially Andrew.

**Lending a hand, listening and helping out: Generosity and self-transformation.**

Interviewing Susan about her friendship with Andrew it was clear that Andrew was a supportive and key figure in her life. Susan explained that on several occasions Andrew had volunteered to get a team together to clear out the gardens and that Andrew and a friend had re-painted her kitchen. She also gave an account of how Andrew had used his contacts with the wider Salvation Army to help organise for some second hand furniture to be donated and delivered to her house. Questioning Susan on her experience of the ‘Christian bit’ Susan explained that she was more than happy to discuss different views on God and that ‘being such a kind young man it obvious Andrew’s faith provides him with a good bit of get up and go’.

Living with Andrew I soon learnt that he regularly helped Susan. He had accompanied her to court several times when she was trying to get custody of her grand son. He would regularly receive phone calls asking for advice, a listening ear or prayer. Andrew explained that in his eyes it was just about being there for Susan, however frustrating it sometimes was:

“I regularly get phone calls from Susan. Susan has lived on the estate all her life and has had to live with a number of challenges all her life. Her Son’s father is extremely abusive and for a long time Susan was hated on the estate for marrying a Pakistani man. You have got to remember this is a very white working class estate and racism still runs deep through its veins. Anyway, since Susan’s husband death she has found things tough. Everyone knows Susan but she still has her down days. It’s just phone calls can be really, really, long. I mean really long. I’ve been phoned up in the middle of the night to pray for some distant relative I have never heard of or met. But caring for her means listening and responding to her requests, even if I immediately feel like putting the phone down or not answering. I need to know my own weakness; I’m impatient and
can get grumpy. It’s a stretch but that is loving others; it’s a stretch.”

In many ways Andrew’s view epitomizes and represents many of the relationships between Eden volunteers and Staff and other local neighbours. Andrew’s understanding of loving others is something that involves a ‘stretch’. Seeking to go beyond what comes naturally to Eden Volunteers like Andrew was a big part of enacting friendship with others on the estate. Self-other relationships were intentionally built upon a relational ‘stretch’, and engaging and performing tasks for and with others to meet their immediate need was often provoked by an initial affective encounter and reworked through the exposure of being alongside and journeying in friendship.

Acknowledging his own inability to constantly feel able or willing to help, Andrew subsequently moves from a position of ‘self-positing subjectivity’ to a position of ‘exposure’ (Zizek, 2005, pg 138). Having been ‘exposed’ by the demand of the ‘other’ Andrew’s awareness of his own limitations becomes a positive condition. As Zizek argues, ‘this mutual recognition of limitation thus opens up a space of sociality that is the solidarity of the vulnerable’ (2005, pg 138). Rather than being a strong and continually competent individual able to help at any turn or time, Andrews own reflexive admission of his own fallibility enables this ‘stretch’ to happen.

Living with Andrew he explained that he had learnt a lot from becoming friends with Susan. This learning process had extended to how he viewed and made sense of his own theology. One evening Andrew told me about an incident with Susan earlier in the year:

“I got a very flustered phone call from Susan one evening. I was shattered. I had had a long day at University and the last thing I wanted to have to do was to be on the phone to Susan. Susan told me very directly that I had to pray for her ‘cousin’s son in law’s someone or other’. It was ridiculous, I had no idea who she was talking about but she continued to explain that I needed to pray for him because he was very ill and needed to have a heart operation, but they can’t do it
where he is at the moment. Without she said he’d die. I had had so many prayer requests that week from Susan and I was feeling a bit like ‘oh Yeah ok’. We prayed on the phone and half way through the prayer she told me she had to go. She later rang me back and said ‘they’re scrambling the air ambulance and flying him to Newcastle, they’re going to operate today. You’ve got a line!’ I was really surprised. I didn’t expect an air ambulance and I did not expect an instant solution. God had challenged me through the faith of someone I thought had very little understanding of who God was, but said ‘we should pray’. She was right! This instant taught me to acknowledge that God cares about all of us, even someone I have never met. God is powerful. He has far greater resources than the air ambulance at his disposal! God cares enough to answer our prayers. Maybe Susan knew more about God than I thought she did, she did not have a fully formed theology and she still has a lot to learn about God. But this reminded me so do I. I am still growing and changing.’

As the short account from Andrew illustrates, his friendship with Susan had not only taught him that he had a number of personal limitations and weaknesses, but that his own theological assumptions and conclusions were not always right. Andrew’s friendship with Susan was didactically shaping his theology; particularly his understanding of prayer and God’s unbounded care for others, even distant and unknown others. In living alongside Susan, being there to hear and respond to her own joys and trials, something of Andrew was changed. In this coming ‘face to face’ a ‘dance begins’: an interplay between the self’s and the other’s conflicts (Brewin, 2010, 170). To emphasise with Susan, Andrew had to look on her with compassion and attempt to see himself from her perspective (Brewin, 2010). Following the thoughts of Brewin (2010) in melding together both a Levinasian and a Zizekian approach, Andrews encounters were about acknowledging that the ‘other’, Susan, had a ‘face’; a particularity, and yet also he began to acknowledge that like Susan, he was vulnerable and incomplete. Being open to the vulnerability of these encounters with Susan and facing up to her particularity, something of Andrew’s own self was drawn into a space of enigmatic tension. Living amongst particular socio-economic need Andrew became more aware of his own need as he explained over dinner one night:
“I have quite significant dyspraxia, and when I get tired I notice it more and it effects my life more: I make a mess eating; I get more impatient with myself and others; I have a tendency to trip or fall. I have to really manage my sleep and my routine. I have my own querks and quarms and, you know, getting to know Susan has been no different. She has some infuriating habits and demands, she can be really pushy with you, but I am no better. I take out my own frustration on others around the neighbourhood. I can get easily frustrated with certain young people at the drop-in club and I loose my rag. Living in this community and rubbing shoulders with others has made me more aware of my own issues and how dependent on God I am.’

Conclusion:

This chapter has critically examined how ‘living amongst’ led different volunteers and staff of Eden/SA614UK to engage with a number of very different arenas of local community life. In the case of this one particular FBO case study, what emerged out of adopting an ‘incarnational’ approach was both a series of involvements in public and voluntary welfare provision. Beyond this, the ‘incarnational’ approach also led to an involvement in the lives of local residents through neighbourhood friendships and, in the case of young people, a Christian youth club. The overall argument that has emerged from this chapter is that while each of these arenas of engagement are co-constituted differently, within each arena the involvement of staff and volunteers of Eden/SA614UK has led to several significant contributions. These contributions are evidence of how the praxis of ‘living amongst’ might be considered as an ethical landscape. Attending critically to the involvement of Eden/SA614UK staff and volunteers across and beyond the local voluntary and public sector highlights the nuanced and complex nature of ‘incarnational geographies’. Faith was performed and constituted in numerous ways in different spatial settings and the mix of actors meant that self-other relations were assembled differently across this spectrum. Having examined this variation there are several conclusions to make.
The first conclusion to make is that ‘living amongst’ led to a gap in youth provision being filled. However, more importantly, the involvement of Eden/SA614UK in setting up and running a youth drop-in club for 11-14 year old local residents opened up the opportunity for the performative emergence of a space of care and hospitality on the estate. Turning to analyse the performative way this particular drop-in space was relationally assembled it was clear that the varied relations, encounters and negotiations that constituted the drop-in club, rather than being a performance of pre-given moral tenants, was in fact relationally assembled from the intersubjective and co-produced nature of relations that led to the emergence and cultivation of particular ethical sensibilities (Darling, 2011). Constant acts of attending and responding to the young people present, often including enactments of assymetrical generosity, performatively bought a space of care and hospitality into being (see Barnett and Land, 2007). Not only was this space of care and hospitality made explicit in the testimonies of young people participating in the club, it was also clear in the testimonies of other agency representatives that visited. Accordingly, the place of drop-in club was not simply a backdrop for caring relations (Bondi, 2003) it was infused with a particular psychosocial spatial texture (Conradson, 2003) that were translated and felt as open, friendly, welcoming and peaceful.

The second conclusion to make is that ‘living amongst’ led different individuals to draw upon a combination of faith-fuelled passion, local insight and personal frustration to both provide and partner with the public sector. In contributing to both local health and secondary education provision significant gaps were filled; enhancing after-school provision for students on the verge of exclusion, and establishing a local community health centre on the estate. Rather than just being seen as simply public gap fillers I argued that both these two faith-motivated ventures led to significant contributions. In the case of the health centre this was two-fold. Firstly, in resistance to neoliberal techniques and rationales (see Peck and Tickell, 2002) the provision of healthcare was centred first and foremost on the lives of patients above and beyond statistics. This meant a significant focus on the actual encounter with the patient, understood as a local person from the community. Secondly, providing health care for the community meant a search for both empathy with the patient and self-reflexive
engagements with care-giving selves. This put a focus on personal integrity, character and virtue and it provided a starting point for progressive postsecular partnerships in the health practice as staff were valued first and foremost for their ability to keep focused on the lives of the patients over whether they were motivated by a particular religious faith. In the case of the secondary school this contribution was three-fold. ‘Living amongst’ not only meant Luke, the Eden/SA614UK youth worker, was able to initiate particular forms of provision based on his proximate insight, he was also able to use his good level of rapport with ‘hard to reach students’ to increase participation and reduce gaps in knowledge of the circumstances and difficulties facing students beyond the school gate. Secondly, his approach and character played a significant part in encouraging the relationships between certain teachers and students to be redefined and redrawn; leading to ways of relating that extended beyond neoliberal agendas. Thirdly, the manner in which faith was performed and displayed in and through the involvement of Eden staff and volunteers in the school meant that teachers were unperturbed and open to the faith-based ethos of Eden/SA614UK. This helped to facilitate progressive postsecular partnerships (see Cloke, 2010) across and between people of different ideological positions.

The third and final conclusion to make emerges from the analysis of the involvement of Eden/SA614UK volunteers and staff in the local community beyond organized public and voluntary provision. This focused on two arenas of engagement. In the case of the Cell group the analysis highlighted how, performatively speaking, the space became a site of both evangelism and that of encouraging citizenry relations. Turning an analytical eye to these performances of evangelism and drawing upon a number of different young peoples experiences it became clear that the young people interpreted the performance of evangelism differently. One young person found the media clip inspiring while others testified it was over emotional and unsettling. Critically assessing the dynamics of these evangelistic performances it became clear that a number of young people felt there needed to be more transparency with whether the evening was going to involve an explicit ‘God slot’. Turning to examine how the same space could be used to encourage citizenry relations the analysis found that the LZ7 campaign was used to evoke and promote citizenry ways of relating between young
people attending the group and other members of the local community through various articulated ‘good deeds’. Lastly, examining several different Christian-neighbour relations I have highlighted how a number of these friendships were underpinned by evangelistic motives and imbued with unequal power relations. However this section also illustrated how the formation of particular neighbourly relations in some cases led to the re-shaping of both motives and Christian selves for the other. Holding these two sets of findings in contrast with one another illustrates the complex dynamics of these friendships and how some of these neighbour relations involved more of a going-beyond-the-self than others.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This final chapter provides a conclusion to my thesis on ‘incarnational geographies’. It firstly draws together my research findings to comment on their contribution to the overall argument of this thesis and it then critically reflects on the methodological approach used throughout this research. This chapter ends with a number of suggestions on how this research may be taken forward in the future.

**Section 1: Key research findings**

In the introduction to this thesis I positioned my work within both a societal and an academic context. I narrated how British society has seen a resurgence of religion and faith in the public arena and I attributed this to both increasing multiculturalism and the increasing involvement of faith-inspired people and organisations in public welfare. The whole of this thesis has been positioned within the second of these two societal contexts. Turning to the academic context I reviewed geography’s engagement with religion and I argued that geography’s examination of the place, purpose and praxis of faith-inspired involvement in public welfare did not sufficiently reflect the breadth and depth of this public phenomena. I then put forward three provocations as to why faith-praxis in the public arena needs to be given greater attention in geography: first that faith-praxis is often prompted and shaped by its own particular theo-ethics, second that faith-praxis is a very real public phenomena, and third, that faith-praxis forms one co-constituent of emergent postsecular landscapes.

The main body of this thesis has aimed to extend geography’s current understanding of the involvement of faith motivated people and organizations in public welfare and care by focusing solely on one arena of praxis: incarnational expressions of the Christian faith in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. Focussing in on this arena of praxis this thesis has produced a re-reading of ‘incarnational geographies’ by presenting a more complicated and nuanced picture of the nature, dynamics and impact of the Christian faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’.
Questioning essentialist readings

This argument was founded by questioning two overly simplistic readings of faith-praxis in acts of public welfare and care. The first reading that was questioned was the assumption that the purpose and presence of Christians choosing to embrace ‘living amongst’ is motivated and structured wholly by the will to convert and proselytize others. The second was that the practice of ‘living amongst’ is purely a self-moralising process where what appears to be going-beyond-the-self is properly explained as reinventing the self, with charitable affects. (Cloke et al, 2005, 387). In the earlier part of this thesis these two readings were critiqued in two ways. Firstly I argued that the proselytisation reading does not take adequate account of the complex and diverse ways in which faith is shared and performed. Secondly I argued that the self-betterment reading neglects to take account of the spectrum of how and why the charitable and caring self is involved in other-focused acts of welfare, and that such involvement cannot be considered in an essentialist manner; either being read as simply altruistic or egotistic; self-orientated or other-orientated. The deconstruction of these two readings and the alternative more complex account of what, how and why Christians might embrace ‘living amongst’ contributed to the establishment of the central tenets of this thesis by developing five core questions to draw through the ethnographic research.

Making sense of the empirics

The ethnographic research on Eden/614UK has richly contributed to the development of my re-reading of ‘incarnational geographies’. A number of these contributions have emerged from building a socio-temporal understanding of incarnational landscapes (chapter 4) and others have emerged from an analysis of the actual performances and practices of the volunteers and staff involved with Eden/614UK on Fitton Hill (chapter 5). Although I do not wanting to repeat the actual argument of these two chapters there are number of key points to draw out in this overall conclusion. Similar to the research of Baker and Beaumont (2011) my research findings have emphasized how important it is to acknowledge the complex and fluid nature of religious praxis as it is performed and grounded in local contexts.
1. Incarnational geographies as processual and dynamic

Building a socio-temporal understanding of incarnational geographies developed this thesis’s re-reading because it revealed the dynamic, processual and complex nature of the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’. Five key research findings contributed to the development of this aspect of my argument:

i) The rationale and actual practice of the FBO in question shifted and developed over time as it adopted an incarnational approach in socio-economic deprived neighbourhoods. Even though the initial adoption of an incarnational approach by the Message Trust and the Eden Network was clearly as a form of evangelism the gradual development of the network indicated how the rationale behind the incarnational approach underwent a process of reinterpretation that included a holistic blend of ‘citizenry action’ and evangelism (Graham and Lowe, 2009).

ii) The motivation to sign up to the Eden network as a staff member or a volunteer was often a complex mix of wanting to see others come to faith and wanting to embrace the radical and extended opportunity to serve and support local community. This was illustrated through the biographic narratives, which in many cases drew upon comparisons between what other models of church had to offer and what the ‘incarnational’ approach had to offer. From this I argued that Eden/SA614UK could therefore be envisaged as an organizational ‘device’ (see Barnet et al, 2010) through which faith could be more deeply put into action for the sake of others in the community. I also argued that subsequently in some cases embracing an incarnational approach re-enchanted faith and belief as it prompted participants to reinterpret their own faith through a more communal and less individualistic lens.

iii) Through grounded participation alongside the local neighbourhood community many of the subjectivities of those ‘living amongst’ changed over time. Through the ethnographic research I was able to illustrate how the proximate involvement of Christians enacting a theology of incarnation in a deprived neighbourhood often led to a shifts in ways of relating to others. Encountering others, being alongside and
figuring out how best to support local neighbours, led to the reconfiguration of rationales for engagement, theologies, hopes and expectations.

iv) The practical and emotional hardship that faced volunteers and staff gave an indication of how often such an approach was grounded in a going-beyond-the-self. Exploring these emotional experiences helped ‘to create more lively and creative accounts’ of involvement (Conradson, 2003, 1989) and it illustrated the ‘everyday interactions, practices and feelings’ involved in the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ (Jupp, 2008, 341).

v) The practical and emotional hardships that faced volunteers and staff also gave an indication of how these faith-inspired practices were imbued with a complex mix of concerns for the self and concerns for the other. The burnout narratives in chapter four supported this re-reading as they illustrated how particular individuals felt that they lacked personal support and missed certain expressions of church that centered on personal development and pastoral care. Similarly, the experiences of ‘doing Eden’ provided a key illustration of how the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ was imbued with a complex mix of self-orientated and other-orientated concerns as the biographic narratives revealed the continual struggles that faced practitioners in coming to terms with personal expectations of the project’s outcomes and purpose.

2. Incarnational geographies as ethical landscapes?

Questioning how the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ might be considered to be co-constitutive of an ethical landscape has significantly extended the re-reading this thesis makes of incarnational geographies. In chapter five there were three key developments that helped produce a re-reading that went beyond the essentialist readings founded in the proselytisation and self-betterment debates. I will briefly conclude how each of these three developments contributed to the thesis’s re-reading.
i) Incarnational geographies and arenas of engagement

Chapter five of this thesis has explored how the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ has led to engagement in both voluntary and public sector local welfare provision. Exploring these localized involvements it was clear that these involvements led to several significant acts of service and support to, for and in some cases with, the local neighbourhood. Focusing on this involvement illustrated a number of key points.

Firstly it illustrated how adopting an incarnational approach led to several key individuals drawing upon a combination of faith-fuelled passion, local insight and personal frustration to see local community welfare provision enhanced. Secondly it illustrated that rather than the motive of such engagements being to see others converted or to better the self, these engagements often illustrated that the motive of those involved was to serve and transformed the local neighbourhood. Thirdly the involvement of volunteers and staff in local community could be considered as co-constitutive of an ethical landscape because it led to an intentional resistance to the logics of neoliberalism. In the case of the health sector this was embodied in the search to put the lives of patients before statistical outcomes and in the educational sector this was epitomised in the approach taken with pupils. Fourthly analysing local friendships between Christian-self and neighbourly-other illustrated that in many cases these friendships were not built on purely other-orientated and altruistic motives but a complex and dynamic mix of self-interest and selflessness.

ii) Incarnational geographies as performative

The general argument of this thesis has also drawn much of its substance from having turned a critical eye to how faith-praxis is actually performed, constituted and enacted in the context of different local arenas. This analytical lens has complicated and bought nuance to essentialist readings levied against incarnational geographies because it has paid attention to how care is performed and self-other relations enacted in and through local spaces of provision.
This was clearly illustrated in attending to the nature of interrelations between staff, volunteers and young people in the context of the youth-drop-in space. Far from being able to interpret this space as a space of coercive proselytisation I argued this micro-public space of encounter was better performatively envisaged as a space of welcome, care and hospitality. Self-other relations were asymmetrically structured in and through these performances and what emerged through this assemblage was the cultivation of ethical sensibilities that valued moments of generosity and open engagements with difference (see Darling, 2010). Triangulating my own observations and participatory experiences with the testimonies of young people and partnering agency representatives the research found that the space was interpreted in a similar experiential light.

**iii) Incarnational geographies and the postsecular**

‘Living amongst’ led to a number of progressive postsecular partnerships (see Cloke, 2010). The involvement of staff and volunteers of Eden/SA614UK in both the local voluntary and public sector led to a rapprochement of different positionalities mutually working together to support, serve and empower local people. In the setting of the local secondary school my research illustrated how the particular way in which the Eden youth worker performed faith was a catalyst for mutual partnership. Luke’s performance of faith in school was interpreted as neither threatening nor imposing but instead was attributed to being respectfully open to differences. In the context of local health provision it was the reflexive focus on care-giving selves that was influential in facilitating postsecular partnerships. Rather than an emphasis being placed on the distinctiveness of faith the emphasis was placed on the ability and integrity of the person to give something back to the local community. The significance of both of these postsecular partnerships to my overall re-reading is that such postsecular compacts illustrated how faith could be generously enrolled into acts of service for the sake of the common good without being either coercive or self-fulfilling (see Volf, 2011).
Section 2: Critical reflections on researching incarnational geographies

Having concluded how my research findings contribute towards the general argument of this thesis I now want to turn to critically reflect on my methodology. This involves a critical examination of my participatory approach and my positionality.

Participation

This thesis has emanated from a participatory ethnographic approach that combined a mix of observation and participation. In chapter three I articulated why this approach was fitting considering the nature of my topic and my own personal desire to enact a faith-fuelled form of ‘quiet’ activism. Without repeating this argument I want to reflectively stand back and draw out two points that relate to how such a methodological approach contributed to my thesis and how it therefore allows faith and religion to ‘speak back’ to geography (Yorgson et al, 636).

Firstly, this approach enabled me to build a nuanced and complex account of incarnational geographies because a participatory approach enabled me to attend not only to what volunteers and staff of Eden/SA614UK told me about their lives but it enabled me to witness what actually happens in practice. This mix of discourse and performance enabled me to build a re-reading of incarnational geographies that incorporated the experiential and the affectual. This enabled me to encapsulate something of the actual lived and immanent nature of faith-praxis and it made room for the non-verbal, the phenomenological and the embodied. Secondly, being a participant in this particular arena of faith-praxis enabled my research to become highly relational (Gobo, 2008). This meant that the ethnographic material I gathered was more detailed because, on the one hand, I developed and gained the trust of others, and on the other hand, because I was able to reflect with others as another co-contributer (Stoller, 2004).

It must be noted however that my participation was short lived. Even though I became a ‘fulltime’ volunteer it was still first and foremost a research placement whereby I had a start date and a finish date. I flipped in and flipped out of people’s lives and my
own ‘incarnational’ approach and ‘quiet’ activism was very temporary. With the limited time allowance given for a production of a PhD thesis it would be unrealistic to suggest I had spent more time ‘in the field’ however there are a number of other ways that I hope to ‘give back’ to the field now that the research and the write up are coming to a close. My own personal next steps\(^8\) are very much as a practitioner working within the context of a local YMCA and this action-based context allows me to take forward some of the critical reflections and personal lessons I have learnt through this participatory research into this next opportunity. Having also become somewhat embedded in a growing national network of reflective Christian welfare practitioners my aim is also to continue to play an active role in contributing towards these ‘conversations’.

**Positionality**

In chapter three I outlined how my research was built upon both a balance of embracing critical proximity and searching for critical distance. I argued that it is naïve to assume there is such a thing as a singular Christian homogenous identity and suggested that my own position might differ quite dramatically from another Christian, something I termed: ‘distance-within-proximity’. I also argued that my Christian faith could be productive of a form of critique that is ‘grounded-in-proximity’ as the emic position in itself also has particular value (see Knott, 2010). In search of critical distance I suggested that I relied upon four key maneuvers: attending to the views and experiences of ‘others’ from the local neighbourhood; asking critical questions throughout the research process; leaving and returning to the field several times and building critical intersubjective dialogue with participants. I noted that this ‘search’ created a number of ethical and practical difficulties. However grappling with the tension between proximity and distance led me to acknowledge both the explicitly positive and the implicitly questionable. It also led me move beyond the front edge of what is said and testified about Christian ‘mission’ in the incarnational arena and what actually happens in praxis over time and in different contexts.

\(^8\) I am now working at Exeter YMCA coordinating volunteers and leading a team of graduate interns through the first year of ‘Ten:10’ see www.ten-10.org.uk
Future directions

There are a numerous ways in which this research can be taken forward and extended.

i) The ethnographic research in this thesis has focused on one form of 'living amongst'. In chapter two of the thesis I outlined how there is a whole spectrum of incarnational re-engagement with the margins, stretching from individuals to organizations. This thesis has therefore developed a particular view of incarnational geographies and this view could be extended by further research into other Christian organizations and individuals who have adopted an incarnational approach. How for example would the faith-inspired praxis of 'living amongst' differ if it was not backed by a broader FBO or did not have an explicitly evangelistic ethos? Similarly, it would be interesting to compare the re-reading developed in this thesis with research that could be drawn from studies of the established church and its historical presence within similar deprived areas. Furthermore, looking beyond Britain and the 'developed' world, this research could be extended by turning to make sense of similar contemporary 'mission' initiatives and approaches in the Global South (see Bessenecker, 2006).

ii) This research has focused solely on Christian accounts of 'living amongst'. In order to build a comparative approach between religions and to extend this research beyond religion and faith it would be interesting to see further research delve into the place, purpose and practice of similar proximate practices of 'living amongst' that are motivated by other non-Christian faiths and ideological standpoints. The research in this thesis has shown how incarnational geographies are prompted and passionately fuelled by Christ's incarnation and the post-Christendom context in which the contemporary Christian church finds itself. It has also illustrated how such theological praxis leads to certain postsecular rapprochements. However, the potential contribution of non-Christian theologies and ideological standpoints within such compacts still remains to be understood.
iii) As the current conservative government’s Big Society plans are unfolded, further research crucially needs to be undertaken into the impact such policies have on incarnational geographies; will these faith-inspired landscapes for example be drastically changed, and if so how will the interconnection between Big Society, faith and the public sector shift and re-shape emergent incarnational involvements?

iv) Further research needs to be undertaken into how incarnational geographies might be considered ‘spiritual landscapes’ (see Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009). Much of this thesis has focused its attention on social landscapes and the agency of those who enact a theo-ethical vision by ‘living amongst’, there is however still further work that can be done into how the ineffable and divine might be performatively and phenomenologically interwoven into the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’. This would bring further insight into how the faith-inspired praxis of ‘living amongst’ draws on spiritual belief by nurturing, nourishing and evoking a consciousness that is alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture (Cloke, 2009). Drawing upon Dewsbury and Cloke’s notion of spiritual landscapes as ‘co-constituting sets of relations between bodily existence, felt practice and faith in things that are immanent, but not yet manifest’ (2009, 696) would also contribute to the re-reading given in this thesis by attending to the interconnections between faith, place and power and how the such discernment prompts an ‘engagement with the spiritual interior’ and leads to an alternative interpretation of the ‘inner spiritual nature of the political, economic and cultural institutions’ (see Cloke, 2011).
Appendix:

Appendix i: Research itinerary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eden/SA614UK Oldham research undertaken</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 months Ethnographic placement: January 2010- June 2010:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 400 hours of volunteering and participant observation</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 staff interviews varying between 1-3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 volunteer interviews varying between 1-2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 partner agency interviews between 45mins-1.5hrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 interviews with young people between 10-30mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 local resident interviews between 30-45 mins</td>
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<tr>
<th>SA614UK Aston Research undertaken (not used in thesis)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 months Ethnographic placement:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 hours of volunteering and participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 staff interviews varying between 1-2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 volunteer interviews varying between- 1-2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 partner agency interviews between 30-60mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 interviews with young people 10-30mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 local resident interviews 25-60mins</td>
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