



**RECONNECTED**  
**RELEASING THE IMAGINATION AROUND**  
**MISSION AND CHURCH IN A**  
**POST MODERN WORLD**

# Church on the Edge

## Missionary

## Apologetics

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What I need to do today is to both present what COTE is about and the research I have undertaken. BUT COTE itself was a piece of action of action research into new forms of church so this presentation outlines some of the COTE findings which help set the context alongside the practical theology research that has been completed for this course.



# Church on the edge



How do we journey  
in mission with  
young people?

What might  
Donovan's new  
place look like?

## Looking for answers through praxis

What can youth  
work & emerging  
church learn from  
each other?

How do we  
collapse the gap  
between church  
and mission?

What might  
a missional approach  
look like?

How do we grow  
church from  
scratch?

What does Tacking  
look like in reality?

It set out to explore a number of questions

Quote donovan

# The Imaginary lid



Part of the pretext was that church itself limits mission as we are caught in this inbetween time, essentially we are in a missionary context, but if you were a missionary you would start with the church as we know it.



# The Imaginary lid

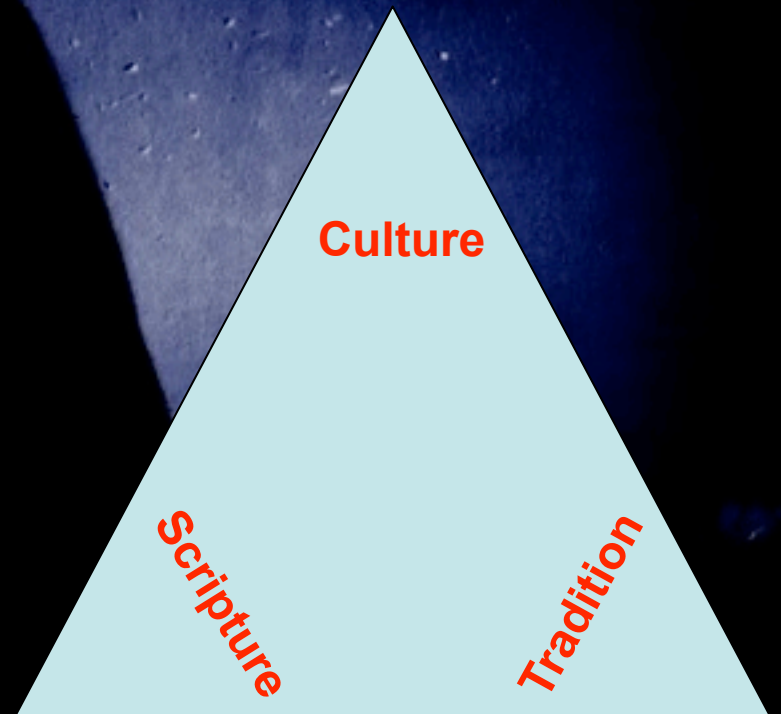


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Part of the pretext was that church itself limits mission as we are caught in this inbetween time, essentially we are in a missionary context, but if you were a missionary you would start with the church as we know it.

# COTE Findings

- Bridge Metaphor holds little weight biblically
- Missionary Tradition advocates inculturation
- Cultural engagement through relational mission encouraged faith development



Reflecting on the project using Grenz and Franks framework for theological reflection Church on The Edge identified a number of findings.

Firstly that the established idea of mission as a bridge into church holds little weight biblically and is not consistent with the images of church offered in scripture.

Secondly the missionary traditions of Vincent Donovan and Stanley Jones, Christ of the Indian road and Water Buffalo Theology, written by Kosuke Koyama, reinforce the need to move beyond a contextualisation of the message towards a journey of discovery on both sides. Robert Schreier sees this journey as inculturation which he describes as “the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical insertion and assimilation between them”.

The emphasis being the *reciprocal* nature that allows the process to question our current assumptions (answers) about what church and mission is.[4]

Finally having looked at the Biblical text and traditions, we turn to the third part of Grenz and Franks' method: culture. The COTE learning here is a story of possibilities - as the workers encountered young people the impact on the workers themselves was one of enlightenment and a broadening view and understanding of God, a growing recognition that the god we know may not be God. As Meister Eckhart prayed “god rid me of God.”[5] This further supports the reciprocal nature of the missional undertaking. When one goes out to intentionally be and grow church, it is a journey which fuels the individual in their understanding of God, enabling them to see the missionary endeavour as an act of worship to God, and encounter the presence of God in the whole process

# What is Church?

- Church is Mystery (Eph 5 v 31 and 32)
- Described analogically e.g. body, vine, etc
- Images suggest '*attitude and a course of action*'
- John 10 v10

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Due to the joined up nature of the project I followed Grenz and Franks' model into the literature review. Thinking about church we turned to Scripture,

Part of the problem in helping us move forward is in our thinking about Church- firstly We have a fairly static and fixed idea about what is Church, secondly many see church as holy cow that cannot be challenged and questioned.

Generally the research and lit review questioned the authenticity of our views and concepts of Church based on some of the following.

Church is Mystery (Eph 5 v 31 and 32) BUT we can't cope with this kind of uncertainty we need things pinned down we need to know what is and what isn't church. Even Dulles in Models of church starts with this point but goes on to give definition and a typology.

Church is Described analogically e.g. body, vine, etc Jesus and in the letters use similes and metaphor the common thing amongst these images is that .....

These Images suggest '*attitude and a course of action*' They often talk about process and outcome but we have this static idea about church Hence Planting rather than growing

John 10 v10. Life in all fullness is the key scripture as we move with Bosch in Father sending the Son then the Spirit and together they send the church – John 10 v10 offers we focus on as it sets the context for mission and church.

# What is Mission?

- New place
- Kingdom Centred
- Process and Outcome
- Ontological Imperative



# Two sides of the same coin

- Church
  - Church is Mystery (Eph 5 v 31 and 32)
  - Described analogically e.g. body, vine, etc
  - Images suggest *'attitude and a course of action'*
  - John 10 v10
- Mission
  - New place
  - Kingdom Centred
  - Process and Outcome
  - Ontological Imperative

So when we put these together

# Cultural considerations

- Truth is relative
- This is my truth
- It is all one
- Individualist consumerism
- Meta-narratives reflect the interests of the powerful
- It is all relative
- Hyper criticism

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Finally the cultural considerations outlines were a challenge to the research paper as where do you start

Nancy Murphy highlights there is a difference between the deconstructive European movement and some of the more constructive arguments put forward by the Anglo-American philosophers. A good example of this more constructive take on post modernity is that of Stiver, who identifies three strands; a critique of modernism, a paradigm shift and, importantly in this case, a 'sketch of the future'. [1] If we are to take the cultural context seriously within the reciprocal nature of inculturation this "sketch of the future" could fuel the re-imagining of church within Grenz and Franke's framework.

So I drew some basic PMC and missional responses to help sketch a future

[1] Grenz and Franke p. 19 -21.

# Our old metaphor

Young  
People

Youth Club

Church





# A new metaphor



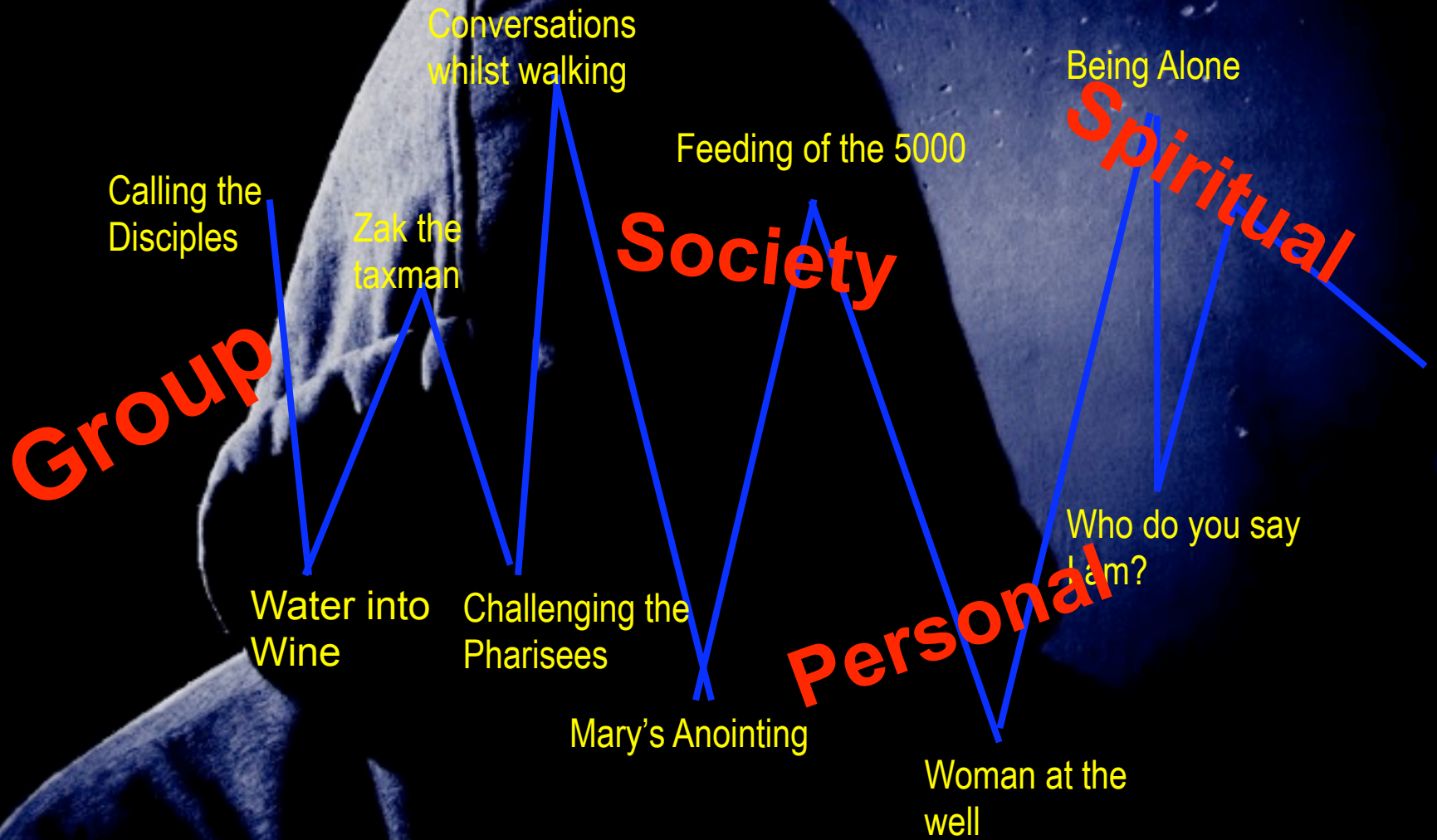
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I was offering the new metaphor of tacking and seeing if this theological and missional helped liberate imagination and effectiveness

Tacking - Helping people and society become more fully human, by a process of purposeful and deliberate, but informal interactions.



# Jesus and Tacking



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The inspiration for tacking came from Jesus as he encountered people and the world around him

**Personal Development** - The growth of the individual, becoming more Christ-like and fully human. Being okay with questions and doubts, accepting different viewpoints and people.

**Group Development** - The growth of the group, becoming friends and community, developing openness and acceptance to other, and staying part of the group even though you may disagree.

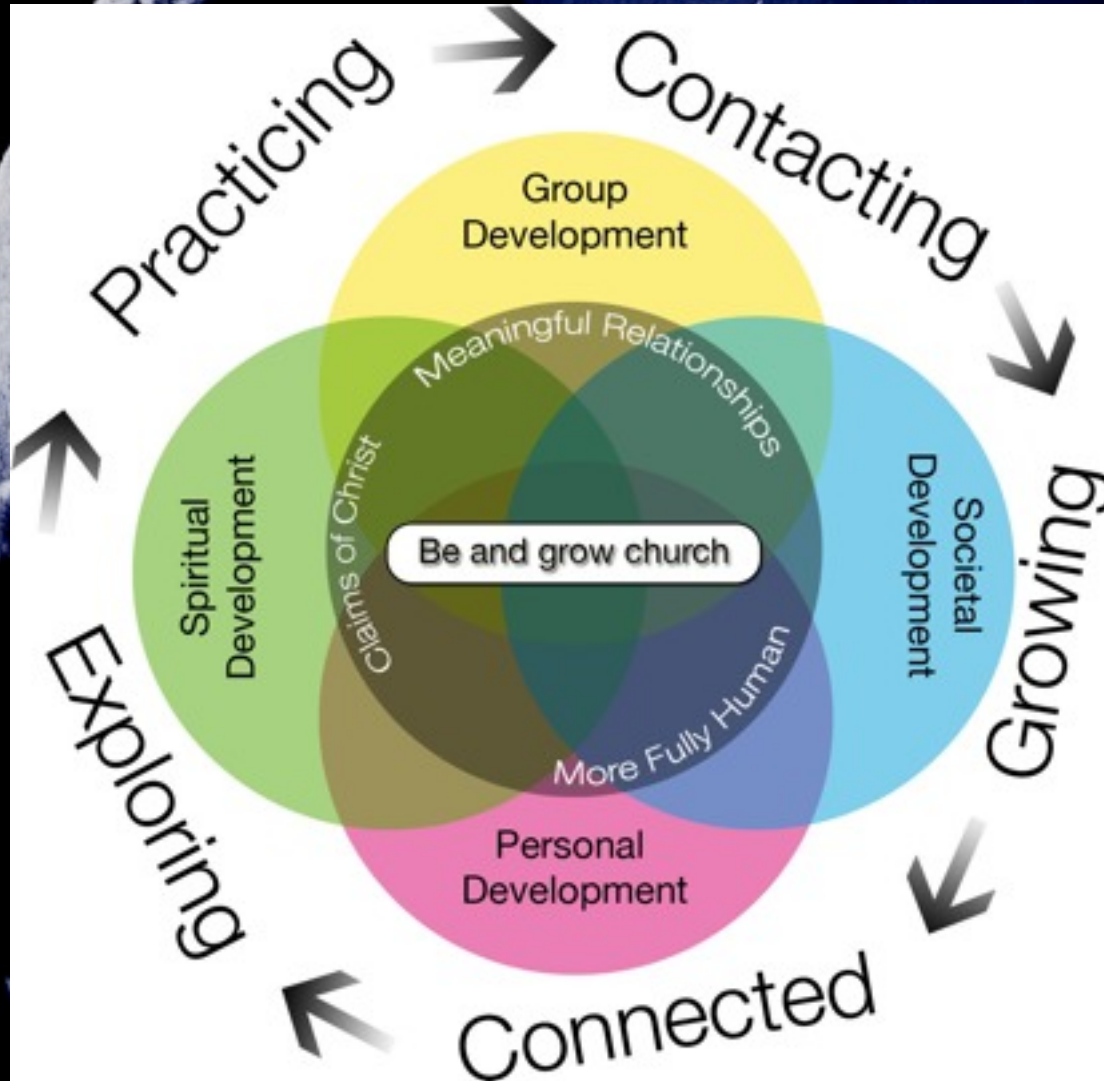
**Societal Development** - Being prepared to challenge the accepted, working towards a more equal and fair society.

**Spiritual Development** - developing an awareness of Christ in others and the world around you.



COTE goes through 5 basic stages

# Drawing the strands together



And when you draw the strands together it looks something like this.



# Missional Ecclesiology/Ecclesio-Dei

Engaging in mission intentionally to be an expression of and grow church, changes the paradigm.

It STOPS being a question of when does this become church with all the LIMITS that places, and starts with the question what is God doing? With all the possibilities that embraces....



# Hypothesis

Many UK based practitioners hold a dualist distinction between mission and church, that can be limiting, however by challenging this distinction and understanding the Church on The Edge (COTE) process, mission orientated practitioners are released into a creative space, and way of thinking that enables them to engage more effectively with the communities they serve.

# The Research

Level One - New Workers

Level Two – More experienced practitioners

Level Three – Key Workers/managers

National Trainers

1. A questionnaire was carried out with 7 new youth workers (specifically those in the first year of training on a degree in youth and community work and applied theology) to ascertain the views around missional ecclesiology of people who have not encountered the project.
2. A focus group of 6 was undertaken specifically with a group of more experienced workers who had undergone COTE training to assess the benefit and impact the training has had on their thinking and work.
3. Structured interviews were undertaken with 5 key workers who have encountered the project. These workers were selected as they are usually leading a local missional/church organisation and have a reasonable amount of autonomy to shape their local project.
4. Structured interviews with 3 national trainers, who often deliver training to church staff and volunteers around mission and fresh expressions. These were selected to gain a broad picture about how people approach church and mission and if they find the COTE methodology to be a helpful model for learners.

# Research Variables

- Purposed dominance
- Coupled questions
- Impact of the trainer
- Distance

An issue that needed enlightenment was the nature of a perceived orthodoxy or purposed dominance around church, it is church it must be right, so to counter this and other research variables we had to care to shape the research appropriately.

Swinton and Mowat recognise the telos laden nature of practice, and conclude that as Practical Theology is a quest for truth, it must examine the theories and assumptions underlying practice. It is interpretative that may offer challenging insights into the tradition, it stays close to experience, and is fundamentally missiological. From its conception COTE set out to do much of this and so one may argue that this research could simply tell the wider story. [2] However although COTE has been interpretative and as an exercise in faithful improvisation, had an impact that does challenge insights from the tradition the rigour of reporting on this would not have been enough.

Due to the nature of COTE "Contextual, Explanatory, Evaluative and Generative"[1] questions were used. In some cases such as the questionnaire coupling of questions were used to triangulate responses but this meant Explanatory, Evaluative and Generative questions were together making extrapolation more complex.

A variable that needed to be considered within the research was how a strong trainer may impact the research. Therefore a focus group was undertaken with a specific group, of more experienced workers who had undergone COTE training to assess the benefit and impact the training has had on their thinking and work. It was felt a minimum period of six weeks was needed between the training and the group, to avoid any bias based on the training process and to see if the issues addressed had taken root in any practical way. Questions were directed towards the generative in order to provide information on both the training processes and impact on practice, taking a view that if the participants really value the concepts it will affect their practice.

The reality of the project meant interviewing people from the south west to the north of Scotland so all the interviews were conducted via telephone. This meant that a full transcript could not be taken due to technological restrictions so records were sent to the participants to agree

# COTE Findings and Reconnected Findings

- Bridge Metaphor holds little weight biblically
- Missionary Tradition advocates inculturation
- Cultural engagement through relational mission encouraged faith development
- Little understanding of ecclesiology
- Bridge is not working so need a better missiology
- Engagement encourages questions leading to better practice



# The Findings



# The Findings

## Level One

New Practitioners or  
less experienced vol-  
unteers

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Perceived orthodoxy  
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More experienced  
and/ or trained  
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More experienced  
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Practice raises questions  
creating some movement

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## Level Three

Project Leaders with  
significant relational  
engagement

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New Practitioners or  
less experienced vol-  
unteers

Perceived orthodoxy  
stops questioning

## Level Two

More experienced  
and/ or trained  
Practitioners

Practice raises questions  
creating some movement

## Level Three

Project Leaders with  
significant personal  
engagement

Practice raises questions and challenges  
orthodoxy enabling some growth

# The Findings





# The Findings

**Level One**  
New Practitioners or  
less experienced vol-  
unteers

Perceived orthodoxy  
stops questioning

PERCEIVED ORTHODOXY LESSENS  
IMPACT OF NEW ECCLESIOLOGY  
BUT STORY CAUSES QUESTIONS

**Level Two**  
More experienced  
and/ or trained  
Practitioners

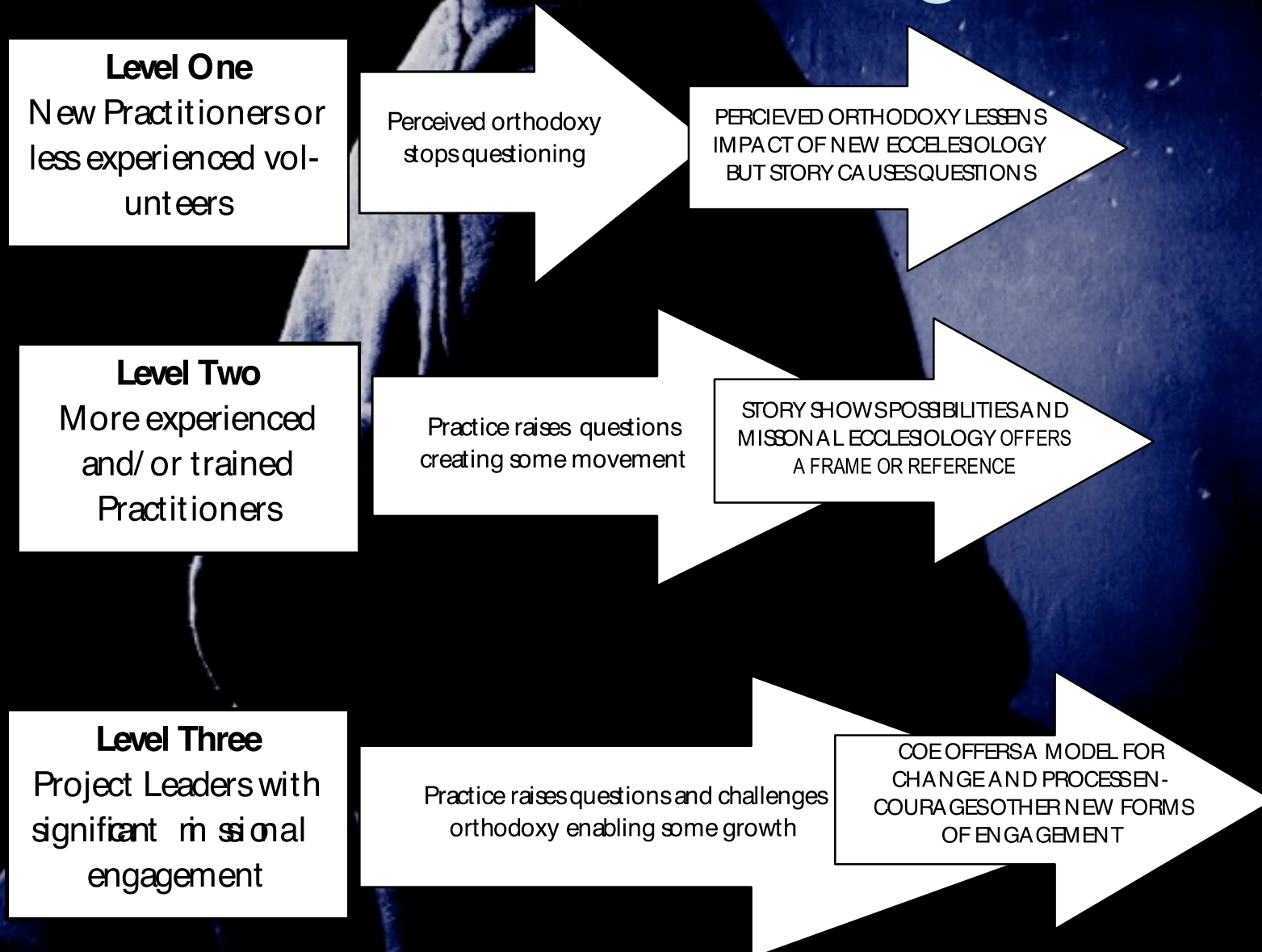
Practice raises questions  
creating some movement

STORY SHOWS POSSIBILITIES AND  
MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY OFFERS  
A FRAME OR REFERENCE

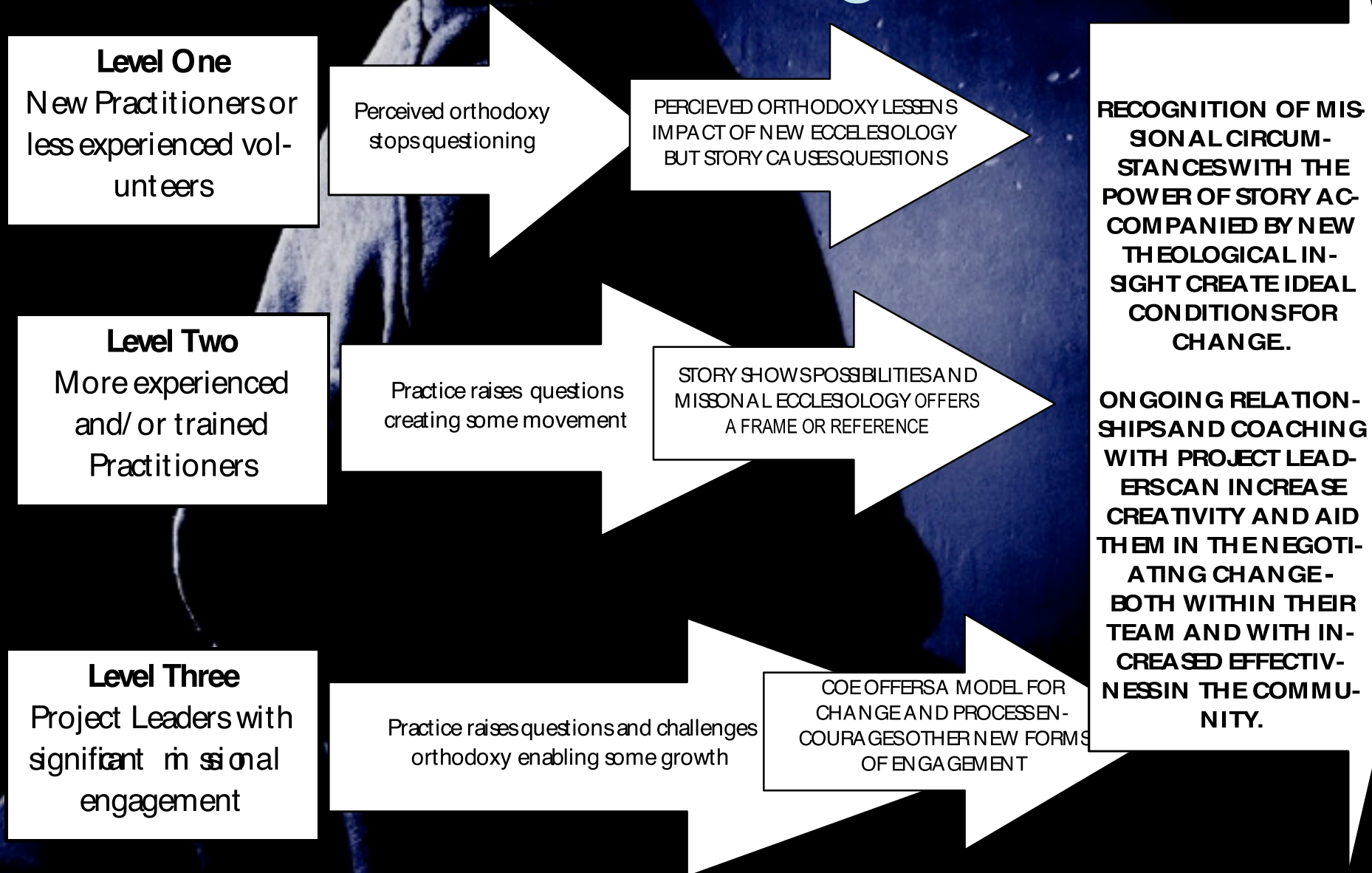
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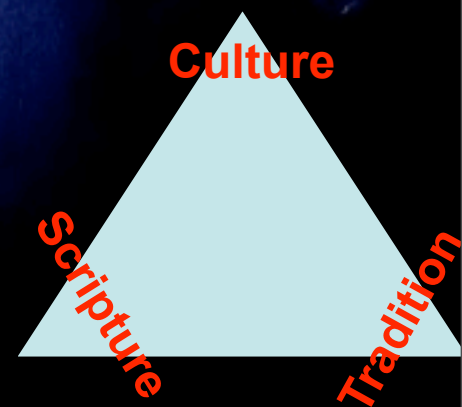


# The Findings



# Theological Conclusions

- COTE as a missionary apologetic (**scripture**)
- COTE as unfolding Habitus (**culture**)
- COTE as a post modern expression of Sobornost (**tradition**)



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Alan Richardson suggests "All Christian doctrine arises from Christian experience".[1] in many ways this statement validates the praxis approach to mission and ecclesiology (the theology of church). It also gives space for developing doctrine and possibly theology in and out of the current context or experience. Both the key workers and those participating in the focus groups were expressing this level of praxis that had already begun to challenge their thinking and ecclesiological paradigm. Their experiences had challenged their mindsets, and when presented with an alternative that was both theologically rooted and practice (story) driven, it offered a new way of interpreting their already dawning experiences.

This research is both the story of COTE following Missio-Dei and the stories of the participants following Missio-Dei. Therefore to value the experiences of where those already following Missio-Dei, and the reciprocal nature of this, (as suggested in the abstract) a better term than missional ecclesiology would be Ecclesio-Dei. This denotes the missional and ecclesiological task more fully, replacing the empathise back onto God and synthesis required by the biblical narrative.

Reinforcing this is the concept of Соборность: translated as Sobornost meaning a spiritual community of many jointly living people, was originally a philosophical term, it was used by Nikolai Lossky and other 20th century Russian thinkers to refer to a middle way of co-operation between several opposing ideas.[1] This was based on Hegel's "dialectic triad"—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—and Lossky defined sobornost as "*the combination of freedom and unity of many persons on the basis of their common love for the same absolute values.*"[2] Rowan Williams discusses the term a number of times in his study of Eastern Orthodox theologians.[3] In relation to this study Sobornost offers a third way and helpful theological backdrop to COTE and the work of Bourdieu around Habitus – cultures way of behaving and norms making society possible, which we are socialised into but Bordieu suggests it is more reciprocal and unfolding in that we we impact habitus as we engage.

So a central part of Ecclesio-Dei is the journey at times with non-believers (who may have opposing ideas antithesis) and the journey towards life in all its fullness that sobornost affirms (thesis). And Sornost sythesis - As Williams expounds building on Bulgakov "the church is essentially the fellowship of the Spirit, held together by the ontological bond of God's love,..... the rest is a matter of conditioned historical decisions and policies."



# Recommendations

- Strength of the Culture, Scripture and Tradition model
- Develop an Ecclesio-Dei Community of Practice
- Mentoring and coaching of workers

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Having discussed some of the theological constructs around we now turn to consider some practical applications when we apply the learning from this research. Firstly it may be useful to revisit Grenz and Franke's method for 'doing' theology in a post modern age that uses the interaction of culture, Biblical text and tradition in forming the initial project. In the light of the research findings this framework can easily provide a good set of parameters for training and dialogue. Whilst discussing culture, it is entirely possible to get participants to discuss the communities they find themselves in and so begin to understand how far they have travelled with the Missio-Dei and then decide how much to focus on the story over the ecclesiology.

Secondly Ecclesio-Dei needs to be robust, drawing from the biblical narrative and text and presented alongside the story. By carefully introducing appropriate stories this may counter inertia due to the purposed dominance. Finally the traditions presented in the discussion earlier (Sobornost) can offer significant weight to the process. These traditions may offer a certain security and when balanced with the missionary traditions and stories and again offers participants a secure backdrop to address the need for a paradigm shift towards Ecclesio-Dei and a re-imaging of church and mission.

The need for mentoring/coaching and some sort of other support/network of youth ministry practitioners following the Missio-Dei is also clearly identified. Whilst the advances in technology can help make this network more easily accessible and maintained the nature of the work and demands of cutting edge practice demand something more.

One model that could be developed is that of a community of practice.[3] Etienne Wenger suggests many people assume and approach learning as that which 'has a beginning and an end; that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of teaching'. [4] However they recognise that learning can also take place beyond this and essentially humans are learning all the time in community. It is from this that they develop the idea of community of practice, identifying three core aspects that make community of practice as they define it. These being *The domain*, the community has a shared interest area, *The community*, within this domain the community share learning and dialogue, and *The practice*, members of the community are themselves practitioners in the domain of the community. This defined and dialogical process is akin to the iterative habitus unfolding process mentioned in previous slide. However here the community of practice can itself be culture forming and enable experimentation and growth that can then be applied back in the individual communities the members serve. The reflective practitioner approach of many involved would suggest that it could be an ideal model to adopt in this case.

The coaching/mentor role is more obvious and well known, but as one of the national trainers suggested having someone who can ask the "*type of questions that come from a practitioner or experience backed worker who can ask the right missional question*" is important. [5] This role can be easily developed and within the field of youth and community work the role of a non line manager or supervisor is familiar. Working on an adapted model of this would be a straightforward way to progress. Both roles, that of the mentor and a facilitator role for the community of practice need to be planned and intentionally developed or they will be missed. Therefore a business plan has been developed to approach trusts for a key worker for COTE. [6]