# Chapter 4: Interview Participants as internet users

## 4.   Introduction

The next four chapters describe in detail the findings from the three strands of the research project. This chapter introduces the interview participants and their parishes. The interview results reported include the leaders' views and use of the internet. Chapter 5 looks at the creation, maintenance and governance of websites and includes the longitudinal survey and first content analysis results. Chapter 6 describes the role of churches as information providers – what is being published and what are the decision processes behind the publication of information? Lastly, Chapter 7 shows how churches and leaders are using social media and interactivity.

Interview participants are introduced below. The chapter outlines the profiles of the parishes and the church leaders. The responses to questions relating to the ways in which leaders use the internet for a variety of tasks are presented, along with the leaders' views on websites and email in particular. It concludes by reporting what the leaders' ideal church website might contain.

## 4.1   Interview process and recruitment

Interviews with church leaders were conducted between January and September 2011, with the first interested party being interviewed in October 2010, one in January 2011 and the final conversation recorded with an interested party in November 2011. The recruitment process is described in section 3.15.3.1   above. Interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after each took place, allowing initial assessment of the themes which were emerging. Despite the mix of denominations and locations, key points and topics were common to many

interviewees and once the point was reached where no new themes were emerging, no more interview requests were issued.

All respondents' details have been made anonymous. Both leaders and their churches have been given invented, representative names. Assurances of anonymity were given to the participants and the intention is that individual churches cannot be identified. Therefore data or opinions that could have identified a specific individual are excluded from these findings. Churches or area names that are not the main church of the respondent have been replaced with the symbol [•] rather than a further fictional name.

Respondents were, on the whole, recruited by email from churches whose websites were included in the content analysis sample. This means it is not wholly representative of the area's church leaders. One interesting question is whether the email requests that were unanswered were dismissed as spam, ignored, or did not in fact reach their intended recipient. It is likely that the interview sample is biased towards those with sufficient interest in either research or the internet to have been willing to participate.

## 4.2   Leaders and their parishes

Table 4-1 below sets out the invented names used in the project and the key characteristics of the interviewees' locations. For consistency, 'parish' is the term used to refer to a particular church's catchment area, although it is acknowledged that this is generally seen as an Anglican/ Catholic term. Likewise, 'leader' is used to describe the ministers, rectors, vicars and priests-in-charge who made up the interviewees.

| Leader | Church name | Parish profile | Anglican parish or equivalent area: rank in Indices of Multiple Deprivation (12682 is least deprived parish) | Anglican parish or equivalent area: decile of population Higher decile=least deprived |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Clergy* | | | | |
| Robert | St James | Inner City Anglican | 506 | 1st |
| Colette | High Road Methodist | Inner City Methodist | 835 | 1st |
| Benjamin | Valley Methodist | Seaside Methodist | 1,483 | 2nd |
| Mark | St Michael | City Suburban Anglican | 4,051 | 4th |
| Helen | Central Baptist | Town centre Baptist | 5,107 | 5th |
| Kester | St Bride | Town Centre Catholic | 6,806 | 6th |
| Aaron | East Methodist | City Suburban Methodist | 7,921 | 7th |
| Wendy | St Timothy | Town Suburban Anglican | 8,609 | 7th |
| Thomas | St Margaret | Town Anglican | 11,790 | 10th |
| Gayle | Christ Methodist | Town Centre Methodist | 11,921 | 10th |
| James | St Saviour | Town Suburban Catholic | 12,353 | 10th |
| Lee | Shelley Baptist | City Suburban Baptist | 12,642 | 10th |
| *Webmasters* | | | | |
| Oscar | New Life Baptist | Webmaster, Town Centre | | |
| Howard | Gate Ecumenical | Webmaster; City Suburban | | |
| Alan | Bridge Baptist | Town Suburban Church | | |
| *Interested parties* | | | | |
| William | n/a | Publisher & webmaster | | |
| Michael | n/a | Communications professional | | |
| Murray | n/a | Local communications | | |

*Table 4-1 Interviewees and characteristics of parishes*

Background information of note concerns the churches' location, affluence and the churchgoers' age.

## 4.3    Location

Whilst there are not representative churches from every denomination in every kind of location, apart from rural, there are churches from a variety of places. Given that the choice of location of the church was a secondary consideration in the

recruitment of interviewees, it would have been outside the time scale of the project to attempt to have a completely representative sample. The webmasters were all from Baptist churches, recruited following an article in the Baptist Times. Although relatively local to the project's main catchment area, their churches were not amongst those which had been sampled for content analysis.

### 4.3.1 Neighbourhood affluence or deprivation

In 2011 there were 12,682 parishes within the Church of England. Statistics supplied by the Chelmsford Diocese have ranked each parish according to the 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)[15] (McLennan et al. 2011) so it is possible to identify the areas that are most and least deprived relative to the rest of England. Baptist, Catholic & Methodist churches do not map directly onto the Church of England parishes but it is possible to identify the relevant area, particularly given the sample was originally drawn with geographical equivalence as a factor (see 3.7.2 in the methodology). The last two columns of Table 4-1 above list the rank of each church or equivalent area whose leader was interviewed and the decile in which this ranking places the church. Lower ranking numbers (the least deprived ranks at number 12,682) and lower deciles indicate higher levels of deprivation.

Two churches in this study – Anglican St James and High Road Methodist – are located in inner city areas which are classified as some of the most deprived English places (the top 10%). Valley Methodist, a seaside parish, is in the top 20%. Other areas have fewer factors scoring highly on the IMD. The equivalent Anglican parish for Shelley Baptist church ranks as 12,642nd in England – in the 10% least deprived

---

[15] Thanks are due to Canon Don Cardy for supplying the IMD ranked data

areas. The sample has more churches in less deprived areas, but does include churches from a range of situations. It was mentioned in interview that the congregation at St James is international in its nature, a foreseeable consequence of the church being located in the inner city. Understanding the social background of the churches in question helps contextualise the answers given in interview.

## 4.4    Congregation age

| Church name | Age profile of congregation: as recorded in the interviews |
|---|---|
| Central Baptist | predominantly 50+ but with a growing, very very healthy under 18s |
| Christ Methodist | a lot more people in the 20-45 age group now than we did have |
| East Methodist | if you averaged it out around about 60 as there are some young and some old |
| High Road Methodist | It is a mix. We have young people, children, babies we have middle aged and elderly people as well |
| Shelley Baptist | we are generally an older congregation |
| St Bride | [...] might be more elderly with some young families, [...] is mostly young families |
| St James | the majority of the congregation are between 30 and 45 |
| St Margaret | Lots of families but a preponderance of 50-plus |
| St Michael | it's right across the age range |
| St Saviour | I would say younger families |
| St Timothy | Large proportion elderly, 50 upwards |
| Valley Methodist | mix of ages |

*Table 4-2 Broad classification of congregations' age profile, as identified during interviews*

Two parishes self-identify as having predominantly older congregations, the others suggest a spread of age ranges. The age profiles do not appear to be related to location – High Road Methodist and St James are both inner city, but characterise themselves differently; the variation here could be a denominational difference.

## 4.5    Size of congregation

One church has a regular congregation of 25; others approach 200 on a regular basis. These quantitative differences are summarised in Table 4-3 below. The variety in size is probably not attributable to any difference in denomination except it should be noted that Catholic parishes are generally larger in size and fewer in number than their Anglican counterparts.

The size and age breakdowns given in Table 4-2 and Table 4-3 are direct quotations from the interviews.

| Church name | Size: as recorded in the interviews |
| --- | --- |
| Central Baptist | membership is about 250 |
| Christ Methodist | we're creeping up to 300 again |
| East Methodist | 25 in three of them and ten in one of them |
| High Road Methodist | 150 members |
| Shelley Baptist | 160 members |
| St Bride | 220-240 at Mass on a Sunday |
| St James | we average about 50 |
| St Margaret | Electoral roll 400, 180-200 in attendance |
| St Michael | can be up to 200 people |
| St Saviour | I have three churches and I have an attendance on Sundays of round about 500 |
| St Timothy | it's got an electoral roll of 300 |
| Valley Methodist | Half a dozen to 80 members over 4 churches |

*Table 4-3 Congregation size or attendance, as identified at interview*

## 4.6    Interviewees' profiles

### 4.6.1  Leadership status

Level of experience and seniority varied between respondents. Some were relatively new to their position. Others managed parish areas with two or more churches, often with different age profiles and characteristics. For example Mark (St Michael,

Anglican) has two church buildings, one of which is a suburban modern building, but he also has a historic village-set traditional church under his leadership. Aaron (East Methodist) has four congregations under his jurisdiction, the smallest of which has a membership of ten. Kester (St Bride, Catholic) looks after two churches in neighbouring towns.

### 4.6.2 Gender and age

Age and gender of interviewees were not factors in the recruitment of volunteers and no questions were asked to identify the respondents' age. The final sample of clergy interviewees was four women and eight men; all webmasters and interested parties were male.

### 4.6.3 Internet use

Leaders' own experience with websites and online tools varied too. Although all used at least some of a variety of online tools, hardware or gadgets, levels of enthusiasm and engagement differed with some actively seeking out novelty and others being deliberately late adopters. No marked differences were noted between genders, with the women in leadership as likely to be engaged online as the men. Age of the leaders was not a consideration. No leader said that they did not use the internet at all for any purpose.

## 4.7  Leaders as internet users

### 4.7.1 Attitudes towards the internet

Part of the interview was intended to assess the leaders' personal opinion of the web and the services it offers. It was felt that there may be an identifiable relationship between the leaders' experience of the internet and their expectations

and attitudes towards their churches' websites. This section will explore the views expressed on the positive and negative aspects of the internet as a phenomenon, with further sections also exploring the leaders' personal relationship with online information seeking. These questions were related to the second aim, and objective 10.

### 4.7.2  Internet Positives

Interviewees were asked if they agreed that 'the internet has changed life for the better.' All the church leaders did suggest this was the case; with Robert (St James, Anglican) being more reluctant to agree unequivocally:

> *…to me it's on a par with junk food, motorways, environmental pollution, etc – it's as good as all that, as well as having some extremely convenient and useful aspects. (Robert, St James)*

Respondents suggested a range of reasons why access to the internet had benefits. Time savings in terms of easily locating resources were a key benefit, allowing swift research work and the ability to look answers up almost instantly.

James (St Saviour, Catholic) mentioned online book retail as important. Helen noted that online book retail may have been a factor in the closure of the town's dedicated Christian bookshop, presenting a negative side to the changes in book buying habits. Others also used online banking and other retail sites.

All respondents used email and many cited the ability to correspond via email as being a benefit. Further consideration of the leaders' use of email is below in section 4.8.2  below. Other benefits mentioned included:

- Access to sermons and resources beyond one's own church (Helen, Lee)

- Podcasts for those who are not keen readers (Helen)

- Access to information on the move (Kester)

- Ease of genealogical research (Benjamin).

In a considered answer, Kester suggested that one of the major benefits of the internet was that it allowed 'a light [to be] shone in dark places' and expose scandal or wrongdoing more easily.

Web access was accepted as part of everyday life and an established method of gathering information and communication. Robert (St James, Anglican) was a slight dissenting voice when he expressed concern about the cost of the equipment needed to set up an internet connection (others had suggested generational differences might be a limiting factor, see section 6.6 below). The next section will consider some of the negative aspects of the internet as discussed in the interviews.

### 4.7.3 Disadvantages

Compared with suggesting positive aspects, more negative consequences were suggested and these will be considered here.

### 4.7.3.1 Bullying

Wendy (St Timothy, Anglican) cited online bullying as a cause for concern amongst younger people, and also said:

> *I do know that there can be problems with social networking – it can take over people's lives, it can cause an awful lot of pain…with children just being nasty and malicious to others so I think there's a, there is a downside to it which you have to be aware of.* (Wendy, St Timothy)

### 4.7.3.2 Security of information

One specific example came from James at St Saviour, a suburban Catholic church. On the one hand, he did not sign up to Facebook or other social networking sites because he was cautious about sharing personal details. On the other, he had purchased goods over the internet from sites he had identified by Google search. This had not occurred to him as contradictory behaviour, but was noted as potentially so during the course of the interview. For James, a generic suspicion of online communication was held to be more of a potential problem than providing banking details to an internet retailer. Subsequently, his justification for this contradictory position was that online retailing saved him time, whereas social networking was a timewaster, however, he remained suspicious of sharing personal data.

### 4.7.3.3 Timewasting

The possibilities of wasting time online were mentioned by others; with Mark (St Michael, Anglican) admitting to spending a whole day responding to comments on a blog. Kester would probably use this as an example to back up his assertion that time spent online can be a 'gross distraction.' Other timewasters mentioned were the problems relating to the necessary hardware and software (Robert), fruitless searches or too many search results (Wendy and Colette).

### 4.7.3.4 Effect on relationships

Robert had serious misgivings about the way moving communication online affects community:

> *I think it enhances the anonymisation of, and therefore alienation, and depersonalisation of community and what it is to be a neighbour* (Robert, St James)

This is the more extreme conclusion of views voiced by others who were concerned that email might damage face-to-face relationships; either by misunderstandings arising through messages being misread or by reducing the amount of personal contact. Email was described as a 'blunt instrument' (Thomas, St Margaret). Concern was generally expressed that online may not be the most appropriate forum for a conversation and whether sufficient care is taken when choosing how to send a message. Helen expressed her misgivings about having congregation members as Facebook friends as it meant she altered her way of interacting with non-church friends (see section 7.4 ).

### 4.7.3.5 Age of users

There was a general perception that the internet is for the younger generation and churches with an overall elderly population may scale back their activities or not begin them in the first place, because there is no expected audience within the church (see also section 6.6 below).This could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. With no online content the younger members may feel their information needs are not met by the church leading them to either seek alternative places where they can engage more flexibly with a home church, or more likely, leave altogether.

### 4.7.3.6 Accuracy and completeness of information

Information literacy was cited by Wendy and to a certain extent by James. Wendy suggested one drawback of online information is that people tend to assume that all information is true, and gave an example of a quiz night where incorrect answers had been provided. James (St Saviour, Catholic) expressed concern that extreme or dogmatic information could be taken as representative of the church's teaching, when in fact it would only be the website producers' opinions. Michael (national church communications officer) made a related point that the national organisation had to be cautious about publishing a definitive church policy, when local leaders

were autonomous and could make their own decisions on matters. So a website for the national church could not risk setting up conflict between itself, enquirers and local churches. Hence, even the relatively simple task of publishing more than basic information can become complicated.

### 4.7.3.7 Interactivity

Drawbacks with interactivity on the internet were also given. Michael (national communications) cited issues with the public's perception of senior leaders blogging. First, that the public may not necessarily see publishing an opinion online as a core part of the senior leaders' roles. In contrast, in interview, it was discussed that a letter to a newspaper expressing the same opinion would be seen as legitimate activity. Secondly, the senior leaders themselves needed to be taught to cope with trolls and other attacks. The trolls (commenters who post deliberately antagonistic messages) were also mentioned by Kester and Aaron. Aaron (East Methodist) cautioned against 'nutters, crazies and weirdos' and Kester (St Bride, Catholic) suggested that where online comment forms for sites such as the BBC were concerned:

> *it is ninety percent madness what is written, [laughs] so I don't think churches should be in the, encouraging madness.* (Kester, St Bride)

### 4.7.3.8 Adult and illegal content

The availability of adult websites was mentioned –specific reference to the ability to easily find content such as pornography or gambling sites was made. Colette talked of their attempts to guide the church's youth:

> *We try to encourage our young people to be very careful about what they watch on the internet for example. Look for the good things. There are some*

*things they don't understand and you definitely want to shy away from.*

(Colette, High Road Methodist).

Several times the dangers of 'chat rooms' and so on were specified as reasons for a lack of interactivity or involvement online. However, the impression that these references convey is not so much that leaders are very aware of specific dangers but that there is a general fear of the possibility of danger. There is no commensurate knowledge or understanding that, for example, access to a Facebook group could be controlled. The unspecified nature of the threat was clear from the statement from Gayle, when talking about her congregation's reluctance to use Facebook:

*…you hear things, don't you, about chat rooms* (Gayle, Christ Methodist)

To conclude, leaders had no difficulty in articulating their ideas on what harm the internet can cause to individuals and to society. Their responses ranged from risks that were specifically understood, to more loosely held opinions on dangerous aspects. Not all of these are necessarily accurate. One explanation for this level of negative opinion might be that for most clergy, their only training on the internet is as part of child protection and safeguarding practice (this was mentioned by James and Benjamin in the Catholic and Methodist churches respectively). This would necessarily focus on the safety aspects of working with young people and could skew the participants' perceptions of the internet if at no point were the positive aspects for their own practice highlighted as part of a training course.

## 4.8    Clergy information seeking

Questions were asked which aimed to contextualise the churches' websites in the experience and expertise of the leaders' online information seeking preferences.

This covered both the general use of the internet and for research specifically linked to the leaders' roles in their church.

All leaders said that they used the internet for other purposes to varying extents. Some self-characterised as infrequent users but when prompted were able to list several ways in which the internet was used. Robert (St James), who was the least enthusiastic about the changes that the internet has brought, still sees it as 'incredibly useful':

> *I use the internet a lot entirely almost entirely for convenience for looking things up, for finding information about things, checking my facts, it's very good...There are various religious, the Bible, you can get religious texts and so on.* (Robert, St James)

It is clear that even the reluctant users accept that online information is now part of everyday life. How that translates into their role as church leader of course varies between the leaders and their expectations.

### 4.8.1  Internet for inspiration or information

One specific question was aimed at addressing the ways in which using websites or the internet is integrated into the leaders' religious role. Interviewees were asked how they would approach preparation for a sermon. Answers broadly fell into two themes. Some suggested that their collection of books would be the first place they would look, and that online search would be for factual research only such as checking a quotation or looking for an image as illustration. Gayle would always begin with her book collection, as would Thomas. Both will combine the print and online sources, however, and would, for example, Google a particular word or phrase in Greek or look for clarification on a point. Robert would use websites only

to check facts. Kester would also refer to his print collection first, but would use Google for a specific piece of information such as a quotation.

The second theme suggested that others used online sources as a source of inspiration to start a creative process. Helen, Lee and Mark were likely to turn to websites for help. Helen said that one thing she found particularly useful was the ability to listen to podcasts of other people's sermons and talks on a topic – she was not a keen reader, so this allowed her access to new opinions and viewpoints:

> *I always go and listen to sermons and read sermons and sort of see what other people are saying about things...the ideas from other people who have looked at the passage are interesting so I do use the internet a lot for preparation of sermons and things.* (Helen, Central Baptist)

Lee described a situation where a search might be very useful if his inspiration was failing:

> *...all you need to do is type into Google, "sermon", that passage, and you will find sermons that have been written on that passage that will hopefully, you know you're not going to use and copy, but at the same time will give you the prompt that you might need.* (Lee, Shelley Baptist).

Helen is a younger church leader, so would probably be part of the generation that James (St Saviour) seems slightly wary of. He would not turn to the internet for sermon preparation:

> *...every day of my life I preach because we have a daily mass and I always say something, and I've never used the internet. I know by rumour that some younger clergy do, they'll sort of get information off the internet and use that*

*as the basis but I have never have done and I can't imagine ever doing so.*

(James, St Saviour)

Aaron described at length one website he used[16] that was a gateway to various resources and would be his starting point for any research. For him, this site was comprehensive and a useful portal and he would not use any other site. In contrast, Benjamin was more eclectic in his use of websites, and would use any one of many sites for inspiration or for prayer or hymn suggestions. Aaron's reliance on one website means that his pool of available online resources is shaped by the selections of a third party – in this case, a third party in the US – who could potentially introduce their own bias into curation of their website. Aaron could therefore find his information limited or biased.

## 4.8.2 Email

*Well, the Church of England and the Diocese… runs by emails so my inbox is overflowing most days.* (Wendy, St Timothy)

During the interviews, leaders were asked about their opinion of the internet in its widest sense. Many participants mentioned their use and opinion of email. A number of strong opinions were offered which was unexpected. Email was one of the aspects of online communication given as an example in the question, so it is possible this had a priming effect. Interviewees who did not have a wider experience of social media or using websites may have picked this as a cue to talk about something with which they were experienced. Nonetheless, the emerging theme of the importance of email is interesting not only for the way it demonstrates that an

---

[16] http://www.textweek.com/, accessed March 17 2012

online tool has been widely adopted and highlights the pitfalls therein, but it suggests there is an established level of online computing activity and familiarity which could be built upon if more sophisticated tools were to be introduced.

Respondents both praised and criticised email as a tool for communication. The convenience of email was recognised – allowing asynchronous conversations, and a more measured approach to responses. Kester (St Bride) saw the effect of the rise in its popularity as his congregation now 'casually' communicate by email, in a way that did not happen in his previous parish. At the same time, problems with email were mentioned by almost all participants and it appears to be tolerated as a necessary evil rather than embraced. Section 6.1.2 suggests that not all church websites publish an email address, which could be in order to limit the amount of unsolicited contact.

The quotation from Wendy given above hints at the wider concerns of many regarding the volume of email received. Both Anglican and Catholic diocesan authorities send administrative details and updates via email. Several participants expressed frustration at being copied into irrelevant threads, and a sense that email conversations can take much longer than a short and efficient telephone call. Colette had not yet ventured on to Facebook because she found the volume of email enough to cope with, without adding another source of messages. More serious drawbacks were mentioned, including the difficulty of judging tone of voice used via email and the risk of accidentally upsetting the recipient of the message. Or indeed even purposely using email as a medium to send unpleasant messages:

> …*sometimes people say things in emails that they would never in a million years dream of saying to somebody's face or over the telephone* (Gayle, Christ Methodist)

And also from Helen:

> *it's so easy to just chuck out an email about something, sit there at the computer send it off and then have to pick up the pieces afterwards because somebody's taken something you said the wrong way* (Helen, Central Baptist)

These criticisms were levelled at general use of email by all members of the community. Helen's opinion suggests that she has had to act as mediator when other people's messages have been misunderstood, and also reflecting perhaps her own experience.

It was also noted that it is easy to assume a message has been communicated because an email has been sent, despite the lack of guarantees of delivery or that it will be read or understood as intended. Given the sensitive nature of a number of conversations and interactions that church leaders will have, it is unsurprising that many find email to be a cause for concern. Helen also noted that email might not be the recipients' preferred method of communication and it was important to be sensitive to the needs of others. Thomas (St Margaret) carefully described his approach, and in doing so summarised several potential problems:

> *…anything that's difficult or hard to hear, whenever I am saying no to something, I'd rather do that face to face or at least on the phone. … so you want to try to foster face to face communication as much as you possibly can, otherwise, it doesn't, relationships get weakened. It's quite a blunt instrument, email, because you miss out on tone of voice and body language, that kind of thing* (Thomas, St Margaret)

Robert (St James) highlighted one perceived benefit of email:

*I think you can have a semi-conversation by email that is in some ways freer than a phone call and there is a kind of spontaneity combined with the ability to save and go over it again and I think that can be good* (Robert, St James)

He also described a situation in a previous parish where access to email – or not – was a real barrier to communication within a collaborative community project, which had helped shape his overall suspicion of online media.

In contrast, email was valued by others for team-based communication. James (St Saviour) said that when committees or working parties were established, email was his preferred method of communication. Thomas (St Margaret) runs a lot of the administration for his church teams via email. Alan, one of the webmasters, described the mailing lists his church operates. Aaron (East Methodist) has run theological discussion groups via email. James (St Saviour) suggested two key benefits for email as a method of communication – convenience and record keeping. Email is 'less intrusive' than calling someone and it also allows for a record to be kept of a conversation. With some communication for clergy being sensitive or possibly controversial, the ability to keep a record would be an important benefit.

One point that Kester raised was his different interaction with different media. He said that whilst he frequently initiated email contact with various people, he only responded to messages via Facebook. For participants, email is a key communication tool and now an indispensable part of their work, even if it is sometimes a source of frustration as well as a convenience.

## 4.9   Ideal website

Participants were asked what they would like to see on an ideal church website. Mark noted that the basic factual information is important alongside the efforts to

convey welcome via images of people who are members of the church. Wendy noted that broken links and sites that do not work are off-putting. Aaron explained that his church's website had very little content, because there was not the staffing to make this feasible. So the creation of his ideal site would be unattainable in the current circumstances because of the difficulty in keeping it maintained. Gayle felt that her church's site combined the factual and welcoming aspects by mentioning the varied activities that are linked to the church, aimed at giving a sense of welcoming community and place where new members would be able to feel comfortable. She referred to a small church in her circuit that currently does not have a website, saying:

> *now they haven't got a website but if they did it would say [●] Church, Sunday worship six o'clock and that's all that would be on it. And that would tell you a lot, wouldn't it?* (Gayle, Christ Methodist)

Benjamin offered an opinion on the way that churches should approach the selection of content for the website. With his wider experience in communications theory and practice, he had been encouraging other churches to think about their online presence and in his previous role, had co-ordinated awards for good websites. Benjamin reflected that:

> *people thought once they had a website up with a picture of the church and a few bits of information that was it, but it is actually more than that, it is saying well, if there is a group meeting what's the purpose of the group? put the programme up – all welcome – things like that, and always keeping it refreshed* (Benjamin, Valley Methodist)

There was agreement with this from the interviewees who expressed an opinion in that the basic information was not enough, and the key aspect of an ideal website would be its ability to give a flavour of the kind of experience a visitor would have. Whether churches are achieving this is considered next.

The preceding sections have presented a picture of the church leaders' environment, their use of and frustration with websites and email. Moving away from the personal experiences and turning firstly to the content analysis data, the next chapter investigates the ways in which websites are created, their subsequent maintenance, and the leaders' experiences.