

The contribution and motivation of faith-based volunteers in a UK antislavery partnership: a case study

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Abstract

Modern slavery and human trafficking are crimes impacting local communities with the most vulnerable being exploited. As such, there is a need for communities to partner towards slavery-free communities. Faith communities are encouraged to partner in these responses. The article presents a small-scale case study of one UK antislavery partnership (AP) and interviews participants of Christian faith, who volunteer within it. The study asks, to what extent does the AP benefit from volunteers of faith? And what motivates the volunteers' involvement within that AP? The findings indicate that APs can benefit from the skills and experience of faith volunteers. The study highlights that the volunteers' Christian faith and previous experiences of working with vulnerable individuals motivates their present praxis. Through reflection relating to lines of connection between life and faith, the common good, public faith and spirituality, the study explores how faith communities and APs can develop mutually beneficial partnerships.

Keywords: modern slavery, human trafficking, antislavery partnership, volunteer, faith responses

1. Introduction

The International Labour Organization estimates there are 49.6 million people living in modern slavery in the world today (2022). Of these, between 100,000 to 122,000 people are estimated to be exploited within the United Kingdom (Gren-Jardan, 2020; The Minderoo Foundation, 2023). If communities are to develop more cohesive and robust responses to modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT), there is a need for all parts of the community to be involved, including local faith-based organisations (FBOs) and faith communities. Local solutions and resources can help communities develop resilience against exploitation and to partner towards becoming slavery-free.

Although there are a growing number of FBOs responding to MSHT, there has been no research regarding the extent APs can benefit from volunteers of faith, nor the volunteers' motivations for involvement. Through utilising a case study of an AP within England, five

volunteers of Christian faith are interviewed to explore: 1) to what extent does the AP benefit from volunteers of faith? 2) what are the volunteers' motivation for involvement within the AP?

2. Modern slavery and human trafficking

The UK's Modern Slavery Act (2015) categorises offences of slavery and human trafficking:

Slavery is when the person holds another person in slavery or servitude and that person is to perform or compulsory labour.

Human trafficking is when a person arranges or facilitates the travel of a woman, man or child with a view to that person being exploited.

Within the last twenty years there has been increased awareness about MSHT and its impact within local communities. This has resulted in increased support since 2009 for victims of modern slavery within the UK through the statutory support of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Through the NRM, potential victims of modern slavery are safeguarded and access support.

In 2022, 16,938 people were identified as potential victims of slavery and referred into the NRM (Home Office, 2022). This was a 33% increase from the previous year (12,706). For adult potential victims, 78% (6874) were male and 22% (1978) were female. 41% (7019) claimed exploitation as children. Albanian (27%), UK (25%) and Vietnamese (7%) nationals were the most commonly identified victims. Labour exploitation, criminal exploitation including drug distribution through county lines, and sexual exploitation were the most common types of modern slavery. There are more victims identified each year who choose to access local community-based support, rather than consenting to enter the NRM.

3. Faith-based organisations and responses

Within the UK there have been varied responses from faith-based organisations (FBOs) in responding to modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT). The research from the Universities of Sheffield and Leeds, *Faith Responses to Modern Slavery*, mapped 115 UK based anti-trafficking organisations. 33 of those organisations were faith-based; 32 Christian and one Jewish. No other religious traditions were evident (Lewis et al., 2020:7-8). Many of these FBOs recruit and depend on volunteers to support and add capacity.

Leading responses are The Salvation Army (TSA), whose long history of responding to exploitation since 1886, culminated in forming their UK Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery Unit. Between 2011-2021 TSA supported 18,291 recovering victims of MSHT within the UK (The Salvation Army, 2022: 5-9). This was achieved through securing the Government contract to deliver the NRM, providing safe-house accommodation, legal advice, counselling, health care, education and training, and outreach support (Betteridge & Grinsted, 2021).

Twelve charities are subcontracted under TSA to provide NRM support and beds in safe houses across the UK. Several of these charities are FBOs and include: Catholic charity, The Medaille Trust; City Hearts, originating from Hope City Church in Sheffield, and; The Snowdrop Project. These organisations rely on both faith-based and non faith-based volunteers to help deliver their objectives.

Other FBOs emerging within the the last twenty-years include: Stop the Traffic, offering targeted social media campaigns; International Justice Mission, partnering with local justice systems to end violence; Hope for Justice, working with law enforcement to rescue victims and provide care for survivors; Caritas Bakhita House, supporting women in domestic servitude or forced labour, and; René Cassin raising awareness and actions within the progressive Jewish communities. These varied responses from FBOs also mobilise volunteers from both faith and non-faith backgrounds.

The recent emergence of antislavery partnerships (APs) within the UK has developed strategic responses through community stakeholders working in partnership against MSHT. Increased opportunities for FBO's to work in partnership with wider community partners have been evident. The University of Nottingham's *Partnership for Freedom* (2020) report, identified 98 APs within the UK. The police and local authorities lead the majority of these partnerships. From 2017-2020 the quantity of FBOs engaging in APs almost doubled, however, less than one third of the 98 APs identified included FBOs in their membership (2020:17). The report views the APs' mobilising of 'wider constituencies' such as faith and business communities as 'improvements' (2020:5). With less than one third of APs including FBOs in their partnerships there is potential for greater engagement from FBOs and faith communities within those APs.

Tensions, however, between FBOs and secular organisations have been evident. The study, *Faith Responses to Modern Slavery* (Lewis et al. 2020), interviewed six FBOs and found that 'FBOs feel there is mistrust and doubts over their professionalism and that they have to "go

the extra mile” to develop relationships of trust in the sector, particularly with secular organisations’ (2020:3). The same study noted there were anecdotal examples of FBOs proselytizing victims, which in turn resulted in three out of the four interviewed FBOs adopting safeguards around discussing faith with clients. For the interviewed FBOs, ‘The risk of being tarnished by accusations of blurring the line between providing support and promoting religion meant that proselytism and evangelism were treated almost as a taboo topic in the research’ (Lewis et al. 2020: 13-14).

4. Literature, modern slavery and theological responses

Recent literature about modern slavery explores similarities and differences to historic slavery, defines current manifestations and categorises types (Bales, Trodd & Williamson 2011, Bales 2012, Kara 2017). Garbers’ *Unseen Lives* (2022), overviews modern slavery within the UK and highlights problems with victim identification, immediate and long-term support for survivors.

Bales’ *Blood and Earth* (2016) highlights how factors contributing towards forced migration, such as drought, hunger, environmental disasters, war and conflict and human rights violations exacerbate vulnerability where slavery thrives and environmental destruction follows. Forced migration and vulnerabilities of displaced peoples has been identifying as increasing the risk of trafficking. Children on the move, low-skilled workers, those with cognitive difficulties are particularly vulnerable to organised crime groups, for the purposes of MSHT (Boskovic & Jankovic 2023). Indeed, the evidence-based report about the war in Ukraine found, ‘conflict drives human trafficking and exploitation’ and that ‘the UK’s visa-based response to refugees from Ukraine contain risks in terms of trafficking and exploitation’ (Cockbain & Sidebottom 2022:3). Recommendations to mitigate these risks were given.

Although theological responses to MSHT are emerging, until recently literature has been limited, focusing on awareness raising (Chalke 2009), migration and trafficking (Haker et al. 2011), sexual exploitation (Miles & Crawford 2014, 2017) and its intersection with Biblical Studies (Carson 2015, 2017). Context specific studies within practical theology include: North Korean stateless victims of human trafficking and restorative justice (Yoon 2019); the lived religion of Polish sex-trafficked survivors (Deventer-Noordeloos 2018) and practical Christian responses to human trafficking in South Africa (Venter & Semmelink 2020).

Slavery-Free Communities (Pratt 2022) and contributing authors develop practical theologies through exploring the intersection between three MSHT survivors’ narratives with

Trinitarian theology, theodicy, restorative justice and liberation theology. MSHT are also explored from the perspectives of Jewish theology, missiology and environmental studies. Bishop Alastair Redfern explores how local churches are mobilised to unite around the concern that vulnerable people are being exploited through MSHT (2017, 2020). He notes, ‘Churches have a huge range of gifts and experiences within local congregations, as well as good connections with a variety of agencies both voluntary and statutory’. For Redfern, this action is rooted within ‘deep moral aspirations of the Beatitudes...’ (2021:180). There has been no empirical research, however, relating to what resources within faith communities may benefit partnership responses to MSHT, nor what motivates volunteer engagement.

5. Methodology: case study and semi-structured interviews

In order to explore the intersection between Christian volunteer and AP responses to MSHT, a qualitative paradigm was used through a case study, employing semi-structured interviews. The study attempted to discover rather than test and verify patterns of behaviour through taking into account situation-by-situation contextual factors through determining how Christian faith interacted with volunteers’ involvement within the AP (Mouton 1993:133).

5.1 The case study: Southend against modern slavery (SAMS) partnership

SAMS Partnership emerged in 2018 from 57 West, a Baptist church working among the homeless and vulnerably housed in Southend-on-Sea, Essex. Several disclosures of labour exploitation were made by the homeless who participated in the church and community café, including Richard.

Richard¹, became homeless in his early twenties while suffering with poor mental health. Offered a job paving and tarmacking in Europe, he worked long hours and was barely paid. Accommodation was in a damp caravan. His health suffered. When Richard tried to leave, he and his parents were threatened. After twenty years of labour exploitation he finally managed to escape and became homeless once again.

These examples of labour exploitation inspired the emergence of SAMS. The partnership draws together twenty-five partner organisations including charities, faith groups, University and College to meet quarterly to work with law enforcement and the local authority towards a slavery-free community. The University of Nottingham *Partnerships for Freedom Report*, highlights the work of SAMS:

The success of this partnership was linked to their effort spent building trust. This understood that many of the partners have their own perspective and priorities on modern slavery, and that identifying each other's strengths has played a big part in the development of the partnership (2020:29).

The SAMS *Survivor Care Project* was subsequently developed, offering specialised support to Richard and other survivors. Community volunteers are trained and supervised to befriend, mentor and offer practical help to those who have been exploited through MSHT (SAMS, 2021).

5.2 Semi-structured interviews

Five participants from SAMS Partnership were interviewed using a qualitative semi-structured approach. They were involved with the antislavery partnership for between ten months to four years and identify as having Christian faith. The quantity of data collected was broad enough to give a range of experiences, while also specific enough to permit in-depth content analysis of the data. Ethical measures were put in place including informed consent from participants, approval from the charity trustees and anonymising the research. Reflexivity was required on behalf of the researcher, who is also the antislavery coordinator for the AP. Researching one's own organization has potential for limited objectivity or viewing and presenting the data and findings with bias. It could, however, enable an insider's insight, giving depth to the research, through understanding complexities and nuances within the research field. Continual personal reflexivity by the researcher was essential, to encourage objective reflection, thereby allowing the findings to emerge from the data. An open interview style was required, asking open-ended questions, thereby encouraging open and honest responses from participants. The interviews were transcribed and content analysis was implemented (Grbich 2007:185-186).

6. Analysis and Findings

6.1 To what extent does the antislavery partnership benefit from volunteers of faith?

In order to explore this question, the study explores the volunteers' roles within the AP and the skills and assets they bring. Three interviewees volunteer within SAMS' Survivor Care Project, including two who are befrienders who, 'meet with a survivor on a weekly basis for 1-2 hours to provide regular social contact, to decrease loneliness, to help create gateways into groups, to help a survivor to access local services and to help build community connections' (SAMS, 2021).

'F' states, 'I've been helping her find community, groups and integrate a bit more to the local area.' F is a final year social worker student at the local University, with placement experience of 'working with youth at risk of homelessness'. Working with vulnerable individuals has motivated her to volunteer with the AP. She reflects, 'there are very transferable skills that I'm learning'.

'G' describes the befriending role as being 'a professional bounded friend'. G is a qualified social worker, who worked with vulnerable clients within the charity sector for several years. She states, '...there's so much knowledge from those jobs that it does help me... being warm, empathy, listening, social work skills and knowledge about no recourse to public funds and benefit systems...'

'P' also volunteers within the Survivor Care Project as the practical helper coordinator, facilitating community volunteers to give practical help to survivors, such as food parcels, clothing and DIY support. P is employed as a trauma therapist. He notes his professional background has developed skills which benefits the AP such as, '... listening skills and people skills, having a framework for helping people get better...'. P also delivers trauma-informed care training for the volunteers who befriend and mentor.

S and J represent their churches within SAMS, and are part of the 25 community organisations within the partnership. 'J' is chair of the AP steering group, developing strategic goals, priorities, human resources, policies and budgets. J states, 'I have a bit of a business head' and reflects:

I think it was being able to bring something of my work perspective... where I was involved investigating serious and organized crime. Over 10 years ago now we started to see more and more examples of people in debt bondage situations or forced labour situations, who initially we would be looking at as potential criminals with undeclared income. And then very quickly we realised these people were victims of modern day slavery.

This 'business head' and senior management experience relating to investigating organised crime, brings important organisational skills and context-specific knowledge relating to MSHT, including victim identification and crime disruption.

S is a church minister overseeing a food-bank and community cafe serving two thousand low-income, homeless and vulnerable individuals each year. S has fifteen years of leadership experience including working with women who sell sex locally. The AP benefits from S's first-hand experience of working with vulnerable individuals within the locality,

including industries at high risk of exploitation such as car washes and construction. S has nurtured relationships of trust with these vulnerable individuals, enabling the identification of several potential victims of MSHT. S and her church have been able to support victims of MSHT in ways the local authority and police cannot. This has been especially true when victims refuse to engage with statutory organisations due to lack of trust or fear.

The findings reveal the AP benefits from the varied contributions and tasks of the volunteers. The trauma-informed training given to other volunteers enabled their up-skilling, thereby directly benefiting the survivors. The befriending service helped survivors integrate more within the community, thereby reducing ongoing vulnerability. Increased victim identification and subsequent work with other AP partners to safeguard, were significant outcomes for the AP. In addition, the research indicated the two volunteers representing their churches within the AP, enabled connections for the AP to access wider resources such as finances, meeting space, prayer support, further volunteers as well as practical support from within those faith communities.

The findings show the volunteers brought skills and assets to their roles within the AP. All volunteers brought valuable professional experience of engagement with vulnerable individuals, thereby supporting the AP's work with survivors and supporting the AP's aim of partnering towards a slavery-free community. S's grassroots work among sex workers, and homeless is an asset for the AP due to opportunities for victim identification and safeguarding. Two volunteers brought a breadth of senior leadership, contributing to the governance, leadership and development of the AP. Without these volunteers, the AP would not be able to afford to pay for this level of experience and input. These skills and assets contribute towards making the AP stronger and achieve more outcomes relating to the overall aims and goals of AP.

6.2 What are the volunteers' motivations for involvement within the antislavery partnership?

The research found two primary factors relating to the volunteers' motivations for involvement within the AP. Firstly, all participants had experiences of working with vulnerable individuals who were at-risk, or who had experienced exploitation. Secondly, Christian faith and particularly Biblical literature were strong motivating factors.

The interviewees highlighted scenarios of MSHT encountered in their wider work contexts, including: 'debt bondage situations'; 'forced labour situations'; an asylum seeker who '...was trafficked into the country'; '...car washes ... people moving between the addresses, not knowing where they live, being paid less than the minimum wage, being treated badly...';

‘...people who've been trafficked because of sexual exploitation’. F while previously working for a charity encountered ‘two ladies that have been trafficked into this country’ and as a social worker helped to safeguard them. S notes that it was through her ‘...local church, food bank, [and] community café...’, that I've become aware of modern slavery, and met people who are trapped within it.’ J describes one of her team’s investigations within the civil service:

It was a caravan site where they had suspicion of forced labour, illegal working. They came across a lady in her seventies, who'd been held as a modern-day slave. She had a room in the caravan, where her bed was half the size of a small divan - it was a cupboard. She had been there for 36 years; under the radar with this particular family.

Secondly, the findings indicate that Christian faith informed all the volunteers’ involvement within the AP. This however, was nuanced to greater or lesser degrees. For four of the volunteers, faith was a substantial motivating factor in their involvement. For one volunteer faith was less evident, describing her motivation as ‘wanting for people to know they are loved; to know that they are valued and that they belong.’

Biblical literature was a strong motivating factors for four out of five of the volunteers. Several themes emerged. Firstly, the Bible’s emphasis of caring for the marginalized and exploited was emphasised by four volunteers. P reflects, ‘I think you can open the Bible on any page, and it talks about the poor, the disposed, the marginalized, the abused, people taken advantage of, the oppressed’. Secondly, the Bible’s focus on love was a motivator for three volunteers. F responds, ‘His [God’s] love, is so big, it makes you want to share that love...’.

Thirdly, for three volunteers, the desire for isolated people to connect within community and find belonging was a motivating factor. F states, ‘He [God] came for those who are not necessarily accepted into society.’ Fourthly the sanctity of human life was expressed as a motivator. J articulates a sense of injustice regarding how trafficking is opposed to her view of life being ‘sacred’:

I think there's some really clear Bible versus about sanctity of human life, about Christ looking out for the widow, the fatherless, the orphan, the vulnerable, and the exploited... Every human being is unique, created in God's image; life is sacred in that respect. And that sanctity of life; that individual uniqueness, is stripped away in the process of being trafficked or exploited. And that is just wrong on so many levels for me.

As proselytization of faith had been viewed as a ‘taboo’ within previous studies of FBOs (Lewis et al 2020:14), the study sought to explore if proselytization was a motivating factor for these Christian volunteers. The data found that none of the volunteers expressed proselytization as a motivating factor for involvement within the AP. Rather, all volunteers viewed the proselytizing of victims/survivors of MSHT as unethical. This was due to several factors. Firstly, for three volunteers this was due to the perceived vulnerability of survivors and an awareness that experiences of trauma increases vulnerability. Secondly, three participants compared proselytizing to the coercion and control experienced by victims during exploitation. G states: ‘I volunteer in the red light district and do some outreach there and I think it can be quite similar because... they've already been pimped out; they don't need someone putting their values on them.’ By saying ‘they’ve already been pimped out’, G brings a direct comparison between the pimp and the proselytizer, both ‘putting their values on them’. A ‘power imbalance’ was noted by P: ‘Anytime anybody with power over somebody uses that power to impose their own agenda there is something morally wrong.’

Thirdly, three volunteers were aware of survivors having differing cultural backgrounds and beliefs. S reflects that ‘many will have come from a very different cultural background; may have come from a different faith background to whichever person of faith they're talking to.’ F highlights the importance of volunteers ‘being open-minded’ to other religions and cultural backgrounds and not try to convert anyone. P reflects on the need for community and that for survivors ‘familiarity and comfort’ would be found in different communities, within a ‘...church... mosque... synagogue... or a temple’.

The perceived unethical nature of proselytizing for three participants would not, however, stop them from talking about their faith within certain situations. G reflects about her experience of talking about faith with the survivor she befriends:

‘My survivor did say that her dad is a pastor. And then she started talking about having some faith, herself in God and Jesus. Not lots of information, but she did ask me if I was a Christian. So I said, ‘yes’. Sometimes she has said, “I know you will pray”. So that's been a comfort to her.’

S places importance on the survivor feeling ‘...empowered, fulfilled, hopeful for their lives’, which ‘might not mean Christian faith, but it might.’ For the volunteers, ‘faith-talk’ is acceptable within the context of the survivor initiating the conversation, and if it leads to improved well-being.

Viewing proselytization as unethical aligns with The Human Trafficking Foundation's *Survivor Care Standards*: 'Services should be provided equally to those of any religion, or belief, or none... Service providers must not engage in proselytization - that is seeking to persuade someone to join a religion, cause or group (2018:21). There was no indication that the subject of proselytizing was viewed as a 'taboo', rather all volunteers openly engaged.

The research highlights that the volunteers' personal encounters of scenarios of exploitation intersected with their Christian faith. Motivational themes emerged including: 'a desire to be a voice for people who can't voice things for themselves'; 'going to those who were hurting'; '[God] wants to make us complete and set us free', and; pursuing 'social justice'. These Christian value-driven responses informed by Biblical literature related to the volunteers' personal experiences of exploitation. This intersection between personal experience and Christian faith/Biblical literature were evidenced as motivational factors for the participants' involvement in the AP.

7. Discussion and Theological Reflection

This section will construct a developmental argument through exploring the main findings of the research relating to exploring antislavery partnerships and the involvement of faith volunteers.

7.1 Antislavery partnerships can benefit from the input of faith volunteers

The findings show that diverse resources from faith volunteers can be utilised towards community transformation through the AP. The volunteers' experience in business, management and organisational leadership supported the AP's governance, leadership and community engagement. Social work experience, trauma therapy training and experience of working with vulnerable individuals all supported the client-based work of the AP. The volunteers' professional skills and experience of work with vulnerable people, gave the AP rich assets, without which, the AP would be significantly poorer. This confirms Bishop Redfern's claim that, 'Churches have a huge range of gifts and experiences within local congregations...' (2021:180).

Within a context where public funding is stretched and resources from professional bodies and charities are increasingly limited, findings show volunteers from faith communities can add value, experience and professional skill to the AP. It is therefore worth localised APs exploring partnership work with local faith communities, in order to gain the expertise and specialism of volunteers, they may not otherwise afford to employ.

The findings highlight the possibilities of APs utilising assets found within their local communities. Though using a community organising approach, APs can utilise local assets in order to respond to the complexity of the multifaceted crimes of MSHT. Through community organising, community stakeholders sharing similar interests become a ‘community of practice’, working together on a common theme or issue. Each brings respective assets of knowledge, experience, services, power and other resources to work in partnership. Organising that community of practice towards a specific vision and goal is necessary for power to be exerted thereby enabling transformation and change within society (Anderson & Richards 2015:10-12). APs and communities who partner towards slavery-free communities are able to consolidate their assets to achieve more than individuals and organisations operating in isolated silos.

Indeed, faith communities are often already engaged at the grassroots, working with vulnerable individuals. Their knowledge, relationships of trust and support for the vulnerable are assets which AP should not overlook. Increased partnership between APs and churches have potential to develop mutually beneficial relationships, in which each can add value to the other.

7.2 Connections between life and faith as a motivator for volunteering

The findings indicate the volunteers developed lines of connection between life and faith, thereby encouraging engagement with the AP. Their critical reflection on past and present experiences of working with vulnerable and exploited individuals, while relating those experiences to the Christian faith, resulted in a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer 1979). In this way, practical theology’s praxis cycle was evident within the volunteers’ reflections and the movement from practice to theory, to critical reflection on practice, to revised forms of practice (Browning 1991, Swinton & Mowat 2006: 255-256). This fusion between life and faith encouraged the participants to volunteer in new ways within the AP. Subsequent theological reflection and critical reflection based upon their present actions within the AP was also apparent. This was particularly evident through the volunteers’ opposition to proselytising survivors of MSHT, viewing it as an abuse of power. Value is added to practical theology through the volunteers’ engagement in the theological and praxis process enabling examples of good practice relating to volunteer engagement within an AP.

7.3 Volunteering as public faith and pursuit of the common good

The findings highlight the importance of faith informing the volunteers' engagement within the AP and thereby in public service. Redfern notes, 'The self becomes an agent of service to this primary agenda [of loving God and one's neighbour] and finds its fulfilment and meaning in this pursuit of a common good for a common destiny' (2021:178). Within political theology, this pursuit of the 'common good' is a theme of how public faith is put into action (Rowlands, 2021; Volf & McAnnally-Linz 2016).

All volunteers emphasised the need for churches and church volunteers to work in partnership with other organisations in order to respond to modern slavery. F highlights, 'Partnership is crucial... We need everyone to combat this. We need to take a holistic approach because it is a holistic issue.' This strong awareness of partnership towards the common good, highlights the volunteers' awareness for the need for churches to develop partnerships within the public sphere.

This view moves Christian faith and action from being privatised, to becoming public and political, thereby offering the potential to transform communities. Volf and McAnnally-Linz write, 'Christians aren't Christ's followers just in their private and communal lives; they are Christ's followers in their public and political lives as well' (2016: 3). Consequently, 'the public life is seen as life together in society. Correspondingly, public faith is faith concerned with responsible shaping of our common life and common world' (2016:x). The volunteers' Christian faith is lived out publically through engaging with community partners, including civil and third sector organisations within the AP, towards the 'common good.'

Although volunteers pursuing the 'common good' can be applied to a wide range of social action projects such as homelessness or poverty, modern slavery is different from these because of its scale and being a hidden crime. Individuals who are exploited, suffer repeatedly and unlike other vulnerable communities, are often hidden from view and out of mind. As modern slavery is the fastest growing international crime, with 122,000 people estimated to be exploited within the UK, most local communities are impacted (The Minderoo Foundation, 2023). It is therefore essential that faith communities grasp the importance of responding to this immense local injustice, through living out Christ's public faith mandate to 'proclaim freedom to the prisoners' and 'to set the oppressed free' (Lk 4.18).

7.4 Developing a vocational and public spirituality

The theological motivators including 'loving God' and 'loving my neighbour', indicate the volunteers implicitly viewed giving their time and expertise for the well-being and care of the vulnerable within the AP, as vocational. This suggests that APs can provide vocational

opportunities for volunteers of faith. Vocational commitment where values and experience motivate involvement in APs have potential to give volunteers resilience and commitment even when the work is challenging and difficult. Indeed, through engagement with APs, churches can shift their frequent over-focus upon their own organisation and projects, towards ecclesial vocational work in partnership with community stakeholders. This vocational work has potential to partner towards the common good through creating safer communities and protecting the most vulnerable. In this way, what Redfern notes as a ‘public spirituality’ can develop:

... churches have an opportunity to nurture a public spirituality that can focus upon the well-being of the vulnerable, the improvement of systems and standards for work and welfare, the shaping of common values around sacrificing the self for the well-being of others, and the high standards of responsibility and care (Redfern 2021:189).

Responding to the increasing exploitation of the world’s most vulnerable, enables churches to practically serve those who suffer, to stand against injustice and to live out faith within the public domain. Through APs, churches have opportunity to envision and empower their congregants to utilise their skills and experience, thereby developing both personal and corporate public spiritualities. Vocational commitment by volunteers has potential to resource APs with individuals who are resilient, committed and skilled.

8. Limitations and further research

Although the study produced adequate data, there are a number of limitations. There is a lack of literature relating to antislavery partnerships, particularly relating to volunteer engagement from faith communities, as well as theological research relating to responses to MSHT. Secondly, a broader sample of APs and faith volunteers from further APs would be beneficial. The small sample gives an indication of one AP, however it is not possible to affirm if other APs would have similar effective contributions from volunteers of faith, nor if those volunteers are motivated by the same factors.

The findings highlight further opportunities for further research within practical theology. Firstly, a longitudinal study would be beneficial to explore the volunteers’ interactions with the AP over a period of time. Secondly, SAMS Partnership is a unique context which was formed initially from working alongside exploited individuals who were encountered within church contexts. A wider sample of APs would be beneficial to explore

how they interact with faith volunteers and faith-based organisations. Thirdly, exploring the involvement of other religious communities within APs and what motivates their involvement would be beneficial.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Recommendations for antislavery partnerships

1. To explore the benefits of operating at local community levels as well as regional levels. Localised partnerships can empower grassroots responses and enable possibilities to mobilise local volunteers to further the aims of the AP.
2. To map community assets within localities in order to utilise local knowledge, skills and resources. This can compliment existing tactical and regional responses, which many local authority or law enforcement led APs already take.
3. To explore participation from faith groups and engage their local knowledge, expertise and transferable skills towards common goals within APs.
4. To offer awareness raising and training opportunities for faith groups and other volunteering groups, which may include sensitively shared victim/survivor narratives. This has potential to encourage greater community support and mobilise volunteers for APs, as well empowering the survivor, whose stories are shared.
5. To develop varied volunteering opportunities in order to benefit from the diverse skill and experience that volunteers can offer. This would include APs offering trauma-informed training for volunteers as well as maintaining good oversight and policies that safeguard both victims and volunteers.
6. To recruit and utilise volunteers who have varied skill-sets, significant transferable skills and who are experienced in working with people with complex needs.
7. To connect survivors of modern slavery within the local community with trained and supervised volunteers in order to provide wrap-around support and promote community integration.

9.2 Recommendations for churches

1. To develop greater awareness of MSHT; the extent it occurs within local communities, and; who are the responding organisations and local stakeholders.
2. To engage with responding organisations and APs in order to stimulate possibilities for collaboration.

3. For churches to utilize their grassroots experience and relationships of trust in order to serve the common good.
4. To support congregants in theologically reflecting upon issues of injustice, and particularly that of local exploitation and MSHT. To encourage 'lines of connection' to be made between faith and life in order to encourage revised forms of praxis relating to local exploitation through MSHT.
5. To recognise and utilise the expertise and experience of congregants who have transferrable professional skills and/or experience with vulnerable individuals. To help volunteers develop their skills vocationally and within the public sphere through the training and support of congregants/volunteers.
6. To develop public spiritualities, as congregations and congregants live out their faith publically, through service to the common good in partnership with community partners.
7. To create opportunities of service with the many individuals within local communities who need practical help, who are struggling to integrate and who are trying rebuild their lives after what may be years of exploitation.

Notes on Researcher: Dan is founder of The Together Free Foundation. Together Free resources communities and churches to respond to modern slavery and human trafficking. This work includes founding antislavery partnerships in Southend, Chelmsford and Colchester. Dan is associate tutor in Practical Theology at Westminster College, Cambridge.

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