ENGLISH MINISTRIES IN CHINESE HERITAGE CHURCHES IN THE UK AND IRELAND

A SURVEY OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

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Note: This "paper" is something I opted to do on my own. It's not commissioned, or accredited, or academically evaluated. So take the findings with a grain of salt, or a tsp of soy sauce.

SUMMARY

English ministries within Chinese-heritage churches in the UK and and Ireland are, on the whole, growing. The majority of the respondents say that their congregations, children's and youth work have grown over the last decade. Respondents are generally hopeful about the ministry, coring their optimism for the English ministry at 3.8 out of 5, and the church as a whole at 3.7.

That said, there are real areas of concern that are raised. These are three biggest.

1. **Leadership gap**. Finding, training, and retaining leaders is the challenge expressed the most amongst respondents. There is an uncertainty about who will lead the English ministry in ten years time, and it's difficult to see a clear path to a young person develop into leadership.
2. **People leaving the English Ministries**. There are two main reasons people don't stay in the English ministry. Relocation, due to study or work. And secondly the difficulty in finding friendship and community.
3. **English ministry leaders feel isolated**. Support from wider networks scores only 2.65 out of 5. There is a lack of mentoring, peer fellowship, and training.

There are practical suggestions on what might help address these needs. Building a leadership pipeline, creating peer and mentoring networks, supporting youth and children's work, improving community and belonging.

INTRODUCTION

I am thankful for the journey that has brought me to the UK, and for my journey of ministry here in the UK. Starting out with COCM, and being located in the North, meant I had a chance to encounter, serve, and experience the challenges faced by early youth ministries and English ministries. Serving with COCM until 2003 gave me a chance to experience the development of the mission centre, and the connection with churches in the South. The health of English ministries in Chinese-heritage churches has always been on my heart. And with the arrival of the BN(O)'s, it felt that this was an important moment to evaluate the current state of English ministries and to prepare for the future.

I chose to use part of my sabbatical to put together a little bit of research, and to share it with others. When I started this, I was just going to keep it to myself. But the interest that I've received about this project, means I will share it with others. The downside is that this is not a fully academic and robust piece of research. It's more of a snapshot overview of the churches, and asking questions that I myself am particularly interested in.

I hope that this research can be used to connect our churches and church leaders closer together, that we can find ways to encourage one another, and build one another up.

> *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*
>
> *Hebrews 10:24-25*

1. WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF THIS?

Across the Chinese churches in Britain and Ireland, there are now just upward of 20 churches with English ministries. English ministries could involve an English congregation, youth or children's work in English, or a blend of both. Most English ministries began as a response to British-born Chinese children who were unable to worship in Cantonese or Mandarin. More recently, arrivals from Hong Kong through the BN(O) route have added a new generation of English-speaking children and youth, as well as families adjusting to life in the UK.

There has not been a picture of how these English ministries are actually doing. This paper offers up a picture of the present situation, with some data and quotes from those who lead and serve in them. The purpose is to see what the needs are, so that support for these church leaders and ministries can begin to be put in place.

2. WHAT'S WAS THE SURVEY LIKE?

The survey asked 55 questions covering the size and make-up of the English congregation, children's and youth work, spiritual health, challenges, structure, relationship between language groups, leadership, support and hope for the future. Most of the questions used a one-to-five scale, with some open written answer questions.

There were 26 responses from 20 churches, across the whole of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland. Respondents were lay leaders (6), English ministry pastors (4), youth or children's workers (4), senior pastors (3), and a small number of other roles, including ministry coordinator, missionary, About a third did not grow up in church at all, and several grew up in a non-Chinese church or in a Chinese church overseas.

Some things to keep in mind about this research:

- It's a small sample and self-selected. It describes the people who answered, and may not represent every Chinese-heritage church
- Most have English congregations, but some are only youth at the moment.
- I tried to contact all the English ministries, but I know at least 2 did not respond.
- Some churches provided more than one respondent. The results therefore count 26 people from 20 churches
- Comparisons between groups of churches rest on very small numbers. They should be thought of as patterns of note, not as proof
- Churches and respondents aren't named in this paper.

3. WHAT WERE THE SURVEY RESULTS?

3.1 MOSTLY SMALL GROWING CONGREGATIONS

The typical English congregations are modest in size. The median weekly attendance is about 35. The average is about 55. There are a few churches that have English congregations over 100. Meanwhile the overall attendance of the church ranges from under 100 to several hundred, with two churches over 1000.

More than half of the respondents say the English congregation has grown over the last 10 years (7 significantly, 8 slightly). Five say it has stayed these are, and five say it has shrunk (4 of them significantly). One did not answer.

The congregations are a mix in terms of their make-up. Besides British-born Chinese, international students, mixed-heritage families, non-Chinese, and children or BN(O) families. Others mention adults and families from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Although ethnically there is a large amount of homogeneity, it is in other ways, more diverse than a purely local born church.

Self-assessed spiritual health is ranked moderate to good. On average the score 3.4 out of 5, for the spiritual health and growth. The feelings that "young people at home and want to stay" is scored 3.65, and "worship and teaching connect with our congregation's culture" is 3.58. However, small groups and discipleship is scored lower at 3.2.

Overall, it seems that the English ministries feel mildly positive, continuing to create congregations that serve their groups appropriately.

3.2 LEADERSHIP: MIND THE GAP

On nearly every measure related to leadership, the scores are lowest, and the concern is the highest.

- **Finding and training leaders is the largest felt challenge**. On the one-to-five scale, with five rated as a major challenge, the average score was 4.1. Nineteen of the twenty-six respondents rate it 4 or 5, with no one scoring lower than a 3.
- **Trained youth and children's volunteers** score 2.5 out 5 for sufficiency, with fourteen respondents scoring it below 2.
- **A clear pathway for a young person to grow into leadership** receives a 2.6 rating. A score of 5 indicates strong agreement with the statement. Sixteen respondents scored it a 2 or below.

Written responses elaborate a bit more.

1. Not enough leaders, or not enough mature ones (about 9 of 25). This is the biggest cluster. It breaks down into several kinds of shortage.

- **No pastor for the English group:** "No pastor who can minister the English group" and "looking for an English ministry pastor".
- **Too few volunteers:** a lack of trained English-speaking volunteers, and a shortage of people for youth and cell leading. Especially for the youth and children's ministry where there is not an existing English congregation, the Cantonese speaking parents are asked to lead these areas.
- **Maturity:** "spiritually very mature leaders with pastoral hearts" and "producing higher quality leaders".

2. Stretched and tired (about 4). "Stretched", "balancing time with needs", and the weekly work of setting up and clearing the space for a small congregation. This links to the first theme: when there are too few leaders, there is too much work for the few. Additionally, for churches without pastors, the feeding for the lay-workers and the pastoral care for them is lacking.

The survey figures suggest the pieces are connected. Churches that report a clearer pathway into leadership tend to be more confident about the future (a correlation of about 0.6), while those who feel most stretched with leadership are the least confident about succession (about -0.6). But with just 26 responses these are only indicators, but you can make a loose correlation that a visible route to leadership appears to matter for confidence about the future.

3.3 THE NEXT GENERATION

Children's and youth work shows more promise than the congregations as a whole. Twenty-two of the twenty-six respondents say the number of children and teenagers has grown, fifteen saying significantly. Most churches youth ministry is specific for the English-speaking youth. There are 6 that are shared with Chinese-speaking groups, and separate English and Chinese youths groups in five. Fifteen have an English-speaking children's ministry, seven share it with the Chinese groups, three run separate ones, and one has none.

The question is what happens next. When asked about previous generations continuing in the church as adults, the score is 2.96. And questions about pathway from Sunday school to youth to young adults scores 3.04. Retention of young adults after university is generally rated as a serious challenge (3.8), with 16 respondents rating it 4 or 5.

In the written answers about what works well and what is hardest, three themes come up.

- **Working well:** good relationships between leaders and young people, young people who have grown up in the church beginning to serve (especially in worship), and the parents who bring their children and set an example.
- **Hardest, part one: leaders.** Not enough trained and available youth leaders, especially for the older teenagers. A recurring theme.
- **Hardest, part two: faith that is the young person's own.** Several respondents want young people to move from their parents' faith to a personal faith that survives university. Parents' expectations set against young people's views of faith scores 3.3 as a challenge. One respondent notes that some parents want didactic teaching while young people want room to explore and question.

3.4 WHY PEOPLE GO AND WHAT MIGHT KEEP THEM

The responses can be categorised in a few groups

- **Moving Away** Some churches refer to themselves as a "transition" church, a place that helps students settle in a city, but only a temporary home. International students often return home. A new job in a different city. One said their city is not a draw for Chinese people to settle in.
- **Belonging and friendship** There are some similar number of answers that attribute

leaving to loneliness, lack of finding friends, newcomers who do not "fit in", or too little time for fellowship after the service. One respondent suggests stronger peer connections in the larger Cantonese congregation

- **Teaching, resources and culture** A smaller number of respondents mention weak, inconsistent preaching ministry, due to the lack of an English-speaking pastor, and little resource give to the English group. One pointed to the better resources in the local church
- **Unresolved conflict and unmet needs** is also mentioned by a few

Retention is felt most by the churches that also said they experienced shrinking. Those five rate retaining young adults at 4.4 out of 5 as a challenge, compared with 3.7 for churches that are growing. For most, money and buildings, by contrast, are not seen as the main obstacles: limited funding averages 2.7 and limited space or building access 3.0.

3.5 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LANGUAGE GROUPS, AND HOW THE CHURCH IS STRUCTURED

Most English ministries are part one church with shared leadership. Eight express that their congregations have their own leadership and are fairly autonomous. One church expressed a plan to become independent.

Combined worship services are rare. Sixteen churches worship together only a few times a year, six rarely or never, and only four monthly. Respondents rate communication between language groups at 3.6 as a challenge, and differences in culture or worship style at 3.4.

Language is the barrier named most often in the written answers. Others name the different perspectives of what church should like, including different approaches to fellowship. Attitude and cultural gaps between generations is also a point of tension. What helps unite are combined services at special times of the year, food, family outings, or cross-over events or ministries. Personal networks that help cross congregational advice or support also helps.

In the written responses, there are other expressions of tension between the English ministry and the wider church. Keeping a multi-site, multi-language and multicultural church united is a heavy burden. The lack of clear vision from senior leadership that relates to the cultural context of the English congregation, or the challenge of having a church culture that fits the vision. And others lament long-standing, unresolved conflicts, or historical issues surrounding the establishment of the English ministry that has an impact for the future.

Three patterns in the numbers are worth thinking about.

- In the six churches where language groups rarely or never worship together, the score for "decisions and expectations are communicated clearly across groups" is 1.8, compared with about 3.0 elsewhere.
- English ministries describing more autonomous structures give a lower score for having a real voice in whole-church decisions (about 3.1) than those that are part of one church with shared leadership (about 3.7).
- Growing churches rate communication between language groups as a bigger challenge (4.1) than those that are static or shrinking (about 3.0). Growth may bring more contact, and more friction, between groups.

3.6 THE EFFECT OF BN(O) MIGRATION

Seventeen of the 26 respondents say recent migration has changed their English ministry (thirteen "somewhat", four "significantly"). Seven say "not yet" and two say "it does not apply." The four who answered "significantly" are in churches where the English congregation has grown.

Overall, the effects are mostly seen in the youth and children's work. There are increased numbers (one estimates 30%), new teaching materials and language needs, and new ideas. The challenges are behaviour and language, integration, and the rise in numbers overwhelming the number of leaders.

There are some different experiences on where BN(O) young people choose to worship. Some say most have chosen Cantonese worship, with only a few joining English service. Another reports that as the young people speak less Cantonese, they are now being directed to the English side.

Looking ahead, respondents anticipate a larger English-speaking generation needing leaders, possible movement of BN(O) families to new cities, or returning to Hong Kong.

3.7 SUPPORT AND ISOLATION

Support from a wider network, missions organisation or other Chinese churches is rated 2.65 out of 5. Nine of the 26 respondents score it 1 or 2. The churches which are part of an established denomination tend to rate the support 3 or 4, with one respondent rating it a 2.

These are the main summaries when asked what would help

- **Fellowship and mentoring:** someone in a similar role to share experience with, one-to-one mentoring, and "a safe place" to discuss leadership issues. One describes a regional prayer network as valuable but wants more.
- **Training:** leadership, youth discipleship, Bible study, preaching, how to share the gospel with people who grew up locally, and working across cultures.
- **Structure and governance:** church leadership structures, safeguarding policies, healthy governance, and what is needed when a ministry moves toward independence.
- **People:** an English-speaking minister, rotating speakers and, in one case, maybe support workers who could give existing leaders a breather.

3.8 HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

When asked what a thriving English ministry wouldn't look like in ten years, two main pictures emerge. About 1/3 describe a multi-ethnic, intercultural, or "like an international church" reaching English speakers from different backgrounds. The second picture is a ministry where young people have become the leaders, with lay leaders raised up and released and strong discipleship.

The challenges expressed note the tension between a "Chinese" atmosphere, culture, and language from leadership in the other congregations, making a wider outreach challenging. Some of the respondents describe their churches as monocultural or inward looking. There

is a sense that the leadership, structure or culture is not ready for changes necessary for the future of an English ministry.

This is a summary of the responses when asked what advice they would give to churches exploring an English ministry.

1. **Pray and trust God (about 6)**. Examples are "pray for God's vision", "commit your plans to God", and keeping "our gaze fixed on God". Several pair it with patience: it will take time and there will be ups and downs.
2. **Get the vision and preparation right first (about 5).** Make sure everyone shares the same vision, set achievable goals and expectations, and think about why the ministry is needed and what it implies. The sharpest version says that without a clear vision of what the church is and a sustainable structure, each ministry "would be an incubator for disaster".
3. **Choose and train the right leaders (about 5).** Leaders need to be committed, available and passionate about young people. Others add training locally born young people from diverse backgrounds, being careful in appointing leaders, and reliable, trustworthy leaders.
4. **Let it have its own culture (about 4).** Adapt to the needs of the younger generation, let the ministry "grow according to their own culture and style", and think about the implications of opening the door to cultural diversity.
5. **Build relationships and look outward (about 5).** "Start small and focus on the relationships" appears alongside advice to reach out to the surrounding community and not stay inward-focused. One respondent said an English ministry is "not just about language" but about helping the next generation grow in faith.
6. **It is hard, but worth it (about 5).** Examples are "It's tough", "a worthwhile ministry", "hugely rewarding" despite people moving on, and "It's a must especially in UK".

One respondent's story of encouragement is relatable to many. A British-born Chinese young person, newly at university, found that he did not fit comfortably into the student Christian Union: he was not "international", but he was placed into that category. His church was the place where he could be with people who understood where he was coming from. This encapsulates the reason for an English ministry in a Chinese church, and it is also a measure of what is lost when such a ministry is not well led.

3.9 TWO FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS

Two leaders were interviewed after the survey: one church where the English ministry is not established, operating more as a youth ministry at the moment (Interview A), and a church that is part of a larger UK denomination (Interview B). The material below comes from my notes, not recordings, so the wording is approximate and the details are kept general. The conversations are helpful in getting some insight into some of the challenges faced. Each church has their own special journey, but there are similarities that can be helpful in ways to support and help in the future.

Building from a small base. In Interview B the church has Cantonese, Mandarin and English congregations, with the English congregation being the smallest of the three. There are roughly 20 to 30 people in the English, a Cantonese congregation of 120 to 180 and a Mandarin congregation of 60 to 110. The pastor said it began as important but "not growing, not just functioning", and described building it up as a long journey with many conversations. Most of the pastor's time goes to the Mandarin side, where many newcomers are struggling with English and with settling in, and where the pastor's impression was that survival and success come before spiritual questions. In Interview A, the pastor took over the coordination and development of the youth ministry, which runs its service independent to the Cantonese and Mandarin sides. A few English speaking young adults assist in this ministry.

BN(O) families are already shaping the picture. In Interview A, about nine in ten people in the English ministry are from BN(O) families, with one person from mainland China. In Interview B, BN(O) arrivals who speak English are coming to the English congregation. The pastor was especially thankful to have people of the same life stage, with young children, as fellow members.

Together, but apart. Both leaders describe congregations that run separately. In Interview A the English ministry is "quite separate", some in the Chinese-speaking congregation do not like having children and young people in the service. In Interview B the three congregations run independently, and the pastor is trying to help them become one church, with "walls to break down". Even where groups share a site and have small groups, the pastor said, misunderstandings are hard to avoid.

Caught between the church and its denomination. This is the new point. The Chinese church in Interview B belongs to a UK denomination and feels "stuck in the middle": bound by the denomination's rules, but not seen by it as a crucial part of the body, while the church itself tends to be inward-looking. The pastor's aim is to build better links both with other Chinese churches in the denomination and with the wider denomination.

The weight on the pastor. The youth pastor in Interview A spoke openly of doubts and loneliness, of high expectations that the pastor would "fix the kids", and of pressure over young people's Bible knowledge. What they wanted was connection with other youth pastors in similar roles: "someone to talk to". They also said it was hard to find another youth worker, and that the church has a real lack of Sunday school teachers. This matches the survey, where fellowship and mentoring were the support leaders asked for most.

Hope and advice. The youth pastor hopes to see young people excited to be involved in church and discovering a relationship with Jesus so that it is "their own faith, not their parents' faith". Their advice is not to treat youth or English ministry as an extra: "include them. They are part of the church." They recalled that being involved as young people, and seeing other adults lead worship, shaped them. The pastor in Interview B hopes the English congregation can become more diverse and reach the international community, helped by a planned building project that may bring international students onto the site. The aim is to empower the English side to see the church as their own.

4. WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

There are some broad conclusions we can take away from this research.

1. The main constraint is people

The biggest scarcity is trained, available, long-term leaders. There is a real need for pastors, youth workers, lay leaders who can teach, mentor and disciple. There is need for English-speaking ministers to be able to work with the existing church culture to develop a plan for the English ministries. The existing leaders often are stretched across several roles.

2. Preparing for the future

The English ministries are growing, from migration and from the next generation. But the structures to sustain and develop increased numbers is not quite set in place. Although the respondents are hopeful, there is genuine doubt about what leadership in the future looks like. Churches that have not planned for the English-speaking generation may be in for a surprise when it arrives sooner than expected.

3. Community is an important part

A sense of belonging in church is a vital part of retention. Having leadership that is willing to stay and invest helps to create a place worth staying. Developing groups for different stages help to provide community stability, making it a place worth investing in.

4. Connection with other churches is important

With such a scarcity of resources, and the lack of support, it's important for churches to be able to connect, learn, and support each other. The unique aspects of serving in an English ministry in a Chinese-heritage church means collaborating and connecting with one another is an unaddressed need.

5. Cross-cultural communication remains an issue

There remains challenges in communicating to the other language sides. In places where there isn't senior English-speaking leadership, the perspectives and pressures from the other language groups is often a cause of tension. This becomes more complex when dealing with the next generation, who are already caught between languages in cultures.

6. Missing Generations

Some churches lament a "missing generation." Without students or young adults, there is no one to serve the youth. That responsibility has fallen onto their parents, or non-native English speakers. It means there are significant cultural and linguistic challenges for them. Previous English congregation members which have left to a different church has created an unintended side effect to the younger generations. They are left without role models, and leaders to look up to.

5. SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

These are some things which might be helpful to look into doing, or at least get discussion going.

LOCALLY

1. **Develop a leadership pipeline**. Spot and train people early, before they graduate and settle. Give youth opportunities to serve, and to try new things. Consider internships and apprenticeships, and routes for training and ordaining English-speaking pastors. Make the path into leadership visible, so young people can see where it leads.
2. **Develop youth work for English speaking**. Developing the youth and children's ministry is an important aspect of the future of the English ministry. As English becomes their primary language, connecting with them, and creating a space where they can express their spiritual questions freely is important. Helping the church understand the difference between the older generation and the engagement of the younger generation is fundamental
3. **Strengthen retention and belonging**. Focus less on the numbers, but seek to create a welcoming and genuine community for each of the demographics. The importance isn't the size of the ministry, but the warmth and love from the individuals in them.

NATIONALLY

1. **Leadership Development** Leadership gathering, preaching training, trustees and committee support, discipleship training are all larger scale elements that can be done together, for mutual encouragement and support. It also provides a place for discussions about governance, safeguarding, and cross-congregational ministry.
2. **Create peer and mentoring networks**. Connecting English ministry leaders with one another, within a region and across the country. Seeing if mentoring can be put int place for younger pastors or newer leaders, and regular, safe spaces to share what is working.
3. **Helping Language Groups relate well** There needs to be some ways for the leadership across different language groups to share their perspectives of the ministry, and to work together for the good of each group. The challenge of vision for such a diversity of groups means understanding needs to increase. Help churches think through how an English ministry could be structured, encouraged, and implemented.

6. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

I was really encouraged to see that overall, people serving were quite hopeful about the future of English ministriest. At times, it can seem so isolating and so overwhelming, that it's easy for discouragement to set in. But to see so many faithful, persistent, caring, and hopeful individuals encourages me greatly. It also make me want to find more ways to encourage and support them.

In my conversations and research, I've come to see that investment in the English ministries is still a area of missional growth. For congregations with a generation gap, there will need to be people committed to coming in and serving those youth, and commiting to an English ministry that is still very much a work in progress. In the early days of my ministry, it wasn't uncommon for brothers and sisters to serve the youth in the Chinese church, serve in the English ministry, and then go to another church for spiritual feeding. That is a missional commitment, sacrificing their own comforts for the good of another. But I remember asking them why they would do that, and they said that they received so much blessing in the serving, and they had a deep passion and love for those youth to grow to know God.

That same missional commitment may need to be seen from those who have left the Chinese church for greener pastures. For many who have gone, they received from a previous generation, and there are opportunities to continue that blessing. It is still very much a work in progress.

It's also very clear that the most urgent need is for leadership development. The ministries need a good deal of encouragement and support. But they also need ways to equip their own better. But it's not a question of resources. There is a wealth of training information, and teaching materials available online. I realise that it's the human connection, the personal mentorship that is missing. It's evident that AI is not able to replace what a human connection brings.

There also needs to be a greater engagement with the Cantonese and Mandarin leadership to come to an understanding of different perspectives and philosophy of ministry. Didactic methodolgy is less effective in the West, and there is benefit in wider discussion and asking of questions.

This last minute research project I put together has a lot of limitations. I believe there are still a number of areas to research.

1. There are a number of (newish) primarily Cantonese churches that have a large number of children and youth in them. I imagine they will have a challenge with their English ministries in the future. I was not able to research or connect with them. Their future needs remains an open question.
2. There are also new Chinese sub-congregations in local churches. Some of those churches are now struggling with the pastoral issues the Cantonese members might have. How their second generation is adapting and their cultural adapatation also opens the opportunity for more research.
3. Should English ministries simply move to the local church, or should there be a development of English-speaking east asian churches, similar to the US or Australia. It would be interesting to explore some of these ideas.

MY HEART

I have thoroughly enjoyed connecting and speaking to different church leaders across the UK. I feel very privileged to be part of the English Ministries in the Chinese-heritage churches in the UK. The leaders share their challenges, heartaches, frustrations, and hopes with me. And I take it all to heart and bring them to Jesus. I am constantly reminded of how Christ is the head of his church, and the different forms or expressions of that here on this earth, help demonstrate the richness of his people, but also the distance between our humanity and his divinity. It's in humility and hope that we approach his throne of grace.

May we constantly be reminded that we serve Him and His people, and desire to grow to be more like him, and bring more to know Him and love Him.

In the differences between the congregations, and the languages, may we continue to learn how to serve one another in humility and patience. To learn to live and walk together is part of the journey of faith. And it's in that journey that we are shaped to be more Christ-like.

If you have anything to say about this research feel free to drop me a line. I'm always happy to hear from my fellow brothers and sisters.

with love,

Bert

APPENDICES

AVERAGE SCORES ON A ONE-TO-FIVE SCALE, 26 RESPONDENTS UNLESS STATED.

MEASURE	AVERAGE
Optimism about the English ministry	3.8
Optimism about the church as a whole (25 responses)	3.7
Young people feel at home and want to stay	3.65
Worship and teaching connect with the congregation's culture	3.58
Voice for the English ministry in whole-church decisions	3.46
English congregation is spiritually healthy and growing	3.4
Strong small groups or discipleship	3.2
Clear pathway for children and teenagers	3.0
Children and teenagers stay involved as adults	3.0
Decisions communicated clearly across groups (24 responses)	2.8
Enough trained youth and children's volunteers	2.5
Clear pathway into leadership	2.6
Support from a wider network	2.65
Confidence about who will lead in 10 years	2.4

CHALLENGES,
RATED FROM 1 (NOT A CHALLENGE) TO 5 (MAJOR CHALLENGE).

CHALLENGE	AVERAGE
Finding and training leaders (25 responses)	4.1
Retaining young adults	3.8
Communication between language groups	3.6
Differences in culture or worship style (25 responses)	3.4
Parents' expectations and young people's views of faith	3.3
Limited space or building access	3.0
Limited funding or resources	2.7
Identity, belonging and experiences of racism	2.5

SOME DATA COMPARING LARGER CHURCHES (EM > 50) WITH SMALLER CHURCHES (EM < 50)

MEASURE	LARGER	SMALLER	DIFFERENCE (LARGER - SMALLER)
Clear spiritual-growth pathway for children and teens	3.33	3.07	0.27
Children and teens stay involved as adults	3.50	2.87	0.63
Enough trained volunteers for children and youth	2.67	2.60	0.07
English congregation healthy and growing	3.50	3.33	0.17
Young people feel at home and want to stay	3.83	3.60	0.23
Strong small groups or discipleship	3.50	3.00	0.50
Worship and teaching connect with culture	3.67	3.47	0.20
English ministry has a real voice in whole-church decisions	2.83	3.73	-0.90
Decisions communicated clearly across groups	2.33	3.00	-0.67
Clear pathway for young people into leadership	2.67	2.47	0.20
Confident about who will lead English ministry in 10 years	2.50	2.20	0.30
Supported by a wider network	2.83	2.53	0.30
Optimistic about the future of the English ministry	4.17	3.73	0.43
Optimistic about the future of the church as a whole	4.00	3.60	0.40
Finding and training leaders	4.00	4.07	-0.07
Retaining young adults after university or work	3.67	3.93	-0.27
Limited funding or resources	2.50	2.87	-0.37
Limited space or building access	3.33	2.80	0.53
Differences in culture or worship style between congregations	4.00	3.20	0.80
Communication between language groups	3.83	3.40	0.43
Identity, belonging and experiences of racism	3.00	2.53	0.47
Parents' expectations vs young people's views of faith	3.17	3.07	0.10

Average scores on a one-to-five scale, 26 respondents unless stated.

APPENDIX B : IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WHAT LEADERS TOLD US

A plain-language companion to the findings above. Quotes are taken from the open answers. Names of churches and cities have been removed, and a few words tidied for clarity.

The scores tell us what leaders think. The written answers tell us what it feels like. These are some of the main themes that emerge

1. LEADERS ARE STRETCHED THIN

What they said: The shortage of leaders came up more than any other problem. It is not only that there are too few people. The same people are already doing a lot, so it is hard to ask them to do more.

"We've exhausted the pool of people we could recruit."

"We have faithful volunteers, but we don't have a pastor in English ministry or next generation ministry."

"Stretched."

One respondent said the single biggest challenge was a lack of spiritually mature leaders with pastoral hearts. Another said the church lacked trained English-speaking volunteers. One respondent pointed out that most of the youth leaders already hold several other roles, so they have little time left to spend with young people.

My take: Not about the programmes. Need to equip and enable more people – personal discipleship for the long run

2. PEOPLE LEAVE BECAUSE THEY MOVE, OR BECAUSE THEY DON'T FEEL AT HOME

What they said: Leaders gave two main reasons. People move away for study or work, and people don't find friends or a sense of belonging. Money and buildings were hardly mentioned.

"Can't find friends. Loneliness."

"Lack of genuine relationship building with newcomers who may not immediately 'fit in'."

"Some people see EM as a 'transition' church. They come when they are students, it helps them settle into city life, but if they get a job, they then go to a local church."

My take: Create spaces and groups that you would enjoy being in. The love and care for people creates environments they want to stay in.

3. YOUNG PEOPLE NEED A FAITH THAT IS THEIR OWN

What they said: Many leaders see children and preteens looked after while they are young. The worry is what happens at sixteen, eighteen and beyond.

"To let the youth understand that this is their own faith, not their parents' faith."

"Hardest part is making sure they don't depart from their faith when they go to uni."

One respondent described parents who want teaching handed down in a traditional way,

while young people want room to ask questions and explore. Another said young people from the church were now choosing to stay and serve, especially in worship, and named it as what they were most excited about.

My take: When kids become teenagers, they start asking bigger questions. If the church doesn't let them ask them, and doesn't give them space to answer them, they don't develop their own faith.

4. THE LANGUAGE GROUPS LIVE SIDE BY SIDE

What they said: Language is the barrier named most often, but culture, expectations and size matter too. When people do meet, small things help.

"People tend to stay within the language groups where they are comfortable."

"Food always brings people together!"

"Relationships between language groups hinge strongly on some sense of shared connection, which tends to happen with a shared building or cross-over ministry."

Another pointed out that many activities are organised by the Chinese-speaking side with little English involvement, partly because the English group is too small to take part in everything.

My take: I've got a whole paper talking about how churches shouldn't treat other congregations as children, but adopt a sibling relationship, to desire the good of each, whilst allowing autonomy as well.

5. HONG KONG MIGRATION IS BOTH AN OPPORTUNITY AND A PRESSURE

What they said: Leaders describe more young people, fresh ideas and new energy. They also describe being unprepared.

"Increased the numbers by around 30%."

"We only had like 3 leaders and suddenly 80 youth."

"The younger generation increasingly speaking English and feeling less connected to the Cantonese ministry."

Leaders also expect that many of these young people will, over time, speak mostly English. One said they will need "enough leaders to support the English-speaking ministries that are likely to grow". Accounts differ on where young people end up: some stay in the Cantonese stream, while others are now joining the English ministry in larger numbers.

My take: I think there's still a lot of uncertainty of what's going to happen. But what we can do is prepare the best we can. Create a church where someone, who is third culture, or feeling lost, to find a home with Christ.

6. THE HOPE IS A CHURCH FOR EVERYONE WHO SPEAKS ENGLISH

What they said: Asked to picture a thriving ministry in ten years, many leaders described something wider than a British-born Chinese congregation.

"A church like an international church. Not just for British-born Chinese, but for all English-

speaking people."

"An ethnically and demographically diverse group of worshippers… resembling an international church rather than a majority-Asian church."

Some also pictured young people leading, with lay leaders raised up and released. At the same time, several leaders admitted that their church can feel closed to outsiders at present, and one described the atmosphere as "greatly 'Chinese'".

My take: A healthy church is one where the members can bring those in their community and outside to know and experience Christ. As English becomes the more dominant language, what will our church look like that is accessible to that generations friends.

7. LEADERS WANT FRIENDS TOO

What they said: Asked what support would help, few most asked for people.

"Just building relationship, meeting with other leaders, to encourage each other in our journeys and share resources."

"One-on-one mentoring, or opportunities to discuss leadership issues in a safe and secure environment, would be good."

"Fellowship would be most valued, not necessarily support or training."

Others asked for training in leadership, youth discipleship and church governance, and for guidance from churches that have faced the same challenges.

My take: Isolation is a real problem. A network that connects English ministry leaders could make a difference even before any new training is offered.

8. ADVICE LEADERS WOULD GIVE TO OTHERS

"Start small and focus on the relationships."

"Think about WHY EM is needed, and talk to the people who would be the core of the congregation to make sure that you all share the same vision before you get started."

"Give them the freedom to grow according to their own culture and style. Don't force them to fit into the same style that your other congregations operate in."

"Start before it's too late but be careful in appointing leaders."

One leader offered a note of caution that is worth keeping: the answer is not always to start an English ministry, and there is more than one way to address the need.