

<b>Institution: Glyndŵr University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 4</b> <b>Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience</b>
<b>Title of case study: The psychology of prayer</b> <b>[4/1]</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research into the psychology of prayer aids the Church of England in one of its key areas of mission, to engage with and to promote the spiritual health of the nation. This research promotes the engagement of those who do not necessarily attend church to engage with their spiritual development. The research conducted into the analysis of prayer cards left in churches and cathedrals has influenced: the development of a Church of England prayer website; the reconceptualization and reorganisation of the Bangor Cathedral prayer request area; and integration of prayer card analyses in larger research projects initiated by Church of England dioceses exploring church growth.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This research offers an original conceptualization of prayer that is accessible to and intelligible to the client (the Church of England) by employing theological categories of thought. This conceptualization proposes the notion of 'ordinary prayer' drawing in an original way on Jeff Astley's notion of 'ordinary theology' (Astley 2002, 2013). Ordinary theology is concerned with the theology of those who sit in the pews and visit churches and cathedrals rather than the theology of the academy. One significant way of accessing ordinary theology is through the analysis of intercessory prayers people leave in church-related contexts. Using such intercessory prayer facilities is becoming an increasingly popular practice in churches in the UK, accessed by a wide-range of people, including churchgoers and those who are not formally linked to the Church. Taking ordinary theology seriously is important for the Church's development of relevant ministries relating to: worship, pastoral care, Christian education, apologetics, evangelism, and preaching.</p> <p>Although there has been a number of useful research studies analysing prayers left in churches none have focused on replication or attempted to build an analytic framework, although their aims have been to inform church-related professional practice in hospital chaplaincy and churches and cathedrals. It is for this reason that the ap Siôn Analytic Framework for Intercessory Prayer (apSAFIP) was developed with the aim of providing a functional tool for identifying and measuring characteristics in prayer content that are relevant to the description of ordinary theologies within ordinary prayer.</p> <p>The apSAFIP was developed using grounded theory and three basic framework constructs emerged, styled as <i>prayer reference</i>, <i>prayer intention</i> and <i>prayer objective</i>, each of which comprise identifiable broad components. In addition, the <i>prayer intention</i> construct was conceived as adaptable allowing the prayer content to be explored from particular research interests, such as health and well being and images of God. The impact described in this case study results from the exploration of the Framework in a variety of church related contexts since 2011, including church, hospital and health and well being, online and street.</p> <p>Dr Tania ap Siôn, Senior Lecturer, 2011 – present        Owen Edwards, PhD student, 2010 - present</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

ap Siôn, T. (2011). Interpreting God's activity in the public square: Accessing the ordinary theology of personal prayer. In L.J. Francis, & H.G. Ziebertz (Eds). *The Public Significance of Religion*, pp 315-342, Brill: Leiden.

ap Siôn, T. and Edwards, O. (2012), Praying 'Online': The ordinary theology of prayer intentions posted on the internet, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 33 (1), 95-109.

ap Siôn, T. (2012), Ordinary prayer and the rural church: an empirical study of prayer cards. In L.J. Francis & M. Robbins (Eds). *Rural Life and Rural Church*. Equinox: London.

ap Siôn, T. and Edwards, O. (2013), Say One for Me: the implicit religion of prayers from the street, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 16 (9): 922-935.

ap Siôn, T. and Nash, P. (2013), Coping through prayer: An empirical study in implicit religion concerning prayers for children in hospital', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 16 (9): 936-952.

ap Siôn, T. (2013). Ordinary prayer and the activity of God: Reading a cathedral prayer board. In J. Astley & L.J. Francis (Eds). *Exploring Ordinary Theology*. Ashgate: Farnham.

Indicators of the quality of the research

Funding of 30k for a full-time PhD studentship was secured from the St Christopher's College Trust for a period of three years for Owen Edwards to research education in relation to cathedrals (2010-2013). The funding was secured by the St Mary's and St Giles' Centre with which the University works in research related area within the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (2008-to date).

Ap Siôn joined Glyndŵr University in January 2011.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

As a result of the research, some cathedrals and churches are now understanding better and developing more fully the ministry of their prayer boards. The impact of this research has been in three specific outcomes:

1. The Church of England has developed a new web-based ministry to make opportunity for prayer requests more widely accessible, which has been informed by the results of the research to date.
2. New research projects have been identified in dialogue with Bangor cathedral.
3. The diocese of Southwark has incorporated the study of prayer requests into a wider research project relating to church growth.

**Outcome 1:** The Church of England's online 'Pray One for Me' website was set up in close conversation with ap Siôn who was invited to monitor the use of this facility. Results indicated that the online prayer facility was being used in a very different way from those prayers posted in contexts that were not online, with greater content emphases on prayers for self, relationships, affective growth and primary control. Subsequent to this, the Church of England saw value in extending what was initially a Lent initiative to a permanent all-year-round facility 'Pray One for Me', with additional interactive features, developed from a thematic response to the research results. This website was launched in February 2012 (**reference d**). Currently, around 2,000 prayers have been collected by ap Siôn from the new website and a series of analyses are taking place in order to explore the results of this intervention. The results of the research are shared directly with the Church of England's Senior Communications Officer, who is responsible for the Church of England's online prayer provision, and with the Bishop of Manchester, who is one of the bishops involved in this initiative (**reference a**).

**Outcome 2:** ap Siôn also works directly with a number of Cathedrals including Bangor, Lichfield, and Southwark to help them with the development of their ministry through prayer boards. This is the result of research that has explored the accessing of spiritual support through prayer by means of the prayer boards and prayer trees provided by the Church of England within churches, cathedrals and hospitals. This supports the Anglican church in the UK in its mission among those who do not necessarily engage with church in a traditional way but nonetheless wish to engage with the 'sacred space' that cathedrals and churches provide. The Anglican church has used the research to better support those who may only attend church for the occasional offices or use the space to pray. This has led to reflection at Bangor Cathedral, for example, on the prayer board area and associated devotional areas in the Cathedral. Research-led physical modifications have been initiated and will be the subject of further research. For example, the positioning of the prayer board in relation to other devotional foci (such as a statue of Mary, votive candles, pebble pool), change to the size of the prayer board and paper sizes. This is testing whether any of these factors play a role in the frequency of prayer board use and also the type of use in terms of prayer content. Ethnographic research methods are now (in 2013) being employed at Bangor Cathedral to explore further the dynamics of personal devotional activity, and this has been stimulated by the prayer card research. It was recognised that prayer cards are only one type of personal devotional activity available to those visiting the Cathedral, and that there are also non-written forms of personal devotional activity as seen in the popular use of statues/ icons and votive candles, for example. Through using non-participant observation, all these aspects of personal devotional activity are being explored in the Lady Chapel of Bangor Cathedral, where it is possible to observe behaviour relating to both written prayer requests and other types of personal devotional activity. The aim of this is to understand the devotional dynamics within this particular area of the Cathedral, and to understand more fully how different individuals are using the area. A further objective that is being explored in dialogue with the results of the research is how to create an appropriate liturgy in which this kind of devotional activity may be incorporated. **(reference b).**

**Outcome 3:** Another example of the impact of this particular prayer research project is that the apSAFIP is being employed as a component of larger research projects that have been commissioned by the Church, such as the 'Signs of Growth' project commissioned by the Diocese of Southwark. The 'Signs of Growth' project is a large-scale quantitative, survey-based project led by researchers at the University of Warwick at the request of the Diocese of Southwark. The objective of the 'Signs of Growth' project is to understand the reasons why numbers attending churches in the Southwark Diocese are increasing (which is against the trend of decreasing church attendance in most other dioceses in the Church of England). On the basis of the track record of the intercessory prayer research, ap Sion has been given access to the prayer requests left in Southwark Cathedral and is working with the Sub-dean and Canon Pastor at the Cathedral in relation to this aspect of the 'Signs of Growth' project (February 2013-to date) **(reference c).**

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**Reference a:** The Bishop of Manchester

**Reference b:** Dean of Bangor Cathedral

**Reference c:** Project Director for the Signs of Growth project

**Reference d:** <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2011/03/say-one-for-me-this-lent-%E2%80%93-bishops-take-to-the-streets-to-launch-largest-ever-national-prayer-initiative.aspx>