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UNDERSTANDING GROWTH: THE ROLES OF EVANGELISM AND A
CHURCH'S IDENTITY IN DETERMINING WHETHER NEWCOMERS
ARE INVITED TO BELONG
A PROJECT-DISSERTATION

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by

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Dedication

To all who are called to share the Good News of God in Christ.

Abstract

The admission of children to communion on baptism without confirmation introduced a debate about how to define membership in the Anglican Church of Canada. Declining membership raised concerns around attracting new members. Using a Grounded Theory approach the researcher interviewed individuals from three numerically growing Anglican Church of Canada parishes. The purpose of the interviews was to determine their understandings of parish identity, evangelism, membership and belonging. Analysis of the recorded and transcribed responses from the Rector, one long term member and two newcomers included identification of key words, repeated phrases and common themes. Respondents did not identify belonging to the Anglican Church nor the Body of Christ when referring to membership. The only criteria for belonging and membership were attendance and participation. In contrast to the normative method of group endorsement that churches use to define membership respondents understood membership to be through self-definition. The paper concludes that growth was unrelated to evangelism. Identity in general affected the way parishes understood people to belong but it was the negative attitude to evangelism which had the greatest impact on their understanding of belonging and invitation to belong.

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My thanks for helping bring this work to a conclusion are owed to many people. To Bill Close for his encouragement to undertake this programme of study; the many DMin coordinators and the St Stephen's community for their continued patience and support; Bishop Barry and Bishop James for their urging to get it done; my DMin Committee for all their work, Wally Fry, Logan McMenemy and Kim Murray; for Rene Warburton in guiding me in the sociological work; those who must remain unnamed but who generously participated in my study; Ann-Marie Gilbert for being the catalyst which brought this to birth with her expectations of deadlines, careful editing, insightful comments, laughter and time generously given; Angela McIndoe who improved my final corrected copy through her careful proofreading; the members of my parish who have continually encouraged me and held me in prayer; my Mother and Father for their prayers and knowing that I could do it; and my wife Franciane, and children, John-Daniel, Jessica and Luc for living with this for so long. And those whom I have forgotten, do thou, O Lord, remember

Lord God, when you call your servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, which yields the true glory; through him who, for the finishing of your work, laid down his life for us, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

The themes of mission and evangelism are interwoven in my life. Working out what it means to be an evangelical has been part of my life's journey. I have had the immense privilege of serving God in many varied and diverse circumstances. I grew up in the Salvation Army with its strong emphasis on evangelism and reaching out to those in need with comfort for the body and succor for the soul. My introduction to the sacraments during summer Bible camps, and worshipping in an Anglican context on joining the Navy lead me into the Anglican Church. Responding to my commitment at the age of fourteen to serve in ordained ministry, I trained for ordination at Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham, UK. I chose St John's as it was an "Evangelical" college and the theology department at the university was considered one of the best in the UK. My personal tutor, Michael Vasey, asked why I as a Canadian had chosen to train at St John's. I replied that as an evangelical I wanted to attend an evangelical college. He asked what I thought it meant to be evangelical and I replied in terms of a high regard for the Authority of Scripture and the Sacraments. After pondering for a bit Michael replied "John, you are not an evangelical. You are just Protestant." I could understand what he meant though I still believed I fit in a broad category of Evangelical rather than just Protestant. I could identify when my theological tutor, Stephen Sykes, was once pressed in class as to what he considered himself to be and replied "I am an evangelical as Luther was an evangelical." While still linking being evangelical with a high regard for the authority of Scripture and the Sacraments I also closely connect evangelical with

evangelism. To be evangelical is to share the good news of God in Christ and invite people to become part of that story. Part of my ministry has been spent in Africa (Uganda (85-86) and Burundi (91-94)). The areas in which I worked were deeply influenced by the East African Revival. Evangelism was deeply ingrained in the life of the church. Evangelism was talked about regularly, evangelists were a recognized category of ministers in the church and Christians were expected to talk about their faith.

The Bishops of the Anglican Communion initiated a Decade of Evangelism in 1988. I have been Diocesan Representative to the Primate's Network on Evangelism, part of the Canadian Anglican Church's response to the 1988 Lambeth Conference declaration of a Decade of Evangelism.

The intent was for churches to be pro-actively engaged in evangelism. The general response in the Canadian Anglican context was not strong. Part of this may be due to the changes in society. The emphasis on pluralism in our society is often taken to mean that it is inappropriate to share one's faith story. Where there is a sense that we have been entrusted with the Great Commission¹, clergy and laity often do not have confidence or a sense of how to go about sharing their faith stories. There can be the sense that this is not an Anglican thing to do, especially when evangelism is identified with actions of high-pressure proselytising groups. What exactly is "evangelism" (and does it differ from "good news") is a question often posed. Are corporal acts of mercy evangelism? Where

¹ Matthew 28.19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. NRSV

people are engaged in sharing “good news” practically, is it evangelism if they may never reach the point of explaining why they do what they are doing?

I am interested in the area of identity and how people come to belong because the parish of which I am the Rector experienced a decline in numbers during the nineties. The average age was over sixty-five. When the previous rector of the parish retired, the congregation did an evaluation. With the assistance of people from the judicatory authority the parish examined its life and membership, identified positive attributes in the life of the parish and opportunities for growth and change. They specifically wanted to reach out to younger families in the neighbourhood and involve them in the life of the church. They summarized their vision of their parish as wanting to be “an open door...welcoming the surrounding community.” Since I was appointed to the position of Rector in this parish in January 1996 the average number of people attending Sunday morning worship has increased from thirty to ninety. I am interested in learning the reasons why churches grow numerically and how this might be applied to other church congregations.

These interests lead me to undertake a sustained academic study through the Doctor of Ministry programme at St Stephen’s. My hope is that the following study will provide some insight and the results will assist churches to be more effective in reaching out to others in sharing their faith stories and inviting people to become members of the good news communities who are followers of Jesus.

Chapter 1 Boundaries and Identity

Factors influencing Identity

The understanding of a faith community's identity will affect how they live out their life as a community, how open they are to the idea of inviting people to become part of their community, and how willing they are in reality to allow new people to join.

Some factors influencing this understanding include:

- the history of the faith community
- who it understands itself to be
- the underlying theological presumption – are we a Great Commandment² Community or a Great Commission³ community?
- the demographics of the community
- way people dress
- the worship style
- engagement with evangelism.

All these affect a faith community's openness to welcoming newcomers – and all communities can be open - but the major factor is whether or not the community sees a

² John 15.12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. NRSV

³ Matthew 28.19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. NRSV

need to evangelise *i.e.* has a desire for people to join their community and their willingness to ask people to join.

Current Understandings of Identity

The following researchers chosen offer their methods of identifying a congregation's key characteristics.

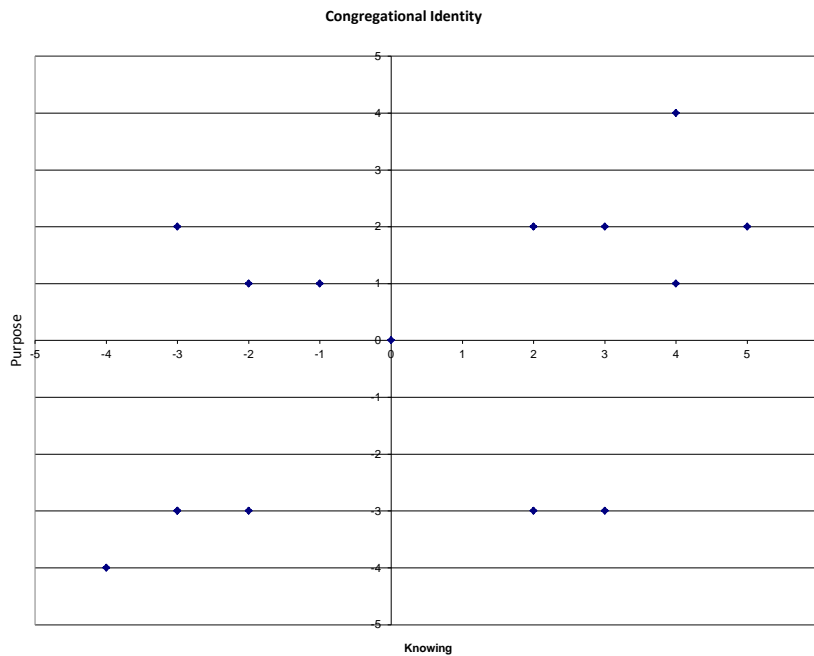
Mead: How One Understands The Good News

Mead⁴ classifies a parish's predominant understanding of church by the way they understand the good news of Jesus. This resonated strongly for me as a useful method of identifying a congregation's key characteristics and distinguishes clearly between the corporate and private understanding of faith. It defines congregational identity in terms of future hope and teleology.

Mead produces a quadrant with an x axis bounded by "The *only* way to know God is a one-on-one, direct relationship. That's the *only* way to know God" on one end to "The *only* way to know God is in the midst of God's people, the church. That's the *only* way." on the other. The y axis is bounded by "The end and purpose of life is so to live that I am reunited with God at my death" to "The end and purpose of life is to participate with brothers and sisters in building a human society of shalom, where peace and justice and love reign." Mapping the congregation's understanding of the Good News clarifies what faith story it is sharing and articulates this story as part of its identity.

⁴ Loren B. Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future*, Once and Future Church Series (Alban Institute, 1994; reprint, 1995). p121

Figure 1 Understanding the Good News



Woodbury: Lifestyle, Decisions and Faith Stances

Woodbury provides the Canadian perspective of someone experienced in congregational growth and development. He suggests there are one hundred ways to be the church.⁵ He proposes three categories - Lifestyle, Making Decisions and Faith Stances - and subdivides them as follows:

⁵ Clair Woodbury, *100 Ways to Be the Church* (Winfield: Wood Lake Books, 1991).

1. Lifestyle: Ethnic, Agricultural, Industrial, Global
2. Making Decisions: Historical, Organizational, Sociological, Psychological, Cellular
3. Faith Stances: The Word, Experience of God, Tradition, Vital Community, Social Action

These produce one hundred combinations of what might constitute primary characteristics of church. How the church functions will depend on how large the range of the mix is and how well they understand and cooperate with one another. This analysis will identify what shapes a congregation's identity, clarify its understanding of the Good News it is to share and suggest the kind of people it will connect with most readily in its evangelism.

Crawley: Congregation as Persona

Crawley⁶ suggests having people image the church as a person. So the congregation is asked to imagine the church as to gender, age, appearance, occupation, lifestyle, health and fitness, life setting, favourite entertainment and food. This is used to come to a common understanding of the congregation's identity. However, there is no suggestion of how the persona would be able to change if needed. I suggest that this approach would need to be augmented by another tool.

Jones: Congregations As Theological Worlds

⁶ Janet R Crawley, *Who Is Our Church? Imagining Congregational Identity* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2006).

I was fascinated by Paul Jones'⁷ Theological Worlds when we studied it during an Interdisciplinary Study in Ministry because it clearly illustrated a process for determining identity. He posits five theological worlds which people inhabit:

1. World One – Separation and Reunion
2. World Two – Conflict and Vindication
3. World Three – Emptiness and Fulfillment
4. World Four – Condemnation and Forgiveness
5. World Five – Suffering and Endurance

He produces a chart (See Table 1) that identifies the primary rhythm of the theological world, associated understandings of the primary question with which each world wrestles, and the feeling and human conditions that are associated with this issue. He then suggests the state with which person identifies in this world and how this world forms an understanding of atonement, Christology and salvation.

⁷ W. Paul Jones, *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

Table 1 The Characteristics of Theological Worlds According to Jones

Essential	Issue	Feeling	Human Condition	State	Atonement	Christology	Salvation
Separation and Reunion	Cosmos	Longing	Isolation	Alien/Orphan	Experiential, Love as tearing the Veil	Revealer/Evoker to lead me home	Coming Home/Being home(harmony)
Conflict and Vindication	History	Anger	Normlessness experienced as Chaos	Warrior	Classical (love as taking our part)	Messiah/Liberator	New Earth
Emptiness and Fulfillment	Self	Ache	Self-Estrangement	Outcast	Enabling	Example/Model	Wholeness
Condemnation and Forgiveness	Demonic	Guilt	Powerlessness	Fugitive	Compensatory	Saviour/Redeemer	Adoption
Suffering and Endurance	Life	Overwhelmed	Meaninglessness	Victim/Refugee	Assumptive	Suffering servant/Companion	Survival

Congregations will contain people with various different theological views and people will gravitate to congregations which reflect a theological world with which they identify.

The theological worlds inhabited by members of a congregation shape their understanding of the Good News and the way that they present Jesus to others. These preferences will influence the liturgy in terms of chosen hymns, Eucharistic prayers and sermon topics. It will influence the way they understand how one should engage in evangelism and their approach to evangelism based on their Christological, and soteriological understandings.

Bowen: Evangelising community

John Bowen is Canadian, and an evangelical Anglican working with the Wycliffe Institute of Evangelism. Its website offers an assessment tool to determine if a congregation is an evangelizing community.⁸ The scale ranges from being uncomfortable with evangelism to thriving as an evangelistic community. There are suggestions for

⁸ John Bowen, "Is Your Congregation an Evangelising Community? An Evangelism Assessment for Churches" <http://institute.wycliffecollege.ca/2008/03/is-your-congregation-an-evangelizing-community-an-evangelism-assessment-for-churches/> (accessed).

action for each ranking. The questions can all be answered by any person with a reasonable knowledge of the congregation.

Hiebert: Bounded and Centred Sets

The previous approaches to understanding congregational identity deal with the question of identity but do not examine the boundaries which form the identity.

In researching this area, the work of Paul Hiebert is the most profound that I have encountered.⁹ His approach links both boundaries and identity. Hiebert, a professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School¹⁰, examines identity and conversion issues in several of his works. Hiebert uses the current mathematical model of set theory to illustrate how we create categories in different ways, each of which has its own structural characteristics and logic. He looks at four ways of forming categories and how these affect one's understanding and view of conversion, the church and mission – outreach to others.

When a category is defined, there are two essential variables:

1. the criteria for assigning elements to a category (set); and
2. boundaries.

The two variables are combined to form four categories:

1. Intrinsic Well Formed (Bounded) Sets
2. Intrinsic Fuzzy Sets
3. Extrinsic Well Formed (Centred) Sets

⁹ Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

¹⁰ Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, is part of the Association of Theological Schools in Canada and the United States and holds to a statement of faith of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

4. Extrinsic Fuzzy Sets

Intrinsic Well-Formed Sets

Intrinsic well formed set theory was formulated by the German mathematician George Cantor¹¹ in the nineteenth century. Cantor's proposition is that a collection of objects can be regarded as a single entity if the objects share properties that define the whole. It is possible in a well formed set to determine whether an object is, or is not, a member of the set. The structural characteristics of bounded sets force us to look at things in certain ways *e.g.* how we view church affects our actions. Hiebert uses the category apple to illustrate this.¹² An apple is:

1.
 - a) a fruit
 - b) usually round
 - c) red or yellow
 - d) edible
 - e) produced by a rosaceous tree.

All objects meeting these criteria are apples.

2. There is a clear boundary to the category. A fruit is either an apple or not. It cannot be partly apple and partly pear. In defining the category the majority of the effort is used in defining and maintaining the boundary. One must define what an apple is and differentiate from other objects belonging to the same domain (fruit) but which are not apples. The central question is whether an object is inside or outside the category.

¹¹ Joseph Warren Dauben, *Georg Cantor : His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹² Hiebert. p112

3. Objects within a bounded set are uniform in their essential characteristics *i.e.* they are a homogenous group. All apples are fully apples. Some apples are not more apple than others “There is no variation built into the structuring of the category.”¹³
4. “Bounded sets are essentially static sets.” Apples remain apples whether green, ripe or rotten. “The only structural change is movement from inside to outside the category or vice versa.”

Bounded sets as we use them in the West are ontological sets. Reality is defined in terms of unchanging universal abstract categories.

Intrinsic Fuzzy Sets

The concept of fuzzy sets¹⁴ was introduced in 1965 by Lofti Asker Zadeh, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. He noted that in everyday life most categories are one of degree, and that exact definitions of tall, short, sick, well rich, poor, do not exist. Similarly day blends into night, the plain into a mountain, a bush into a tree. Even death is fuzzy with some organs and cells living and continuing to grow when brain function or even heart action ceases. In a fuzzy set there are degrees of inclusion. A thing may be a partial member of a set. Hiebert uses the illustration of race or ethnic origin. While people use sharply defined categories to separate people into different ethnic or racial categories, the reality is in a continuum of inter-marriage. Persons could have great-grandparents from up to four different ethnic groups and similarly for grandparents and parents. One would be ethnically pure only if all one’s ancestors were ethnically pure. In

¹³ Ibid. p113

¹⁴ Lofti Asker Zadeh, "Fuzzy Sets," *Information and Control* 8 (1965).

fuzzy set terms ethnic origin is a continuum. One may be part English, Irish, Scot, Chinese, Japanese *et cetera*. There is no clear boundary.

In an intrinsic fuzzy set we find the following characteristics:

1. Membership is based on the intrinsic nature of the members
2. The boundaries of categories are fuzzy with degrees of inclusion. One could be ten, twenty or fifty percent in the category. Where it radically differs from bounded sets is in not having either/or distinctions.
3. Membership is possible in more than one set because the boundary is fuzzy. A thing may belong to both A and not-A.
4. Change is a process not a point. Fruit ripens by degrees. Day turns into night. The speed of transition can vary but the fuzziness is constant.
5. Ontological reality is a continuum. The underlying unity of reality is the common domain in which categories exist. In terms of ethnic origins, bounded sets would refer to ethnicity. Fuzzy sets would refer to variations within humankind.

Extrinsic Well Formed Sets

The other way of forming sets is using extrinsic characteristics to define membership in a category. Things are grouped on the basis of their relation to other things, not on what they are in and of themselves. Kinship groups are examples of extrinsic sets. “Sisters are females related to one another through common parents. The lion clan in a tribal society is composed of people descended from a common ancestor – old First Lion.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Hiebert. p 122

Extrinsic sets can have sharp or fuzzy boundaries. Relational well-formed or centred sets have the following characteristics.

1. The centred set is created by defining a centre and how things relate to the centre. Things belong to the set if they are related to the centre. The best example is kinship groups. The Smith family, with John and Mary Smith as the reference includes all who have a relationship with them – children, grandchildren, adopted people, those brought in by marriage et cetera. All these people have some kind of relationship to John and Mary Smith.
2. Centred sets are not created by drawing boundaries. They do have sharp boundaries that separate things inside the set from those outside – between things moving towards the centre (related) and those that are not. Centred sets are as well formed as are bounded sets. The boundary emerges automatically by defining the centre and any relationships to it. Greater emphasis is placed on the centre and relationships instead of maintaining a boundary because there is no requirement to maintain the boundary to maintain the set. Things which relate to the centre naturally separate themselves from things that are not.
3. Centred sets have two intrinsic variables:
 - a) Membership; and
 - b) Distance from the centre.

All members of a set are full members and share fully in its functions. Some members are far from the centre, others near, but all members are moving towards the centre. All are equally members of the set regardless of the

distance from the centre. Something near the centre but moving away is not a member.

4. There are two types of change inherent in a centred set – entry or exit from the set and movement towards or away from the centre. Things moving away from the centre can turn and start moving towards the centre. In the kinship example a child can be adopted or a person may form a relationship with another person. As there is a radical transformation in the relationships of the person we could call this change a conversion. Members of the set can move towards or away from the centre. Those at a distance can move closer while those members which are near may slide back while still headed towards the centre. In a relational example someone at a court could rise in rank and power as the relationship to the ruler increases in intimacy or the person may fall in rank and power if the relationship becomes less intimate.¹⁶

Extrinsic Fuzzy Sets

The fourth set is the extrinsic fuzzy set which combines the extrinsic nature of centred sets and the fuzzy boundaries of fuzzy sets. This set would have the following characteristics:

1. Membership in the set is based on relationships to other members of the set and/or a defining centre, not on the intrinsic nature of a thing.
2. The boundary is fuzzy. The defining relationship moves from close to non-existent. There would be no sharp transition from being in the set to being out

¹⁶ Ibid. p 124

of the set. Things would move towards and away from the centre as well as other directions.

3. The two variables of an extrinsic fuzzy set are degrees of membership and distance from the centre. Things would range from non-membership to full membership. There would be differences in the strength of the relationship – closeness to the centre.
4. Conversion would be viewed as a process of changing directions not an instantaneous about face.

Extrinsic fuzzy sets can lead to relativism because things are moving in many directions. Things which are moving towards the centre may at the same time be independent of the centre and therefore pass it by. Examples of extrinsic fuzzy sets are more difficult to identify than other sets. Hiebert identifies totemic societies where there is one life force so that boundaries between humans, plants and animals are fuzzy. Things have more or less of this life force. Another example would be an evolutionary view of nature. While everything is regarded as descending from the same life source, life is evolving in different directions. Therefore boundaries between objects are fuzzy. Humans are seen as more closely related to apes than to fish or trees while sharing a common origin.

Set theory applied to the Category Christian, Church and Mission

Hiebert applies set theory to our understandings of Christian, church and mission. I have summarised these in tables.

Table 2 The Category Christian as a Set

Christian				
	Definition	Boundary	Membership differentiation	Conversion
Intrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> external characteristics which are measurable: orthodoxy orthopraxy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sharp distinction between Christian and non-Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no distinction based on spiritual maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> all people must experience conversion to be saved
Intrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> defined in terms of beliefs and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no sharp boundary between Christian and non-Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> membership is one of degree. A person affirming some of the necessary beliefs would be partially Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not a decisive event but a process no clear point where one becomes a Christian
Extrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, those in relationship with him who make him the Lord or centre of their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear distinction between Christians and non-Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> variations amongst Christians in spirituality maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> entering or leaving the set or conversion and movement towards the centre or growth in a relationship.
Extrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate to Christ in one way or another e.g. Lord, a good person to imitate, a philosopher teaching truth or a guru with insights to life amongst many others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sharp distinction between Christian and non-Christian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> degrees of being Christian – ranging from faithful to casual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conversion would be a series of partial turn no point of conversion or a single point of changing direction distance from the centre would indicate the strength of the relationship.

Table 3 **The Category Church as a Set**

Church					
	Boundaries	Membership	Leadership	Evangelism	Spiritual Growth
Intrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unity is based on uniformity of all Christians thinking and acting alike 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clear membership roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic, participation in meeting and church offices would be limited to congregational members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> major task of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> building the church is an end in itself
Intrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly defined beliefs and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no sharp boundaries resistance to attempts to make boundaries vary from partial to full Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> distinction between those in the process of conversion and those who are full Christians Leadership would be drawn from those who are full Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dialogue and education for growth into the essentials of the Christian faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a wide diversity in essential matters of faith, helping members to accept the official teaching of the church
Extrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> defined by its centre – being in relationship with Jesus Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> degrees of spiritual maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leadership would be drawn from the spiritually mature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stress evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uphold Christ so he might draw all people to himself, build a community of faith
Extrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the church would have no clear boundary, consisting of people who have various levels of commitment to Christ and one another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> those who have some commitment or relationship to Christ ranging from general interest to radical commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognition of degrees in becoming Christian and growing in maturity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> little emphasis on evangelism. stress on helping each person find the best way to lead them to God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the church would seek to increase the level of dedication

Table 4 **The Category Mission as a Set**

Mission		
	Mission	Other religions
Intrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> win them for Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christianity would be regarded as true and other religions as false
Intrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not be a call to conversion encouraged to find the truth in their own religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognition that there is truth in all religions. Christ is a way but not necessarily the way of salvation.
Extrinsic Well Formed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> invite others to become followers of Jesus not prove other religions false 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong distinction between Christianity and other religions, uniqueness of Christ would be affirmed
Extrinsic Fuzzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seekers and new converts would be immediately baptised and incorporated into the life of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there would not be a strong distinction between Christianity and non-Christian religions. The uniqueness of Christ would not be stressed and in the extreme this view would see all religions as leading to God

Reflections on set theory

Hiebert makes an excellent case that the Hebrew world view – in which Jesus was formed – was extrinsic and well formed. The people of Israel knew God in relational terms – Creator, Judge, Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The nation was camped around the tabernacle during the Exodus and in the holy land came three times a year to the “house of the Lord”. The people of Israel were in a covenant relationship with God as a people-in-community.¹⁷ Marriage was with kinship members and blessings and cursings were visited on the kinship group as a whole. The primary values of the Israelites were relational in nature – justice, shalom, love and mercy.

Jesus and Paul reflect the Hebrew world view in their teachings about our relationship to God and one another. When Paul writes ‘I want to know Christ’ (Philippians 3.10) he is referring to knowing God intimately as a person, and not to objective knowledge of God. Paul’s emphasis is on our reconciliation to God through Christ. The New Testament writers must be understood in this relational worldview. In contrast, the Greek world view regarded the concept of God in intrinsic terms – supernatural, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.

Centred Set Theory

If we come to think of our identity and the boundaries which shape it in terms of centred set theory, we can approach it from two different perspectives. Our identity is formed by our relationship with God in Christ and whether or not we are moving towards or away from the centre *i.e.* whether we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. If we

¹⁷ Ibid. p 125

have a relationship with God in Christ then we are part of the set. We are also in motion either drawing closer to or moving further away from the centre, being transformed or sanctified or falling into sin and backsliding. Where some confusion can arise is between the intrinsic variables of membership and distance from the centre of centred sets.

Some people in responding to the concept of the centred set make the mistake of thinking that centred sets are not well formed because there is no talk of boundaries but rather relationship to the centre.¹⁸ They are under the misapprehension that centred sets are fuzzy. If objects are members of a centred set by virtue of their relationship to the centre, then the boundary is made very clear by defining the relationship or what it means to be in the relationship.

I find the model of the centred set helpful in two ways. First, it places the understanding of being a Christian within a relational model. To be a Christian is to be in relationship with God in Christ. It is not based on beliefs or behaviours or to express it as Paul does “We are not under law but under grace.” (Romans 6.14) Throughout the Bible the indicative always comes first and is followed by the imperative. “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt [sc therefore] you shall have no other Gods before you.” (Exodus 20.1) God acts first in loving kindness towards God’s people which then calls for a response from God’s people. “We love God because God first loved us.” (1 John 4.19) We love God because God’s love for us brings that forth in response. We do not love God in order to earn God’s love. Second, the centred set is helpful in understanding the dynamic component of the model. It describes the vitality of the

¹⁸ See the discussion by Moffat of Dave Andrew (*Christ-Anarchy*) and Jim Peterson (*Church without Walls in Olivia Moffat, "What Kind of Church?," in E.F.A.C. Conference 2001 (Sydney, Australia: 2001).*

relationship through movements towards or away from the centre. It can be very descriptive of objects which are members of the set. I feel the centred set is the most useful model as energy previously used in defining and maintaining boundaries is put into sustaining of the relationship.

A difficulty which may occur when discussing boundaries of bounded sets or the relation to the centre of centred sets is determining when a person has crossed the boundary line or has reached the centre. We can use conversion as an example, as it is similarly difficult to determine when a person is converted. Is it the moment of conversion or the culmination of a conversion process that marks the crossing of the boundary or change in relationship?

Research indicates conversion is a process so that even when a boundary is sharp and clearly defined the actual moment of crossing is unclear. If we follow Rambo's¹⁹ suggestion that conversion is what a group says it is then it could be possible to mark conversion with external factors, *e.g.* public confession – verbally or by baptism. Thus conversion would not occur until it is marked by external factors. There will be further discussion of issues associated with conversion in the chapter on conversion²⁰.

This model encounters problems when applied to the centred set and the relationship of the object to the centre of the set, when talking about a relationship with God in Christ in terms of Christian conversion. For example, everyone has a relationship with God in some way because at the very minimum we consider everyone to be created by God and

¹⁹ Lewis R Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁰ See Chapter 3 pp 48ff.

their life sustained by God. To define the relationship we can look at it in terms of commitment. There can be a relationship without commitment or without formal commitment. If we draw on marriage as an analogy, the nature of a couple's relationship changes when they have publicly exchanged vows. We might say that they have moved from a set of friendship to the set of marriage. It is a centred set in both cases because the set is formed by the relationship one has to the centre. But still they are different sets. The covenantal aspect of marriage is different from that of friendship. As the difference is in kind and not degree we need a new set to describe the different relationship. From this example we can see that one can be in a relationship to Jesus in some way, which can be the entire set of humanity by virtue of it being created by God. If one enters into a covenantal relationship with Jesus, according to the definition of Archbishop Temple through acknowledging Him as Saviour and Lord, then one moves into a different set – the set of those who are in covenantal relationship.

When church members are able to articulate the church's identity, its members can then engage in evangelism through sharing their faith stories with others and inviting them to belong.

Chapter 2 Evangelism

My Foundation

My theology of ministry about evangelism has been influenced by my religious formation as a child and teenager. I was born into a Salvation Army family. In the Salvation Army there is - at least in the official pronouncements though there is much less amongst the members - a “passion for souls”. There is the desire that people will be converted and brought into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Lives will be transformed as people turn their lives over to God and accept Jesus Christ into their lives as their personal Saviour. People will only find salvation through such a personal commitment and this salvation is to be found in Christ alone. Those who do not will be eternally lost. With such presuppositions, evangelism, reaching out to the lost, is foundational to the mission and understanding of the Salvation Army.

However, within the Salvation Army a debate has continued from the time of my adherence as a young person to the present as to the nature of its essence. Was it a dual purpose entity? One part ministered to the needs of members who attended worship on Sundays, were engaged in the band and songsters, attended Bible studies and other Christian formation activities but had little or no engagement with the other part of the organization. The second part was involved in evangelism and social services outreach efforts of the organization to unwed mothers, drug addicts, alcoholics and dysfunctional families. Those who understood the Army as having two aspects tended to use church language for those who were members. They regarded the social services aspect as

belonging to the role of the officers or the salaried, ordained ministers of the denomination. Both parts would be engaged in evangelism. The “church” part would be geared towards reaching “people like us”. The social services would engage in evangelism with the economically marginalised and those suffering from addictions. Others who understood the organization as a unified whole referred back to the roots of the Salvation Army as a para-church entity. At the formation of the Salvation Army people were to be members of both a local church and the Salvation Army. Christian service opportunities would be found through the work of the Salvation Army. As time passed it became difficult to persuade those who were currently second, third and fourth generation Salvationists – now solidly middle class – that they needed to be engaged with the economically marginalised and those suffering from addictions. The history of the Salvation Army exemplifies the movement of sect to church.²¹ Today, many worship centres have moved from the downtown areas where they were located to the suburbs where the Salvation Army is one “church” – even though it does not baptize or celebrate communion – among many others. Often it calls itself a community church with the identification as The Salvation Army in small print beneath.

My own socialization has been such as to impart a sense that people need Jesus Christ to live fully human lives as God intended. Yet there is also within that sense a reluctance, due perhaps more to embarrassment though associated with a fear of rejection, to engage in evangelism. My reluctance towards evangelism is also linked to an uncomfortableness

²¹ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). p 204ff

with the manner of many who engage in “evangelism”. Televangelists, those who hand out poorly written tracts, and those who shout on street corners, all raise a distaste - at a minimum, for the style if not the message. Yet there is the Great Commission to “Go into the world...”, and my steadfastly held world view is that people will live happier lives and have hope of salvation when they are reconciled to God. So we come to the motives for evangelism. Should we be engaged in evangelism and if so how is it that people come to faith? What are the factors which play a role in a person changing their worldview and joining an organization? And if we can determine these factors, how do we then relate them to the life of the church and a call to evangelise?

Our motives for evangelism need to be rooted in our experience of God and our desire to share the wonder of our experience with others so they too may enter into a deeper relationship with God as God is revealed to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. A natural outcome of evangelism should be numerical growth. The early church is recorded as growing through the proclamation of the good news. However, evangelism should never be for the sake of numerical growth. If we can expect growth from evangelism we should be aware of factors which affect and are related to growth. In some circumstances contextual factors will be conducive for growth, such as population migration, cultural crisis, and congruence. Other factors such as opposition of kinship groups and dissonance will inhibit it. To undergird our evangelism we will need to create or maximize conditions which are conducive to evangelism and to minimize or eliminate those which inhibit it.

Biblical Usage of the Word “Evangelism”

One of the fascinating aspects of the word evangelism is that it is never used in the Authorised Version, Revised Standard Version or New Revised Standard Version translations of the Bible. It is first “coined in the sixteenth century... and the first reference to it is in the writings of Francis Bacon.”²² The term evangelist is used in the singular, in Acts 21.8, 2 Timothy 4.5 and once in the plural in Ephesians 4.11. The etymology of evangelism comes from the Greek eu) aggelizomai meaning good news. What is intriguing is the preference for either the noun eu) aggelion or the verb eu) aggelizomai by Biblical writers. eu) aggelizomai occurs only once in Matthew at 11:5; ten times in Luke; fifteen times in Acts; in Paul twenty-one times; twice in Hebrews; three times in 1 Peter; and eu) aggelizein twice in Revelation. The verb is not found at all in Mark, John's Gospel, Ephesians, James, 2 Peter or Jude. It is particularly striking that neither verb nor substantive is found in the Johannine writings.”²³ Scholars suggest that it is not found in the Johannine writings because John sees himself as writing a gospel of fulfillment and this does not fit in with his realized eschatology.

“eu) aggelion occurs in Mark eight times (including Mark 1:1 and the non-Markan ending 16:15) as compared with four times in Matthew and none at all in Luke. This has

²² John Bowen, *Evangelism For "Normal" People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002).p13

²³ Gerhard Kittel, "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Kittel's 10 Vol)," ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972-89).

been frequently noted but never explained. We cannot say that Luke rejects the noun, since it occurs in Acts twice. All that we can say is that he prefers the verb. The substantive is also found sixty times in Paul (including four times in Ephesians and four times in the Pastorals), and once each in 1 Peter and Revelation.”²⁴

So we have a distinction between the proclaiming of the good news and the content of the good news. There has been much discussion over the centuries whether the two occasions in Mark²⁵ where the word is placed on the lips of Jesus whether they are original to Jesus or a creation of the community. The issue cannot be decided on textual evidence alone and perhaps the most critical factor in reaching a conclusion will be how one evaluates Jesus’ messianic consciousness. If Jesus recognised himself as God’s Son who was going to die and rise again then he also would have understood that he himself was the content of the good news.²⁶ Paul used the substantive without any qualifications. He had an expectation that his hearers would understand when he talked of “the good news”. The two summaries of Paul’s understanding of the good news are Romans 1.3ff: “The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” and

1 Corinthians 15.1-5: “Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mark 13.10 And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. Mark 14.9 Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.

²⁶ It is reflective of that first year NT essay often assigned “Jesus preached the kingdom. The church preached Jesus. Discuss.”

that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...”

The biblical use of “good news” as verb and noun helps to inform our understanding of evangelism as containing both proclamation and content. The proclamation of the good news as used in Luke-Acts (par Matthew) is a verbal preaching or speaking of the good news. The content as discussed in the Gospels refers to the reign of God, and for Paul, the person of Jesus. As discussed next the term evangelism is problematic but as we look to engage in the activity we should hold in mind the biblical understanding that it is verbal proclamation and the proclamation is about the person of Jesus.

Is It Appropriate To Evangelize?

The question of whether or not to evangelize can be linked to our understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus, who he is and how he relates to the world. It is linked to our understanding of the relationship of the Christian faith to other faiths. Are all religions the same? Are they all different paths leading to God? Is it of importance which path one follows or are they all equally valid? As the world has grown smaller the issues arising from inter-faith encounters challenge adherents of every faith. People within the Christian faith have formed different positions to answer these questions. Alan Race describes the

three main positions as exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist.²⁷ Percy²⁸ adds a fourth view - relativistic pluralism which sees all world views as relative and equally valid.

The term pluralism describes a context without assigning a value judgement to the term.

To say that we live in a pluralist society acknowledges that it is a society in which there are several different world views. However, people often incorporate relativism into the term pluralism. Pluralism now means that not only are there different world views but that they are all equally valid. Percy notes “Pluralism allows for recognition of a diversity of lifestyles and belief systems and for the right of people to choose their own path.

Relativism goes beyond this, to affirm that all belief systems are equally true, and it doesn't matter which system one eventually chooses.”²⁹

Exclusivist

The exclusivist position has been and is held by many Christians. Salvation is through Christ alone and if you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus you will spend eternity in hell. I will examine the implications for evangelism with the inclusivist position.

Relativistic Pluralism

Relativistic pluralism argues that there are diverse paths to God and all are equally valid.

The parable of the blind men and the elephant is often introduced at this point to illustrate how every religion's grasp of God is only partial. Each religion can only give a partial

²⁷ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM, 1983).

²⁸ Harold Percy, *Good News People: An Introduction to Evangelism for Tongue-Tied Christians* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1996). p 61

²⁹ Ibid. p 61

description of God as a blind man can only give a partial description of an elephant depending on what part of the elephant he was holding.

While there are many different versions, the essence of the story is as follows. A Raj has a number of blind men feel a part of an elephant and each is asked to describe it. Each man describes the part which he felt as if it was the entire elephant. The one holding the trunk describes it as a snake. The one holding the tail describes the elephant as a vine. The one holding the ear describes the elephant as a banana leaf. Each blind man has a partial understanding of what an elephant is and so each religion has a partial understanding of the reality of God or ultimate reality.

Lesslie Newbigin offers a critique of this story.³⁰ The critique of the blind men's understanding of the elephant is based on the Raj's ability to "see" the whole elephant. Anyone who claims that all religions are only partial insights into the ultimate reality, depending on their relative position, is claiming they "see" the whole of reality in a way that the religions cannot. If all understandings of God or ultimate reality are relative then there is no possibility of critiquing any position. If all paths are equally valid ways to God how can any path critique a different one or even suggest that there may be a better understanding of reality? Ingham³¹ goes on to argue for a position of modified relativistic pluralism which, in the end, is equally unconvincing.

Inclusivist

³⁰Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

³¹Michael Ingham, *Mansions of the Spirit: The Gospel in a Multi-Faith World* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1997).

The inclusivist position sees salvation as possible for all through the salvific act of Christ's death and resurrection. Vatican II adopted this position with respect to non-Christian religions.³² Ingham argues that the inclusivist is an absurd position to take as all other religions would argue the same regarding Christianity.³³ However, the understanding of scientific argument is that competing and even contradictory theories are examined and the case argued for which gives the best understanding and depiction of reality. When two faiths enter into dialogue, each of them is presenting their understanding of ultimate reality and how and why their paradigm best explains the world in which we live. The scientific method does imply that one theory is superior to another.

Posterski was asked to address the World Parliament of Religions on the topic of evangelism.³⁴ He used the parable of the houses built on sand and on rock. All people have building materials and all are building something and yet we have to recognize that some building materials are not only different but also better than others. What one does have to recognize is that while one may be convinced that one's understanding is better it may also be open to improvement. There is the possibility of correcting one's theory in light of argument by another. As we enter into dialogue with other faiths we can have our understanding of our own faith enriched and altered by the discussions which we have.

The danger as always of the inclusivist position of any religion is that in arguing for a

³² Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II* (Leominster: Fowler Wright Book Ltd, 1975; reprint, 5).

³³ Ingham.

³⁴ Donald Posterski, "What on Earth Is Evangelism?," in *Part of the Problem, Part of the Solution: Religion Today and Tomorrow*, ed. Avind Sharm (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008).

religion's particular understanding – which inherently implies that it is superior – one can be overtaken by arrogance. Poststerski deals directly with the question of superiority: “If I could take Harvey Cox’s earlier advice and, indeed, speak with candour, it would be to say that some beliefs are better than other beliefs. Some beliefs are truer than other beliefs. One of the difficulties with saying that out loud is that it signals a sense of superiority, and claims of superiority conflict with the cardinal virtue of tolerance in many parts of the world. And so people who take this position need to figure out how to stand tall and to live with conviction of choice without feeling superior.”³⁵

The conviction of the rightness of our position should not and must not contain a derogatory attitude towards any other person or faith. Poststerski’s evangelism in a multi-cultural world offers several suggestions for sensitively presenting a Christian paradigm to others.

Implications For Evangelism

If one adopts a relativistic pluralistic or modified relativistic pluralistic view of religions which sees Jesus Christ as the Way and the Truth for Christians, acknowledging all viewpoints as being relative, one no longer has any compelling claims as to why one’s particular point of view should be adopted. “Pluralism and tolerance can have similar effects. Whether extended to other churches or to other kinds of voluntary associations, both tend to reduce any organization’s compelling claims by making its virtues

³⁵ Ibid. p 55

relative.”³⁶ With this viewpoint one is limited to a pool of potential members who are part of a Christian milieu by reason of biological birth. However, if participation in a Christian faith community by children and grandchildren of Christians becomes nominal, at what point are they no longer considered to be potential new members?³⁷ The potential recruitment pool will continually shrink if there is less than replacement retention through biological growth. Evangelism can only be directed to those who are already in some way connected with the Christian faith and in sociological terms this will be intensification rather than conversion.

Both the exclusivist and inclusivist positions endorse an understanding that Christianity holds the best explanation of the world and have a desire for people to share in that understanding. People’s lives will be enriched when lived as God intended them to be lived and when they are in a direct relationship with God. Exclusivists should have a greater driving force to share the good news of God in Christ as they believe people are eternally lost without Christ. Inclusivists would have an understanding that it is of paramount importance to share the good news as people will be better off being part of God’s Christian family than not.³⁸

³⁶ N J Demerath III, "Cultural Victory and Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 4 (1995).

³⁷ The language which is being used here is unsatisfactory. It is based on a vocabulary which talks of recruiting members to an organization rather than an invitation to follow Jesus and to be part of his family. Perhaps the whole issue of interfaith dialogue would be changed if Christians did not approach interfaith dialogue as an explanation of a world view or a philosophical position but as explaining our faith as a relationship with God and an invitation to be part of that relationship.

³⁸ Cranfield and Barth both have excellent descriptions and explanations of election. All humanity is contained within the circle of God’s love. Within that humanity God elected Israel to be a servant and witness. Within Israel God chose the tribe of Judah. Within Judah the house of David, within the house of David, the person of Jesus. Election does not imply superiority in the sense of intrinsically better but

Evangelism from my perspective has negative connotations. In my own experience it can be associated with images of how to do it badly. It can engender unease because one is not sure how to go about doing it. One can be opposed in principle, believing no faith is better than another. We are all following the same path to God so which path a person is following is not important. However, even to maintain a particular size a congregation has to have new people join to replace those who die and move away. This can be from biological growth – children of attending members; transfer growth – people from the same denomination or similar tradition who move into the area and start attending, and people who come from a different faith background. How does a church retain the children of its members, and attract new people from either people who are of a similar tradition but who are not currently active in a faith community or who convert from a different faith?

A related issue which requires brief discussion here is proselytism.

Proselytism

Historically proselytism was the conversion of a person to Judaism and later to early Christianity. It has a positive connotation used in these contexts. In the context of the World Council of Churches it came to refer to switching “denominational affiliation”.³⁹ It is “the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their

chosen for a purpose. With the choosing comes both benefits and responsibilities. With an understanding that one can be invited to be part of the elect – in relationship with Jesus Christ – then there is a desire for others to take part in what we know to be good and right and true.

³⁹ "Mission and Evangelism in Unity Today Preparatory Paper No 1", World Council of Churches <http://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/other-meetings/mission-and-evangelism/athens-2005-documents/preparatory-paper-n-1-mission-and-evangelism-in-unity-today.html> (accessed Feb 23 2011).

denominational allegiance through ways and means that contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church.”⁴⁰ This was particularly well illustrated by activities of different Christian groups operating in the former Soviet Union. It also has a negative connotation where a person has been lured under false pretences or various forms of inducement to abandon one faith for another. In contrast there is “true witness” or “true evangelism”. Christians are called to witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ. Within historic Christian understanding, the hoped for result of sharing the gospel is the conversion of others to the Christian faith. Sharing the gospel is something ordained by God in The Great Commission of Matthew 28. The question for some people whether we should evangelize is tied to past missionary endeavours where Western culture was exported and presented as synonymous with Christian teaching. People new to the faith were expected to adopt Western ways of living along with the Christian gospel. This questions what is cultural and what is religious? If one is primarily concerned about the imposition of a different culture on a person then we need to examine clearly if we can indeed distinguish between faith and culture. What are the parts of culture which need to be renounced, what parts need to be baptized and what is there which can be incorporated as is – though one could argue that all culture needs to be baptized in some way and nothing is ready to be kept as is.

⁴⁰ Ibid., (accessed).para 71

Where We Are In Current Thinking

“A scholar from Princeton, Darrell Gruder, contends that there are over 300 definitions of evangelism in print.”⁴¹ The most widely accepted definition of evangelism in the Anglican church was offered by William Temple (1881-1944), the 98th Archbishop of Canterbury: Evangelism is “the presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in Him as Saviour, and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of His Church.” The Archbishops’ Committee of Inquiry on the Evangelistic Work of the Church (1918) stated “To evangelise is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men and women shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church.”⁴² The end result of evangelism is for a person to change their world view and commit to a new way of living or to be converted. Most approaches to evangelism are theoretical with little or no empirical evidence to show they are effective.

In the following sections I look at understandings of evangelism from different perspectives. Brueggemann presents an understanding of evangelism from the perspective of an Old Testament scholar. Abraham’s The Logic of Evangelism is considered a classic text of the belief-participation model. Finney and Hunter present current thinking on the participation-belief model. Wagner, McGavran and Wimber

⁴¹ Donald Posterski, "What on Earth Is Evangelism?," in *Part of the Problem, Part of the Solution: Religion Today and Tomorrow*, ed. Avind Sharm (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008). p 56

⁴² Archbishops’ Committee of Inquiry on the Evangelistic Work of the Church (1918)

approach evangelism as church growth. Bowen, Percy and Willis are Anglicans working in the area of evangelism.

Walter Brueggemann: Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism

Brueggemann proposes evangelism to be inviting people to become part of the biblical story. Bultmann observed that the people of the Bible lived in a three tiered or storied universe. Brueggemann commented on the word story and suggests that they live in a three storied universe where the stories or narratives are the story of the promise made to the ancestors, the story of the deliverance from slavery and the story of the gift of the land. He understands evangelism as “inviting people into these stories as the definitional story of our life, and therefore authorizing people to give up, abandon, and renounce other stories that have shaped their lives in false or distorting ways.”⁴³ This form of evangelism will insist that “this account of lived reality is more adequate than rival accounts...”⁴⁴ He recognizes that people live by other stories to which they have, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, made a commitment. He goes on to say “The telling and hearing of this “three-storied reality” is an invitation and summons to “switch stories,” and therefore to change lives.”⁴⁵ Brueggemann understands evangelism to have at its centre “the message announced, a verbal out-loud assertion of something decisive not known until this moment of utterance.”⁴⁶ He also links it with an expectation of response. “After the proclamation comes the difficult demanding work of

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p 10

⁴⁴ Ibid. p 10

⁴⁵ Ibid. p 11

⁴⁶ Ibid. p 14

reordering all of life according to the claim of the proclaimed verdict.”⁴⁷ He sees evangelism directed towards three constituencies. These are outsiders, jaded insiders and the young of the believing community. Brueggemann’s concept of evangelism to the jaded insider and the young of the believing community is one which jars somewhat if one considers evangelism to be directed to those who are outside the community of faith. Yet, on reflection, if evangelism is both the proclamation of the good news and the content of the good news then that would be something which is directed to the community of faith also. It is instructive to note Bruggemann’s emphasis both on verbal proclamation and expectation of response which is missing in many accounts of evangelism. It is also interesting to see how the end result of evangelism is conversion to a new paradigm. Brueggemann looks at several Bible stories to illustrate the proclamation to his three named constituencies but he does not address the issue of how the good news is actually proclaimed in our context. He notes that evangelism is related to church growth. As people “switch stories” and re-order their lives the church will grow. The growth is a result of evangelism but not the purpose for it.

Abraham: Believing to Belong

Abraham’s approach⁴⁸ follows a belief-participation sequence. He wants to have an engagement between evangelism and theology. He readily acknowledges the decline in the theological acumen from erudite scholar-evangelists of the eighteenth century such as

⁴⁷ Ibid. p 15

⁴⁸ William J Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards to tele-evangelists of today.⁴⁹ He suggests that “we should construe evangelism as primary initiation into the kingdom of God”⁵⁰ rather than seeing evangelism in terms of proclamation or church growth. He examines the cases for and against evangelism that is understood as ‘the verbal proclamation of the gospel’ and concludes from biblical and historical evidence that evangelism is more than verbal proclamation. He makes the extremely interesting observation that in 1748, Wesley (meeting in conference), reversed the decision to preach anywhere and restricted preaching to places where Methodist Societies were already established so those who showed interest could be cared for.⁵¹ Abraham takes issue with much of the church growth movement. He regards it as having much to offer but ultimately within the wide diversity of the practitioners there is no coherent exposition of what exactly it is. He also sees it as using evangelism as a means to an end whose purpose is to add to the number of members of a church. Abraham produces his own definition of evangelism as “that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time”⁵² with initiation understood as “admit[ting] that person into the eschatological rule of God through appropriate instruction, experience, rites and forms.”⁵³ If evangelism is to be a useful term – and it may not be – then Abraham loads it with more freight than it can or should bear. The end goal of evangelism should be initiation but initiation is a consequence and not a part of

⁴⁹ Ibid. p 9

⁵⁰ Ibid. p 13

⁵¹ Ibid. p 54

⁵² Ibid. p 95

⁵³ Ibid. p 96

evangelism. He seems to be describing the context in which evangelism should occur rather than evangelism itself.

Finney and Hunter: Belonging to Believe

John Finney follows a participation-belief sequence. Finney's study⁵⁴ in the UK concludes that most people experience faith through relationships. They encounter the gospel through a community of faith and that becoming a Christian involves a process over time. Finney summarizes the chief finding as "belonging comes before believing."⁵⁵ Evangelism then is about helping people to belong so that they can believe. Finney outlines the journey of faith as:

1. X is introduced into the church through a member of their family; through friendship with some Christians or through a minister
2. they begin to ask questions
3. they are invited to explore further and come to a knowledge and practice of the faith (often this is through a nurture group or some form of catechumenate)
4. they discover they have become a Christian and mark it publicly through baptism or confirmation or whatever is appropriate to their denomination.

Interestingly Finney does not pinpoint a conversion moment but rather talks of how people 'discover' that they are Christian. What needs to be explored further within

⁵⁴ John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (Swindon: British and Foreign and Bible Society, 1992).

⁵⁵ Recovering the Past John Finney John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1996). p 46

Finney's work is how a person knows when they belong and by whose criteria is a person said to belong – the group's definition or the person's own 'feeling' of belonging? There also needs to be some discussion of the relationship of belonging to incorporation.

Hunter has written several books⁵⁶ about reaching out to people who are not Christians.

In The Celtic Way of Evangelism, despite the use of the word evangelism in the title, the only definition of evangelism given is “evangelism is now about ‘helping people to belong so that they can believe.’”⁵⁷ Most of the book is a comparison of what he calls the Roman and Celtic methods of evangelism.

He produces a schema of each:⁵⁸

1. Roman

- a) Presents the Christian message
- b) Invites people to believe in Christ
- c) After professed belief, welcomes them into the church and its fellowship

2. Celtic

- a) First establish community with people or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith
- b) Within fellowship you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer and worship
- c) As they discover how you believe you invite them to commit

Cox and Butler Bass: Age of the Spirit, Belonging, Behaving, Believing

⁵⁶ *How to Reach Secular People, Church for the Unchurched, The Celtic Way of Evangelism, Radical Outreach*

⁵⁷ George G Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). p 55

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p 53

Cox argues that Christianity can be divided into three ages: Faith, Belief and the Spirit. In the current Age of the Spirit, Christianity is not about God but rather an experience of God.⁵⁹ Faith is understood as “a way of life or a guiding compass...”⁶⁰ This is a “great awakening” which transcends faith boundaries. Butler Bass follows a participation-belief sequence similar to Finney. She states that, historically speaking, religious questions were posed in the order of believing, behaving and belonging.⁶¹ In a culture which gives priority to experience she believes the order needs to be reversed to belonging, behaving and believing. I feel this is similar to Hunter’s description of a Celtic model of evangelism where people come to faith through the experience of participating in a community. Both Cox and Butler Bass see this Age of the Spirit and the sequence of belonging, behaving and believing as equally applicable to any spiritual tradition.

Wagner, McGavran, Wimber et al: Church Growth

Wagner and many others of diverse theological and spiritual approaches equate evangelism with church growth and promote techniques to achieve this. Abraham as noted previously questions this. Wagner⁶² proposes three varieties of evangelism and refers to them as 3P evangelism.

1. Presence evangelism – is getting next to people and helping them, doing good in the world

⁵⁹ Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

⁶⁰ Ibid. p 19

⁶¹ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012). p 204

⁶² Peter C Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1987).

2. Proclamation Evangelism - is presenting the gospel so that the death and resurrection of Christ is communicated and people hear and respond
3. Persuasion evangelism – is making disciples, and stresses the importance of not separating evangelism and follow-up.

Wagner also lists categories of people in evangelism

1. E₀ Already in the Church
2. E₁ Same culture
3. E₂ Similar culture
4. E₃ Different Culture

This addresses the issue of homiophily though he does not identify it as such. The suggestion is that people in the first categories are easier to reach than people in the latter. Where we should put the most effort is in E₀ E₁ people before branching out to the latter categories. There is sociological truth in this assertion. What must be considered is that if this is adopted we run the risk of becoming cultural ghettos where only like to like is found. As a gospel for all people, faith communities should reflect the makeup of society as a whole in terms of demographics. To be appealing only to those like us is not being true to the gospel. The issue of people from a different culture is more complex and the question of the evangelization of people groups would need to be explored further.

Bowen, Percy, Willis: Anglican Approaches to Evangelism

Bowen, Percy and Willis are all Anglicans engaged in ministries of evangelism. Bowen and Percy provide a Canadian perspective. In their writings they see evangelism as sharing faith and helping people come to faith in Jesus. The Wycliffe College Institute for

Evangelism with which Bowen and Percy are associated defines evangelism as “co-operating with the Holy Spirit to help people take steps towards faith in Christ.” It defines the end goal of evangelism – faith in Christ, and the work of the evangelist – cooperating with the Holy Spirit. Willis, a member of the Lee Abbey community, talks about the approach to evangelism as “Do you have a faith worth sharing? And do you have a friend worth sharing it with?”⁶³ He expresses it in a slightly different way saying “If friendship [sc with Jesus] is the aim of the Gospel it is also the prescribed means of spreading the Gospel”.⁶⁴ All three are concerned that there is a dimension to evangelism that includes a verbal sharing of the gospel and invitation to participate. They illustrate what good news is and how it can be shared. The distinction is made between the good news of the gospel which we enact and the telling of the good news. Not all good news is evangelism in this understanding. Willis suggests good news examples from the Bible.⁶⁵ For the ten lepers healing, acceptance and inclusion in the community was the good news they experienced from Jesus. (Luke 17.11-14) For the women in caught in adultery the good news is hope. Habits can be broken. There can be a new beginning. (John 8.3-11) For the rich young man the good news is that there is more to life than money. (Mark 10.17-22) For Zacchaeus the good news is that Jesus wants to spend time with you. (Luke 19.1-9) Percy⁶⁶ suggests that people are lost, lonely, yearn for wholeness, need hope and forgiveness, and are afraid of death. The good news is about reconciliation with God,

⁶³ Geoffrey Willis, *Won by One: How to Help Your Friends Find Faith* (Glasgow: Marshall Pickering, 1994). p x

⁶⁴ Ibid. p 9

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Percy.

resurrection and God's reign. The good news⁶⁷ endeavours in which we are engaged can include:

- Visiting those sick and in hospital
- Visiting shut ins
- Supplying food, shelter, and clothing for the poor
- Welcoming those who are lonely
- Comforting those who are sad and grieving

Good news in action provides the basis for engaging in evangelism. Percy expresses it as “Words without deeds lack credibility. Deeds without words lack clarity.” So evangelism is an invitation with an expectation of a response. It is never solely an announcing of good news or a demonstration of good news but it always includes an invitation to participate. Andrew says to Nathaniel, “Come and see.” (John 1.46) Jesus says “Follow me.” (Mark 2.14) “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.” (Mark 1.15)

In looking at how people come to faith Bowen⁶⁸ suggests a scale of one through one hundred where everyone is at least a one because no one does not know about God in some way and no one is one hundred because no one fully knows God. Fifty is the point “when a person realizes that Jesus is the key to this business of getting to know God, and

⁶⁷ Ibid. p 28ff

⁶⁸ Bowen, *Evangelism For "Normal" People*. p 83

they begin to follow him.”⁶⁹ He suggests that considerable evangelistic effort is spent in trying to move people from forty-nine to fifty even if they might only be at eighteen.

1 _____ 50 _____ 100

This is an extremely useful illustration as it does not try to describe the exact state of a person anywhere along the line. Bowen acknowledges that it can appear mechanical and the reality is that people’s encounters with God cannot be compartmentalized in the way the scale suggests. However, we can combine Hiebert’s understanding of a centred set with Bowen’s illustration. In this case, rather than a static place on the line, we have a dynamic model where the member is represented by a vector. There is continual movement either towards God or away from God. A person could be exploring the concept of God and be represented as moving towards God. A person could identify themselves as a follower of Jesus but be moving away from God.

1 _____ → _____ + _____ ← _____ 100

Within the understanding of Christianity as a revealed religion there is much discussion about how much one can know of God naturally. Alan Richardson notes that “the OT

⁶⁹ Ibid. p 83

knows nothing of a 'theoretical' or even mystical vision of God.”⁷⁰ In the wisdom literature corpus, the book of Job indicates that we can know very little of God through nature: 'Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him.' Job 26.14. However, within the concept of covenant we find that there are universal and particular covenants. The covenant with Noah is one with all of humanity. This implies that humanity can have some knowledge of God. Given the Biblical understanding that one cannot know God naturally, it is better as Richardson suggests, to refer to a 'general revelation' rather than a 'natural knowledge' of God. Thus there is a general revelation of and a specific revelation of God in Jesus. In the diagram then the general revelation of God will be to the left of the cross symbol. The specific revelation of God will be to the right. One will move towards the specific revelation of God in Jesus but cannot move to a fuller understanding of God until one accepts the revelation of God in Christ. Sociological studies suggest that this will occur through participation in a Christian faith community.

Summary

There are two main paradigms suggested for engaging in evangelism. The first follows a belief-participation sequence which Hunter identifies historically with the Roman way of evangelism and is still extant in many understandings today. The second is a participation-belief sequence which Hunter identifies historically with the Celtic way of

⁷⁰ Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957). p 49ff

evangelism. Many of the new proposals on engaging in evangelism are recognising the validity of a participation-belief sequence, without identifying specifically with the Celtic model.

What is striking to me in the definitions of evangelism by Temple - “the presentation of Jesus Christ” - and the Anglican bishops - “so to present Christ Jesus” - is that to evangelise is to present Jesus – a person. The good news is the person of Jesus himself rather than an emphasis on how he can meet our needs.

Organizational Anglican Evangelism - Church Army

I found the Church Army and its understanding of evangelism an interesting contrast to attitudes I encountered in the Anglican Church. The Church Army was founded in England in the latter part of the 19th century “to make war against sin and the devil.” The organization changed its name in Canada on 01 May 2010 from Church Army to Threshold Ministries commenting “The mandate for Threshold Ministries will continue to be ‘helping bring people, from all walks of life, into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and with His people.’”

The Church Army poses these questions to prospective evangelists:

- Do you have a commitment to Christ, to His people and His purposes?
- Do you long to see others come to a living faith in Jesus?
- Do you have a burden for Canada and the world?
- Do you have a passion to share the hope we have in Christ?

- Do you have time and experience to offer in a voluntary capacity for some behind the scenes support to those in front-line ministry?

In my research I found the people interviewed reflected the ethos of their organization. The general approach matches the understanding of evangelism as defined by William Temple and endorsed by the Lambeth Conference.

Reflections

To be effective in evangelism churches need to study their own context and identify how they need to shape their community life in light of these factors. Invitation and expectation of a response are part of evangelism and the process of coming to faith.

Within the participation-belief sequence, however an invitation is offered, an opportunity for a response given needs to be clearly articulated. “Now, as in the early centuries of the church, the church needs a process for guiding people from a private religious experience to a public identity in Christ.”⁷¹

Overall there will be several factors which influence a congregation’s understanding and approach to evangelism. It will be formed primarily by the choice of an inclusive or relativistic pluralistic approach. Within an inclusive understanding it will be formed by the identity of the congregation in terms of the theological worlds it inhabits, its understanding of who they are and the way that they set the boundaries to form their identity – bounded or centred. Equipped with a self-understanding a congregation should

⁷¹ Patrick R Kiefert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). p 118

be able to engage in evangelism more effectively. Their effectiveness will also be enhanced if they have an understanding of how and why people convert.

Chapter 3 Conversion

Biblical Understandings of Conversion

The English word conversion is found only once in the New Revised Standard Version, Revised Standard Version and Authorised Version translations of the Bible in Acts 15:3⁷² where it is used to translate a) nastre/fw. Kittel⁷³ uses the word ‘conversion’ with reference to several Hebrew and Greek words and suggests conversion as a possible translation. We will see the difficulty encountered in academic circles seeking agreement on a common concept and definition of conversion, suggesting that we are fortunate that the word is only used once in the translations noted previously. I will look though at the words which Kittel associates with conversion as they are used in the Bible to see what we can glean from this exercise.

e) pistre/fw

In the LXX e) pistrofw is used 579 times for various forms of turning. It is used for Israel turning away from God and in calling Israel to return to God. The overall sense conveyed is to turn or return. In the understanding of the people of Israel the call is to turn or return to the Lord. It is a change of mind. The accompanying descriptions may or may not contain a sense of sorrow and grief with the idea of turning. The call is not directed to those outside

⁷² 3 So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. NRSV

⁷³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, trans. Geoffrey W Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and The Paternoster Press, 1985).

the covenant people and may be thought of as intensification rather than conversion. With the call to the establishment of a relationship and a particular centrality of a way of life, the Old Testament is using it in a sense of a paradigm shift. In the New Testament Luke 1:16-17, James 5:19-20, Acts 3:19, Acts 11:21, 1 Thessalonians 1:9 all are used in the sense of turning to or turning from.

metanoē/w, meta/noia

In both testaments the term metanoē/w, and its cognates refer to a change of mind which suggests re-orientation of a person towards God. “metanoē/w and meta/noia are the forms in which the New Testament gives new expression to the ancient concept of religious and moral conversion.”⁷⁴ When a person turns to God there is a totality of commitment where one’s relationship with God is now at the centre of one’s existence. The Old Testament scriptures and the words of the prophets are directed to a people that already have an understanding of who God is and what the expectations are of them as a people. These expectations are to live in relationship with God and the practical outworkings in their own lives are in the welcoming of the stranger and caring for the poor, the widowed and the orphan. There is no sense of needing to explain a new way of looking at things or to articulate a new world view. It can entail a comparison of two conflicting world views – that God is a living active God in the lives of God’s people versus an understanding that the other gods are less powerful and less worthy of worship, that idols are made of stone and are blind, deaf and mute, to an understanding that there is

⁷⁴ Ibid.

only God alone and all other gods are illusions. So to repent or to turn is to change away from the false path that one is following to the true path of God. It has more a sense of a return than adopting a new path. Even the ultimate Messianic vision of the nations flocking to Jerusalem to worship God is not looked at systematically but only shown as an end result. How the nations come to the point of wanting to follow God after seeing the example of Israel is not explained. What one must try to understand is what turning to God entails in the Hebrew Scriptures. In light of the first word of Exodus 20:3 'you shall have no other Gods before me' the turning to God is a total re-orientation of life towards God. The covenants which God makes with Israel reflect this total orientation. The turning or returning to God is often accompanied by expressions of regret, sorrow or repentance such as sackcloth, ashes and fasting for having turned away from God.

The New Testament is also written to people who have already chosen to be followers of the Messiah. The call of Jesus is to a covenant people in the manner of the prophets to return to God to repent and believe. The framework of the belief system is already in place and people are called to an alternate interpretation of the framework amidst a competing number of understandings – Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, and different rabbinical schools. The call of Jesus is to people who are already in relationship with God to enter more fully into that relationship with an understanding of God as Father. The call to follow Jesus as told in the gospel stories is to commit to a person – 'Follow me' – with a changed lifestyle following on from that.

The gospel of Luke is written to Theophilus who has an understanding of who Jesus is and wants to learn more.

Paul is writing to people who are Christians. When they fall short of the behaviour expected of Christians, Paul following the prophetic style calls them to return to live as the Christians they are. He never says they are not Christians but rather their behaviour does not reflect who they say they are. Again calls to repentance are for a return to what is already known rather than to something new.

In Paul's most developed theological work his letter to the church in Rome, he addresses the issue of salvation and how one is saved. The contrasts are between the old and the new person. An old life is left behind and a new life is taken on. Again this is addressed to people who are already living a new life in Christ. Salvation comes through trusting in God and committing one's life to God not through earning it by how one lives. The indicative is always followed by the imperative and never the other way around.

The one story we have of Paul addressing those who were not part of the covenant people or who were not already familiar with the story as God-fearers is Paul speaking in the Aereopagus. Here he engages with people who hold a different world view and his approach in this instance is much different from the way that he interacts with people who already hold a similar world view to his own.

Therefore when we examine the Biblical evidence for conversion we need to remember that it is directed at people who are already of the same mind set. This falls into the category of alternation or intensification when looked at in terms of current sociological

research on conversion. What we do need to reflect upon is how they engaged with people who had different world views.

In looking at our own circumstances today and the people with whom we wish to engage we need to know if it will be cases of alternation or intensification. It would also be useful to quantify how much a person has to differ in their understanding for a change to be one of worldview. Does a person who believes in a vague notion of God change their worldview if they come to understand God as the Father revealed in Jesus Christ? Is that a significantly different change from that of an atheist coming to believe in God?

I will next examine sociological research on how people change their worldview or convert.

Sociological Studies on Conversion

One of the earliest sociological studies is Lofland and Stark's "Becoming a World Saver: Conversion to a Deviant Perspective"⁷⁵. The interest in conversion studies was prompted by the conversions of young people to cults in North America and Europe. This interest in conversion continued until 2000. Stark and Finke's proposal of a rational choice theory of conversion⁷⁶ was published in 2000 and has been the subject of much discussion and some disparagement by British sociologists Bryan Wilson and Steve Bruce⁷⁷. The only

⁷⁵ Lofland, J. and R. Stark (1965). "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 30(6): 862-875.

⁷⁶ Stark and Finke.

⁷⁷ Toby Lester, "Oh, Gods!," *The Atlantic Online* 2002.

significant piece of work since then has been an article by Gooren⁷⁸ in 2007 which looks at conversion research over the past thirty years and proposes a modification of a conversion career originally proposed by Richardson⁷⁹. Looking at the last twenty five issues covering twenty five articles in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* only two are on conversion and one of those is by a psychologist.

In this section I will group and examine the major pieces of sociological work in conversion research to date following a similar schema to Rambo⁸⁰ and Gooren's⁸¹ analytical categories. It is important to note at the outset that most of the studies of conversion did not use control groups which severely limits what can be said about their findings.

Participation in Conversion by the Convert: Richardson and Kilbourne, Barker

The conversion of Paul on the Damascus Road is the 'classic' paradigm of conversion. This paradigm dominated studies for many years. In this paradigm the convert is totally passive in the conversion process. Kilbourne and Richardson⁸² note the following characteristics of passive conversions.

"1) sudden and dramatic, 2) irrational or magical in nature, 3) involving a powerful, external, and impersonal force, 4) usually a single event, 5) the negation

⁷⁸ Henri Gooren, "Reassessing the Conventional Approaches to Conversion: Toward a New Synthesis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007).

⁷⁹ James T Richardson, "The Active Vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985).

⁸⁰ Lewis R Rambo, "Current Research on Religious Conversion," *Religious Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (1982).

⁸¹ Gooren.

⁸² Brock Kilbourne and James T. Richardson, "Paradigm Conflict, Types of Conversion, and Conversion Theories," *Sociological Analysis* 50, no. 01 (1989).

of the old self and the affirmation of the new self, 6) change from one static state to another static state, 7) typically occurs during adolescence and is a "good thing," and 8) behavior change usually follows belief change.” Whatever predispositions or situational factors, the conversion is dominated by impersonal and powerful forces acting upon and/or within the convert.

Kilbourne and Richardson propose a new paradigm where converts are religious seekers who actively participate in their conversion. (cf Straus⁸³). The seeker is characterized by: “1) volition, 2) autonomy, 3) search for meaning and purpose, 4) multiple conversions or conversion careers, 5) rational interpretation of experiences, 6) gradual and continuous conversion(s), 7) negotiation between the individual and the potential membership group, and 8) belief change that follows behaviour change, as the individual learns the role of being a new convert.”⁸⁴

Popular opinion, influenced by the stories of Chinese brainwashing coming out of the Korean War, saw conversion to New Religious Movements (NRMs) in the sixties through eighties as extreme passive conversion. People referred to it as brainwashing because no “normal” young person could possibly join such bizarre groups. Barker⁸⁵ in a comprehensive and influential longitudinal study of the Unification Church decisively demonstrated that young people joined the church entirely through their own volition and

⁸³ Roger A Straus, "Religious Conversion as a Personal and Collective Accomplishment," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 2 (1979).

⁸⁴ Kilbourne and Richardson.

⁸⁵ Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Publisher Ltd, 1984).

usually left within two years. With her study and as noted subsequently, scholars now do not classify conversions as either active or passive but a combination of both.

Sequential Model of Conversion: Proposal by Lofland and Stark; Criticism by Snow and Philips, Kox, Meeus and 't Hart

As previously noted “Becoming a World Saver”, published in 1965, was the seminal work on conversion which influenced sociological conversion research for over twenty years. Lofland and Stark classify conversion as a change in worldview. “When a person gives up one such perception or ordered view of the world for another we refer to the process as conversion.”⁸⁶ In their study of a small millenarian sect they developed a typology consisting of four levels:

1. Pre-conversion
2. Verbal Converts “who professed belief and were accepted by core members and as sincere.”⁸⁷
3. Total Converts “exhibited their commitment through deeds as well as words”⁸⁸
4. Core Members

They defined and developed only the two intermediate levels. In a sequential model they categorized conditions for conversion – three pre-disposing and four situational. Moving through the first six levels would turn one from a pre-convert to a verbal convert. Stage

⁸⁶ John; Stark Lofland, Rodney, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (1965). p 862

⁸⁷John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (1965). p 864

⁸⁸ Ibid. p 864

seven will produce a total convert. They concluded that the following are necessary and sufficient conditions for conversion:

Personal Aspect or Pre-disposing Conditions

1. A person must be experiencing enduring and acutely held tensions, within
 2. a religious problem-solving perspective (vs. psychiatric or political),
- which
3. leads him to define himself as a religious seeker, encountering

Situational Aspect

4. the DP (the cult they were studying) at a turning point in his life; wherein
 5. an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts;
- where
6. extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized; and
 7. where, if he is a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction.⁸⁹

They suggest that this is a stage process where each of the conditions are required and met sequentially. The model clearly notes three factors in the conversion process:

1. Social networks – cult members, kinship and friendship networks
2. Personality – as defined in the first three conditions
3. Encounter and Contingency – as defined in condition four.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p 862

There are both passive and active elements in the conversion model. Lofland and Stark do caution that the study was based on the conversion of a small set of converts to a minor millenarian doctrine and so may not possess many generalizable features. They make the important observation that the DP had few advantages in attracting converts compared to other groups other than being there at the scene and able to develop affective bonds and induce intensive interaction. In this model conversion follows adoption of new beliefs.

The model has been critiqued by Snow and Phillips⁹⁰ for lacking empirical foundations and being too specific. In their empirical study of the model with the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist group they concurred with Lofland and Stark that affective bonds and intensive interaction are essential for conversion but that no other conditions were necessary. The model was also tested by Kox, Meeus and 't Hart⁹¹ on Dutch adolescents. They assert that studies show the conditions listed as necessary and sufficient, are largely independent of one another. In fact, "a religious problem solving perspective is not an independent condition for conversion, indeed, it is no predictor at all"⁹². They conclude that the Lofland and Stark theory of the tunnel effect of conditions is invalid. What it does provide is a good picture of converts and conversion but not the conversion process. Lofland and Stark have pointed out a set of possible conditions for conversion rather than producing a step by step model of conversion.

⁹⁰ David A. Snow and Cynthia L. Phillips, "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment," *Social Problems* 27, no. 04 (1980).

⁹¹ Willem Kox, Wim Meeus, and Harm 't Hart, "Religious Conversion of Adolescents: Testing the Lofland and Stark Model of Religious Conversion," *Sociological Analysis* 52 (1991).

⁹² Ibid.

Loss Of World View And Looking To Be Converted: Greil And Heirich

Greil⁹³ examines why a person might become a seeker. “If we are willing to accept that man is a meaning-seeking animal who cannot endure the sense of being bereft of a viable world view, then we may also accept that those whose identities have been spoiled become “seekers” who search for a perspective to restore meaning.”⁹⁴ The spoiling of the identity or destruction of root reality can come about through either significant others in social networks or an inability of the current world view to deal with the problems the individual is facing. This agrees with Stark’s assessment: “It is obvious that people do not embrace a new faith if they are content with an older one.”⁹⁵ Greil designates the importance of factors in conversion according to the activity or passivity of the convert in their process of conversion. For a more active convert personality factors are more influential, for a more passive convert it is the social networks. Greil also notes the importance of homiophily at the cognitive level in the conversion process. The individual’s previous dispositions or socialization will influence the range of alternate viewpoints which they find acceptable though this may be influenced by the encounter with an advocate. Greil concludes that “other things being equal – an individual in a situation of social strain will be attracted only to those movement perspectives whose

⁹³AL Greil, "Previous Dispositions and Conversion to Perspectives of Social and Religious Movements," *Sociological Analysis* 38, no. 2 (1977).

⁹⁴ Ibid. p 120

⁹⁵ Rodney Stark, "The Class Basis of Early Christianity: Inferences from a Sociological Model," *Sociological Analysis* 47, no. Autumn (1986). p 219

intellectual style is compatible with the cognitive style of the social group in question.”⁹⁶

Greil’s model is limited because it is theoretical rather than based on a concrete study.

Heirich is one of the first researchers to use a control group as part of his study. Previous studies indicated a period of tension or what a convert identified as a crisis which their current world view was unable to provide answers to was a factor in a person’s conversion. Heirich’s study showed that while people experience the same tensions and stresses only some people convert. Nonetheless, he sees the destruction of one’s root reality as the basis for conversion. However, no examination is made of the root reality prior to conversion. Root reality is almost impossible to determine as converts are identified when they are already converted or in the process of conversion. In opposition to Greil, Heirich suggests that “immediate personal influences have more impact than does one’s psychological state or prior socialization.”⁹⁷ He notes that for those already engaged in a religious quest social networks are important and that social encapsulation often plays a major role in conversion but does not have to. He finishes his study with the comment that he has shown “the route that conversion takes within a population, but cannot explain what lies behind the religious quest.”⁹⁸

Conversion through Socialization: Long and Hadden

⁹⁶ Greil. p 124

⁹⁷ Max Heirich, "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories About Religious Conversion," *The American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 03 (1977). p 669

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p 673

Long and Hadden⁹⁹ argue that the two extremes of conversion research are the brainwashing model and the social drift model. While both models highlight important aspects of conversion, they are insufficient when viewed alone. They argue for a socialization process with activities that include “displaying the requisites of membership for novices” and shaping novices through applying sanctions, as well as incorporating activities that include recruiting novices, monitoring and placing them in certain church positions. They argue that recruitment precedes belief and commitment. Their typology includes affiliation, conversion and confessions (commitment).

It Makes Sense To Convert: Gartrell and Shannon, Stark and Finke

Gartrell and Shannon¹⁰⁰ in their study of the Divine Light Mission see “recruits to religious movements acting as if they weigh rewards and sanctions from affiliation with members and non-members in addition to weighing the attractiveness of movement’s beliefs and ideas.”¹⁰¹ Rewards can include socio-emotional benefits such as approval, love and respect as well as cognitive understandings of the nature of the world and the individual’s place within it. They propose that people have religious preferences through socialisation. If they encounter problems that they cannot solve within their current world view they will experiment with new religious ideas of other groups. If the social and cognitive rewards are sufficient they will stay and become members.

⁹⁹ Theodore E Long and Jeffrey K Hadden, "Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models " *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 01 (1983).

¹⁰⁰ C David Gartrell and Zane K Shannon, "Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 1 (1985).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p 33

Stark and Finke¹⁰² expand this theory in Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion. Stark and Finke differentiate between conversion which is a shift across religious traditions and re-affiliation which is within the same religious tradition. Most people remain within the religious organization into which they were born, and most of those who do shift from one organization to another remain within the religious tradition into which they were born. They also assert that “social networks make religious beliefs plausible and new social networks thereby make new religious beliefs plausible.”¹⁰³ People who convert will be those whose interpersonal attachments to members are stronger than their attachments to non-members. Along with Suchman¹⁰⁴ they propose that “marriage and migration are major factors tending to produce shifts in attachment.” Re-affiliation and conversion will be more prevalent among the geographically mobile, teenagers, and young adults, at marriage and following a divorce.¹⁰⁵ They make a new and interesting claim that “converts very seldom are religious seekers, and conversion is very seldom the culmination of a conscious search.”¹⁰⁶ Their sense that converts are seekers comes from post-conversion biographical reconstruction of the conversion story post conversion. This contrasts with their stance that individuals are active agents in their re-affiliation or conversion, rationally weighing the benefits of one church over another. They see tension and stress as the source of the individual’s dissatisfaction. Converts are

¹⁰² Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p 117

¹⁰⁴ Mark C Suchman, "Analysing the Determinants of Everyday Conversion," *Sociological Analysis* 53, no. Special Presidential Issue on Conversion, Charisma, and Institutionalisation (1992).

¹⁰⁵ Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*.p 119

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p 122

deemed to be attracted and recruited by churches which are actively competing with one another in a religious market place. This theory has generated much discussion on both sides of the Atlantic.

Acting Into A New Way Of Thinking: Bromley and Shupe, Snow and Machalek, Staples and Mauss

Bromley and Shupe¹⁰⁷ studied young members of the Unification Church and developed a Role Model Theory, which includes five conceptual components to the affiliative process:

1. Predisposing factors
2. Attraction
3. Incipient involvement
4. Active involvement
5. Commitment.

People are converted through playing a role. The process of affiliation is recruitment, belief and commitment.

Snow and Machalek¹⁰⁸ queried how one could operationalize conversion understood as “radical change” and what in a person undergoes radical change – “beliefs and values, behaviour and identities or something more fundamental?” They identify conversion as radical personal change (both religious and social scientific). They distinguish among conversion, adhesion (participating in religious groups and rituals without assuming a

¹⁰⁷ David G Bromley and Anson D Sharpe Jr, "Just a Few Years Seems Like a Lifetime: A Role Theory Approach to Participation in Religious Movements " in *Research in Social Movements: Conflict and Change*, ed. L Kriesberg (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁸ David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Convert as a Social Type," *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983).

new way of life) and alternation. They regard consolidation as an adoption of a belief system or identity that combines two prior but contradicting worldviews or identities.

Regeneration is the enthusiastic adoption of a belief system that had not been taken seriously or that had been abandoned out of scepticism, rebellion or indifference.

Conversion also entails a change in one's universe of discourse. "Conversion concerns not only a change in values, beliefs and identities, but more fundamentally and significant, it entails the displacement of one universe of discourse by another or the ascendance of a formerly peripheral universe of discourse to the status of a primary authority."¹⁰⁹ They list and evaluate three empirical indicators of conversion:

1. Membership status
2. Demonstration events
3. Rhetorical Patterns: which consist of
 - i. Biographical reconstruction
 - ii. Adoption of a master attribution plan
 - iii. Suspension of analogical reasoning
 - iv. Embracement of the convert role.

There are difficulties with these criteria. Membership status does not convey useful information as many organizations have large membership lists with many of those considered inactive. Demonstration events are affected by compliance behaviour.¹¹⁰ This could be classified as adhesion. Demonstration events may also be considered to be part

¹⁰⁹ David A. Snow, Machalek, Richard, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984). p 170

¹¹⁰ Behaviour expressed in public but lacking in private acceptance or commitment

of the conversion process but not indicative of a convert. Rhetorical patterns are all evidenced by members as well and so cannot be used to distinguish between a member and a convert. The fourth indicator could well be embracement of a member role rather than a convert role. Staples and Mauss¹¹¹ conducted a testing of Snow and Machalek's model. They concluded that life long members exhibited the same rhetorical patterns which Snow and Machalek claim are unique to the convert. Snow and Machalek do, however, observe that due to biographical reconstruction, a convert's account should be treated as topic of analysis, and not as objective data on why and how conversion first occurred.

Conversion As A Lifestyle: Gooren

Gooren recognised the difficulties associated with the process model of Stark and Lofland and took inspiration from Richardson's suggestion of conversion careers. Gooren defines a conversion career as "all periods of greater or lesser participation in one or more religious groups during a person's life."¹¹² He defines parameters which "identify the factors in the conversion process, the indicators that show an ongoing conversion has taken place, and the indicators that demonstrate an ongoing commitment after conversion."¹¹³

Gooren identifies the following factors as important in conversion:

¹¹¹ Clifford Staples and Armand L Mauss, "Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987).

¹¹² Henri Gooren, "Towards a New Model of Religious Conversion Careers," in *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*, ed. Jan N Bremmer, Wout J Van Bekkum, and Hans Mol, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change (Leuen: Peeters, 2006).p 27

¹¹³ Ibid. p 27

1. Situational factors
2. Personality factors
3. Institutional factors (the church's position towards cultural practices, evangelisation activities, the charisma of the leaders, the appeal of the church's organisation and doctrine)
4. Social factors (especially the role of social networks).

Indicators of an actual conversion are related to changes in the convert's speech and reasoning such as biographical reconstruction. Gooren talks of indicators demonstrating an ongoing church commitment after conversion, but does not supply details on these.

Gooren's model of conversion careers lists five levels of religious participation.

1. Pre-affiliation – The world view of person prior to affiliation or conversion.
2. Affiliation – An individual is a formal member but religion is not a key part of their life.
3. Conversion – A radical personal change of life and world view by the person and a commitment to a new community.
4. Confession – Person embodies a core-member identity involving high-level participation and strong evangelism.
5. Disaffiliation – An inactive member who still self-identifies as a believer.

Gooren notes that the model is dynamic, is not necessarily chronological, and goes on to relate the four factors in conversion to each conversion career segment. He concludes that as he is at a preliminary stage of developing the religious conversion careers model the

relationships between the four factors and five levels of church participation are sketchy.¹¹⁴

I feel that Gooren's model lacks clarity. He uses the term "conversion" for both the overall model and a stage within the model. The first sense of conversion is "why people may change their religious affiliation",¹¹⁵ the second is "a radical personal change of life and world view and a commitment to a new community"¹¹⁶. He also, while acknowledging the critique of Staples and Mauss¹¹⁷ about indicators of conversion, adopts the idea that changes in converts' speech and reasoning indicate conversion. Unfortunately, this does not address the issue of role adoption wherein a person tries on a religious identity to see if it fits nor the fact that the language of members and converts is identical and therefore is not an unequivocal method for determining who is a convert. Furthermore, Gooren moves commitment indicators to the stage of confession but does not show how outward behaviour is actually linked to and evidence of a change in world view. Overall, his new approach does not seem to lead in any new directions nor answer issues raised in previous research.

Cultural Factors in Conversion: Rambo

Rambo's study is the most developed and detailed model on conversion I have encountered. Rambo is a psychologist and Professor of Psychology and Religion at San Francisco Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley and serves

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p 39

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p 25

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p 28

¹¹⁷ Staples and Mauss.

as a minister in the Churches of Christ. He draws on a multi-disciplinary approach in his work on conversion. Understanding Religious Conversion from 1993 is the most detailed piece of work on conversion since Lofland and Stark's "Becoming a World Saver." Rambo produces a schema which incorporates insights from different disciplines in addition to past sociological research. As this is such a significant piece of work on conversion I will examine it closely.

Rambo proposes a process oriented model where conversion is approached as a series of interactive elements that are cumulative over time.¹¹⁸ He sees "'genuine' conversion as a total transformation of the person by the power of God."¹¹⁹ This transformation occurs through the mediation of social, cultural, personal, and religious forces but needs to be "radical, striking to the root of the human predicament."¹²⁰ However, given the many understandings of conversion he concludes that "conversion is what a faith group says it is."¹²¹ This subjective understanding makes it difficult to discuss conversion across faith groups but is reflected in the way many conservative groups talk of people 'converting' who were previous members of another Christian group. Rambo's seven stage process can be illustrated as follows:

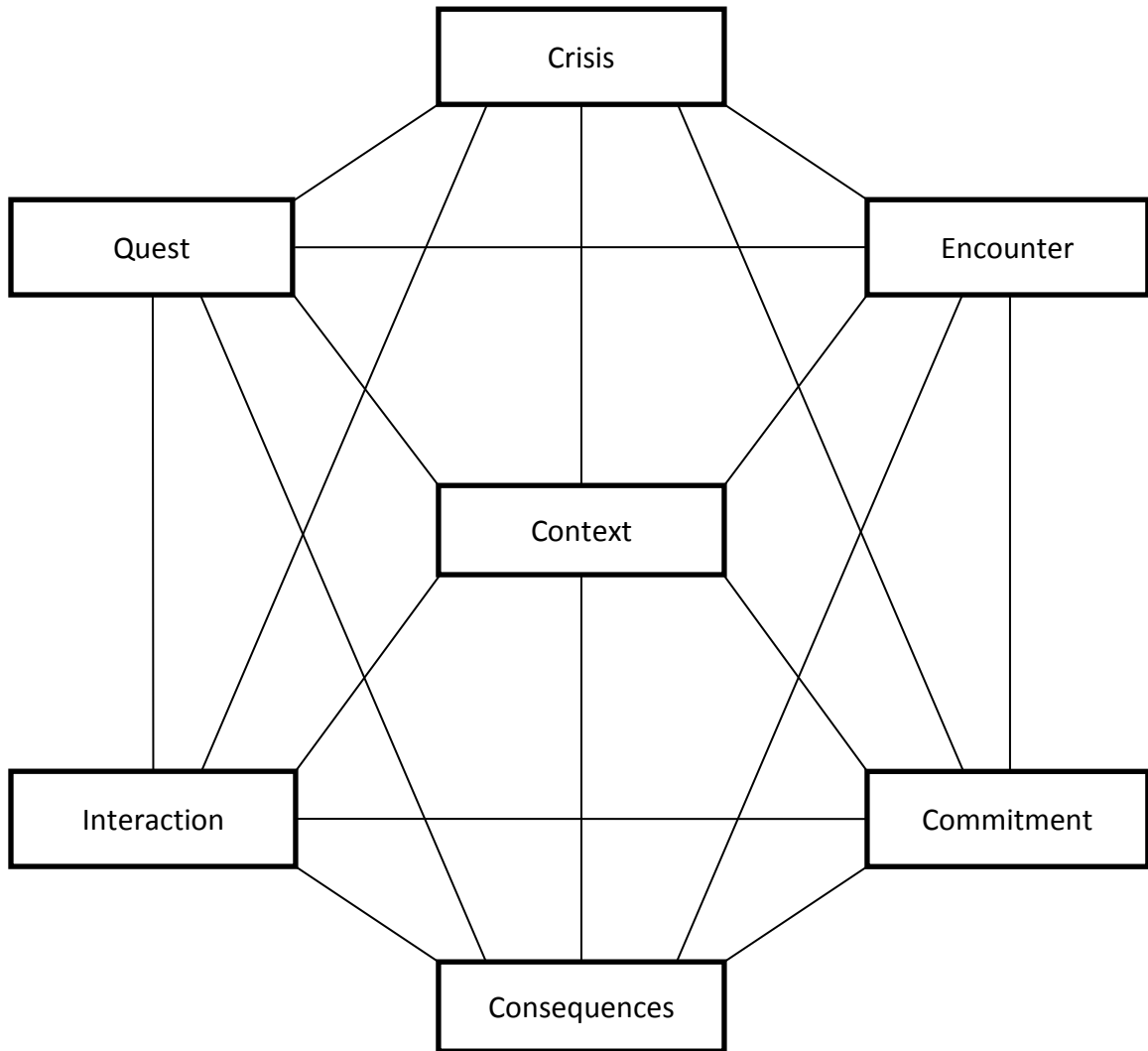
¹¹⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*. p 17

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p xii

¹²⁰ Ibid. p xii

¹²¹ Ibid. p xiv

Figure 2 Seven Stage Conversion Process Model



The schema consists of:

1. Context – is the total environment in which a conversion transpires. It includes social, cultural, religious and personal dimensions. These forces shape avenues of communication, the range of religious options available and people’s mobility, flexibility, resources and opportunities. People can be induced, encouraged, prevented or forced to accept or reject conversion on the basis of factors external to the individual.¹²² Within the context the “macrocontext” *i.e.* political systems, religious organizations, economic systems may facilitate or obstruct conversion. The “microcontext” *i.e.* a person’s family, friends, ethnic group, religious community and neighbourhood, plays an important role in creating a sense of identity and belonging as well as shaping a person’s thoughts, feelings and actions. “Context shapes conversion along pre-existing social, cultural, ethnic or political lines. Congruence – the degree to which elements of a new religion mesh with existing macro- and micro-contextual factors is another important determinant of whether conversion will occur.”¹²³ Rambo argues that secularization is a major social force that influences conversion. He defines it as the process in which religious institutions, ideas, and people lose their power and prestige. Secularization’s source is the rampant pluralism dominant in contemporary culture¹²⁴ which offers the opportunity for people to choose a religion other than the one into which they were born. However this does not take

¹²² Ibid. p 20-21

¹²³ Ibid. p 37

¹²⁴ Ibid. p 28

into account that research indicates most people do not change their religion or faith family.

Rambo notes that “the nature of conversion is to a large degree formed out of the *religious matrix*.” In other words, the ideas, images, methods and metaphors of a religious tradition give shape to the nature of the conversion experience. Significantly most people say ‘no’ to conversion and sadly, most studies are weak because they lack a control group, the people who say ‘no’ to the invitation to convert are not followed, and reasons for declining conversion are not ascertained.

2. Crisis – Rambo accepts that some form of crisis usually precedes conversion.

However, as I have noted, most studies which claim this do not have control groups and do not look at those who had a crisis but did not convert. They also ignore the expectations that one has to have a crisis to convert and biographical reconstruction in the light of this expectation. Heirich’s study¹²⁵ concluded that “stress... is insufficient to account for what is going on.” Yet one can recognize that a catalyst often initiates the conversion process.¹²⁶ Catalysts may include mystical experience, near death experiences, illness and healing. Rambo suggests that rather than crisis, one might think in terms of desire for transcendence. One looks for the meaning of life beyond one’s self if one believes in an external divine power. One looks to give life a meaning if one does not believe in a transcendent power.

¹²⁵ Max Heirich, "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories About Religious Conversion," *The American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 03 (Nov 1977).

¹²⁶ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*. p 48

3. Quest – crisis or the desire for transcendence leads people to build meaning or search for meaning. This is the quest or a seeker stage. The convert takes an active part in their own conversion.
4. Encounter – the encounter with a representative of a religion (advocate) shapes the conversion experience. The advocate’s own background shapes the attitudes and strategies, along with the belief system and specific theory of conversion.
5. Interaction – Converts learn more about the teachings, life-style, and expectations of the group. They are provided with opportunities, both formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated.¹²⁷ These may include encapsulation: physical – by removing people to a distant location; social – directing the potential convert into life-style patterns that limit significant contact with “outsiders”; or ideological – cultivation of a worldview and belief system that “inoculates” the adherent against alternative or competitive systems of belief. “When a sphere of influence has been created by encapsulation, the four dimensions of interaction are deployed¹²⁸:

- a) Relationships create and consolidate emotional bonds to the group and establish the day-by-day reality of the new perspective;

Kinship and friendship networks are fundamental to most conversions. Friends are generally perceived to be trustworthy so one is more inclined to entertain the validity of

¹²⁷ Ibid. p 102

¹²⁸ Ibid. p 108

their belief and explore that belief for themselves. It provides validation as the person sees someone whom they know has changed.

- b) Rituals provide integrative modes of identifying with and connecting to the new way of life.

“Ritual precedes all other aspects of religion: people first *perform* religiously, and then *rationalize* the process by way of theology.”¹²⁹ Rambo follows the participation-belief sequence noted in studies of evangelism. Participation helps to shape and prepare the person for conversion and helps to sustain the conversion after it occurs. “Religious action –regularized, sustained and intentional – is fundamental to the conversion experience. Rituals foster the necessary orientation, the readiness of mind and soul to have a conversion experience, and it consolidates conversation after the initial experience.”¹³⁰

“Ritual helps people to learn to act differently...it is crucial in revealing the nature of worship, obedience and celebration. Attitudes towards life, other people, the world, and God are informed by the power of ritual in the life of the convert. Ritual actions consolidate the community through singing, recitation, and gestures in union, which instil a deeper sense of belonging...it provides experiential validation of the religious belief system being advocated.”¹³¹

- c) Rhetoric provides an interpretive system offering guidance and meaning to the convert.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p 114

¹³⁰ Ibid. p 114

¹³¹ Ibid. p 115

Conversion takes place in part through the process of learning a new language and learning to apply the language in situations that makes it relevant to the convert and to the community in which the convert is speaking.

- d) Roles consolidate a person's involvement by giving them a special mission to fulfill.

Conversion is a change in expectations, values and norms within a social network. People adopt the role of the convert and perform accordingly. Internal changes may then follow. Again, given that members and converts should demonstrate the same behaviour it would be more appropriate to speak of adopting a member role.

These four elements interact and reinforce one another in the conversion process, though groups may differ in the degree to which each component is stressed.¹³²

- 6. Commitment – the five most common elements of the commitment stage are:
 - a. decision making;
 - b. rituals;
 - c. surrender;
 - d. testimony manifested in language transformation; and
 - e. biographical reconstruction and motivational reformulation.

It appears that a person's decision to make a long-term commitment to a group may largely be determined by the degree of connection the person feels with the new group, as opposed to the degree of emotional connection they feel outside the group.¹³³

¹³² Ibid. p 108

7. Consequences – The consequences of conversion are determined in part by the nature, intensity and duration of the conversion and the response to conversion in a person's or a group's context. Authentic conversion is an ongoing process of transformation.¹³⁴

Rambo synthesized many previous models into his own open-ended process model and covered the full spectrum of religious activity. It is possible to identify where he has drawn on previous research. His work on context is influenced by cultural anthropology. The work of William James¹³⁵ and Lofland and Stark¹³⁶ provides the basis for crisis, quest draws on Lofland and Stark¹³⁷ and Straus¹³⁸, encounter and interaction again draw on Lofland and Stark¹³⁹, and commitment depends on Snow and Machalek¹⁴⁰. There has been little follow up on Rambo's work with only one attempt to verify it empirically.¹⁴¹ Kahn and Greene concluded that it was not possible to operationalize the context phase and the encounter phase was "not a distinct dimension in religious experience." Overall they do see their study as an empirical validation of Rambo's model.

Longitudinal Study of Conversion: Barker

¹³³ Ibid. p 127

¹³⁴ Ibid. p 145-146

¹³⁵ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1902).

¹³⁶ Lofland and Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective."

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Straus.

¹³⁹ Lofland and Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective."

¹⁴⁰ Snow and Machalek, "The Convert as a Social Type."

¹⁴¹ PJ Kahn and AL Greene, "'Seeing Conversion Whole': Testing a Model of Religious Conversion," *Pastoral Psychology* 52, no. 3 (2004).

The only extensive longitudinal study of conversion I found in my research was Eileen Barker's study of the Moonies. Barker¹⁴² noted that converts to the Moonies expressed dissatisfaction with a previously held worldview and were seekers. They can be categorised as:

1. travellers – those away from home, those filling in time before or after university or a job, or those who are looking for adventure or something interesting to do on holiday,
2. by-chancers – those who were approached by a Moonie at random, either in a public place or in the person's home,
3. personal networks – people drawn in through friendship or kinship networks.

An important difference in Barker's study is the much lower number of converts who came from personal networks. The convert can be tracked through the following stages:

1. A Moonie makes initial contact with person
2. Person meets the movement in a more general way *i.e.* over a meal
3. Individual attends a two-day workshop a seven-day workshop, or a twenty-one day workshop
4. Person invited to become full-time or home church member.

Barker notes four factors that play a role in the possible conversion of a Moonie.

1. the individual's predispositions
2. past experiences and expectations of society

¹⁴² Barker.

3. understanding of the attraction or otherwise of the Unification Church
4. the immediate environment within which they find themselves.

Barker identified the influence of biographical reconstruction on conversion narratives.

This confirms the findings of other researchers regarding the difficulty in determining the actual events in a person's life which lead to conversion versus the interpretation of events as shaped by the experience of the person post event. The question of the participation-belief sequence or belief-participation sequence is more complex. Both can be observed in the conversion process. Factors which preclude a person from joining include a worldview sufficiently different from the unification movement *i.e.* atheistic, strong family or relational ties outside the movement and differences in age. Barker noted that a person happily married, holding a good job, in their forties, is unlikely to be attracted to the Unification movement. The data suggests that disbelief in God is a significant factor in a person choosing not to join in the Unification Church. This agrees with the idea that a new worldview has to have some similarities with the previous world view for it to be accepted. Barker confirmed that the Moonies, consciously or unconsciously, used role-play as a means of socialising the potential convert into the new group.

Summary

Studies of conversion identify conversion as a change in the root reality of an individual¹⁴³ without describing the individual's root reality. The original root reality may be impossible to determine due to biographical reconstruction. Studies do not present data indicating that an extensive analysis of the current root reality has been examined. Conversion is a rarity and will not take place if individuals are satisfied with their worldview.¹⁴⁴ For those dissatisfied with their worldview and seeking an alternative, the reasons or events leading to dissatisfaction are usually not explored in depth. The researcher is faced with biographical reconstruction¹⁴⁵ when attempting to ascertain causes. Longitudinal studies tracking duration of commitment after initial conversion are rare.¹⁴⁶ Converts are only identified after they have begun the conversion process. This means that any study is biased towards those who self select to participate in the conversion process and does not provide any information about those who choose never to begin. For a successful conversion, three factors which appear to be crucial to the process are:

1. an encounter with an advocate;
2. the formation of affective bonds; and

¹⁴³ Heirich, "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories About Religious Conversion.;" Richard V Travisano, "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations," in *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction*, ed. Gregory P Stone and Harvey A Farberman (Waltham: Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970).

¹⁴⁴ Stark, "The Class Basis of Early Christianity: Inferences from a Sociological Model."

¹⁴⁵ Snow and Machalek, "The Convert as a Social Type."

¹⁴⁶ Barker's own study is the first one I identified. Barker.

3. intensive interaction.¹⁴⁷

Both the new worldview and the advocate will need to have many similarities or points of correspondence with the previously held world view and with the potential convert for a conversion outcome to be likely¹⁴⁸. The presence of these three factors is not in any way a guarantee that the conversion will occur but in the absence of any of these factors conversion is unlikely. Encapsulation¹⁴⁹ also plays a role in the process of conversion. Conversions can be classified according to different motifs¹⁵⁰ and as a belief-participation or participation-belief sequence. Researchers are increasingly seeing conversion as a participation belief-sequence. There is no explanation of how it is possible to have several opposing and competing root realities. Surely the root reality is one which encompasses all of what are termed root realities even if they are diametrically opposed. The overarching root reality will have to hold these in tension. If we cannot determine root realities then any attempt to define conversion in this way is futile. Ultimately what conversion studies describe are how people join organizations. We can determine factors influencing this – such as affective bonds, intensive interaction and encounter with an advocate but the why – if we cannot define conversion – is something we may never know.

¹⁴⁷ Lofland and Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective."; David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984); Straus.

¹⁴⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.

¹⁴⁹ Snow and Phillips, "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment."

¹⁵⁰ John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 04 (1981).

In addition to conversion there are other factors which contribute to or limit growth as examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Growth

Factors affecting growth

Numerical growth in a church will be affected by the attitude of the congregation towards growth in general, if there is a specific intention to grow numerically, and natural limits on growth.

Natural Limitations on Growth - Preferred Size of Congregation, Staff Capacity, Demographics, Building Capacity

People may join a congregation because they like the size of the congregation. If the size changes, either growing or shrinking, then they will need to adapt to the new size or seek a new church of the size they prefer. The church itself will have to address the issue of increasing size by examining factors which are present in the original size to see if they can be replicated in the larger church. If close friendships are the predominant factor in a small church can this be replicated through small groups in a larger church? If the church is shrinking, then the church needs to address the question of how to increase the membership to regain its previous size. Even if a congregation wishes to increase in size numerically they will be limited by natural growth inhibitors. One full time ordained staff person in a church can effectively minister in a context of 150-175¹⁵¹ people. If the congregation increases in numbers beyond that capacity then the church will need to hire another staff person or numbers will shrink back to the 150-175 range. Herb Miller suggests

¹⁵¹ Some suggest one hundred and others two hundred as the upper limit.

that this number is also demographically related. As the median age of the congregation increases, fewer people can be effectively ministered to as intensive pastoral care associated with hospital visits and funerals increases with an older congregation.¹⁵²

Attitudinal differences exist among different age groups in the congregation. Younger families with both spouses working are not at home during the day when pastoral visits traditionally occur. Those with children who are engaged in many formally scheduled activities do not have a lot of free time to set aside for visits from their pastor. They also recognize that there are many calls on the minister's time. These individuals often say that they do not need a visit but will ask the minister to visit if a need arises in their lives. An older demographic which was formed in an era where only one spouse worked and ministerial visits were part of a life pattern have an expectation of personal contact with the minister which is more time intensive.

There can also be an attitude that a parish does not need to have the resources which one would find in a small business because it is the church. What one might expect as standard resources for a small business are regarded as frills when applied to the church.¹⁵³

The occupancy rate of a church building¹⁵⁴ can be classified as:

¹⁵² Herb Miller, *The Vital Congregation*, Effective Church Series (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p63

¹⁵³ There is no doubt a tension about how a minister – particularly in a one staff church – uses their time. Pastoral visiting is a vital part of ministry. I recall doing a placement in Troon in a Church of Scotland parish. I discussed with the minister why one should do home visits - particularly because I am a shy individual I disliked doing them intensely. His response was an unanswerable ‘How will you know your people if you don't visit them?’

¹⁵⁴ Kenneth L Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983). p 29

1. Uncomfortably empty (20-40 % full): People look at the seating area and see a few people scattered about. This can imply not much commitment by those attending or not much is happening in this place.
2. Comfortably empty (40 - 60% full): People look at the seating area and see some people present with a wide choice of available seating.
3. Comfortably full (60 - 80% full): When people look at the seating area they can see that people are attracted to come and that things are happening here. Places for seating are still available but you need to look a little.
4. Uncomfortably full (above 80% full): When people look at the seating area it has a squished feeling. Seating is not readily apparent.

When a church is uncomfortably empty there will be difficulty attracting people to join the community. If few people attend and there is not an appearance of success people will be unlikely to want to associate themselves with such a group. When the church building is comfortably empty or comfortably full the ambiance is most conducive to people joining. People can see themselves as members of this community. If the church building begins to reach the uncomfortably full stage then no further growth is possible¹⁵⁵.

Alternatives would be to build a larger space or split the worship into two services.

People today also have a larger personal bubble or comfort zone than fifty years ago. A row of seating which would have been comfortable for eight people is now only comfortable for five. This implies that churches need to recalculate their maximum

¹⁵⁵ Marlis McCollum, "The 80 Percent Rule: Fact or Fiction," *Alban CONGREGATIONS Magazine* 1, no. Winter (2004).

seating to know the current comfortable seating capacity. Finney's research indicates that "a full church tends to inhibit evangelism."¹⁵⁶ He suggests that this is due to "a sense of complacency or by the fact that the leaders may have difficulty in caring adequately for a large congregation."¹⁵⁷ He goes on to confuse the difference between large and full using the terms interchangeably and saying "smallish is beautiful"¹⁵⁸ and this should be taken into consideration in forming new congregations. While the ethos of a small and large church may be different the impact on growth is not size but capacity.

Taking into account general attitudes towards growth and natural limitations there remains the underlying question as to whether there is an intentional attitude towards growth in the congregation. Does the congregation want to increase numerically and if so why?

Positive and Negative Predictors of Growth

The International Congregational Life Survey (ICLS) is an initiative of four countries (Australia, New Zealand, England and USA) which used rigorous methodology to survey 12,000 congregations with 1.2 million worshipers. The survey lists four factors which are used with great frequency in decision making by congregations.

1. Theology – *e.g.* an understanding to stand by the poor and oppressed
2. Bible – *e.g.* following the Great Commission or Great Commandment

¹⁵⁶ Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* p 5

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p 5

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p 5

3. Spirit – *e.g.* listening for God’s Spirit speaking through prayer and discernment
4. Tradition – *e.g.* engaging in mission because founded as a mission church

The fifth factor identified but rarely used

5. Data driven decisions.

The obvious conclusion is that if we do not use reliable data which is available or gather reliable data, we run the risk of making decisions based on nonexistent realities.

The survey was first analysed in four interrelated categories:

1. Spiritual Connections
2. Inside Connections
3. Outside Connections
4. Identity Connections

They refined the research¹⁵⁹ to identify ten strengths in these four areas:

1. Growing Spiritually
2. Meaningful Worship
3. Participating in the Congregation
4. Sense of Belonging
5. Caring for Children and Youth
6. Focusing on the Community
7. Sharing Faith

¹⁵⁹ Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Beyond the Ordinary 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

8. Welcoming New People
9. Empowering Leadership
10. Looking to the Future

When a congregation placed in the upper twenty percent of responding churches it was defined as being beyond the ordinary in that assessed area. The data was analysed to determine how size, theology, or other identifiable factors were related to a strength and if a particular strength was a factor in numerical growth. The data were compared across faith families of Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant and Historically Black Denomination churches. Each of these strengths will now be examined more detail.

1. Growing Spiritually – Negative Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent also had as strengths:

- Strong Sense Of Belonging
- Meaningful Worship
- Participating in the Congregation
- Many New Worshipers

Small congregations (<100) excel in Growing Spiritually. Theology, beliefs and practices of Conservative Protestant and Historical Black congregations are linked to positive spiritual climates. Interestingly, positive spiritual growth is a negative predictor for numerical growth. Churches which score high in this area are less likely to grow. They are not strong in the positive predictor of growth: Welcoming Newcomers. They are more likely focused inwards on their own members. However the fact that they generally do

not welcome newcomers well does not mean that they would not be able to welcome newcomers if they chose to do so.

2. Meaningful Worship – Not Related to Growth

The one difficulty associated with this data is it was not collected from a control group defined as those who did not find worship meaningful and did not attend. Therefore the data is biased towards those who attend and like the way things are. Congregations in the top twenty per cent for Meaningful Worship also had as strengths:

- Growing Spiritually
- Empowering Leadership

Congregational size is not a factor for Meaningful Worship. Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score higher. The authors postulate that this may be because either services are different or expectations are different or some of both – which is to say that if people bring expectations that they will find God or experience joy and meaningful worship when they attend they may well find their expectations met. This strength is not related to numerical growth.

3. Participating in the Congregation – Positive Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Participating in the Congregation also had as strengths:

- Growing Spiritually
- Inviting Others to Worship Services and Sharing Faith
- Looking to the Future

Small congregations (<100) have a larger percentage participating than mid-size congregations (100-350) who have larger percentage participating than large (>350) churches. Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score higher than Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestants. The average age of a congregation is not related to participation. This strength is a positive predictor of numerical growth.

4. Sense of Belonging – Not Related to Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Sense of Belonging also had as strengths:

- Growing Spiritually
- Looking to the Future

Small congregations (< 100) report the strongest sense of belonging, while large congregations (>350) reported the lowest. Again, Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score highest. A question to reflect on given that Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score highest in the first four strengths, is which comes first – the Sense of Belonging, Participation, Spiritual Growth or Meaningful Worship? Age comes into play for the first time with this factor. Younger congregations have a greater sense of belonging than older congregations. This suggests that younger worshippers are attracted to a congregation that feels like home and where they make friends. This factor is not related to numerical growth. It is more likely to be a factor in retaining people that are already attending.

5. Caring for Children and Youth – Positive Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Caring for Children and Youth also had as strengths:

- Growing Spiritually
- Sharing a Common Vision for the Congregation's Future.

Mid (100-350) and large (>350) size congregations score highest for Caring for Children and Youth. This may be because small congregations have fewer youth and have greater difficulty meeting needs of smaller numbers across a greater age range. Overall, Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score the highest, though there is variation within the individual indices. The order for satisfaction with what is offered for children and youth aged <19 is Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches, Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic. This may be because of the high level of care offered by the Roman Catholic denomination in the past through parochial schools. They may be unsatisfied because of their high expectations. Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestants do not have the high level of retention of youth that Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches do. Age is also a factor. Younger congregations score highly, likely because they have a higher percentage of children and so a natural tendency is to focus on their needs. This factor is a positive indicator of numerical growth and one of the most powerful. Caring for Children and Youth aged <19 increases the chance of retention and is a powerful attractor for those outside the congregation looking for something for their children.

6. Focusing on the Community – Negative Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Focusing on the Community also had as strengths:

- Sense of Belonging
- Empowering Leadership

Congregation size is not a factor for Focusing on the Community. Mainline Protestant churches score highest followed closely by Historic Black churches. Conservative Protestants score the lowest. Younger congregations are less likely to be focused on their communities. Possibly because they have more internal needs. This factor is a negative predictor for growth.

7. Sharing Faith – Negative Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Sharing Faith also had as strengths:

- Participation in the Congregation
- Sense of Belonging
- Empowering Leadership
- People Who Have Begun Attending in the Last Five Years

Small congregations (<100) score highest for Sharing Faith. Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score twenty percent higher in this factor than Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholics. Age is not a factor and Sharing Faith is a negative predictor for growth. This again is perhaps counter intuitive. Yet, sharing faith and inviting people to experience a faith community is only one part of people coming to faith and joining a community. If there is nothing attractive about that to which they are

invited then they will not return. Other strengths are more centrally and directly related to numerical growth than Sharing Faith. Concentrating on outsiders may mean retention rates fall.

8. Welcoming New People – Positive Predictor of Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent for Welcoming New People also had as strengths:

- Inviting Others to Worship Services and Sharing Faith
- Looking to the Future
- Caring for Children and Youth

Congregational size is not a factor in attracting newcomers. The data does show that smaller congregations attract more switchers and large congregations more transfers. The percentage of people attending both is the same but the kinds of people are different. Conservative Protestant churches score the highest and Historical Black churches the lowest. As the researchers say bluntly: “No faith tradition is doing an outstanding job of attracting those who have never been part of a faith community.”¹⁶⁰ For those coming from a faith tradition, Mainline Protestants attract returnees, Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches attract switchers, and Roman Catholics attract transfers. Age is a factor. Younger congregations have a higher percentage of new people. This factor is a positive predictor of growth.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p 89

9. Empowering Leadership – Not Related to Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent also had as strengths:

- Meaningful Worship
- Looking to the Future
- Focusing on the Community

Small congregations (<100) score highest for Empowering Leadership. Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score higher than Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics. Empowering Leadership is not related to numerical growth.

10. Looking to the Future – Not Related To Growth

Congregations in the top twenty percent also had as strengths:

- Sense of Belonging
- Empowering Leadership
- Have People Who Began Attending The Congregation In The Last Five Years

Congregational size is not a factor in Looking to the Future but in the indices making up this factor, worshippers in large congregations are more likely to be excited about its future and believe it is currently moving in new directions. Worshippers in small congregations are more likely to claim that their church has a clear vision to which they are committed. Conservative Protestant and Historical Black churches score highest in this factor. Age is a factor with younger congregations more focused on the future than older congregations. This factor is not related to numerical growth.

Congregational Similarities

Every congregation tends to think of themselves as unique. However, there are three strengths where the range among congregations doing well and poorly was very small:

1. Meaningful Worship
2. Participation in the Congregation, and
3. Spiritual Growth

Amongst the congregations surveyed people indicated that they found worship satisfying. Given the wide diversity in worship this should be encouraging for congregations and judicatories to know. What is not surprising is that people attending worship find it satisfying - otherwise why would they be there? Research with individuals who attend and then leave needs to be done to understand their experience of worship. To date, the lack of control groups and data from those who leave, limits our understanding of the data and the opportunity to extend the findings to wider populations.

Congregations are alike in their ability to engage people to participate in the life of the congregation. Congregations are also alike in spiritual growth. Where there is a difference amongst congregations is in how they might understand spiritual growth.

Within any given specific context however people across congregations describe their spiritual growth in similar ways.

Congregational Differences

The single greatest difference in congregations is in the percentage of new people who began attending in the last five years. This can vary from less than ten per cent to over two thirds. This will substantially affect the sense of belonging and corporate memory of

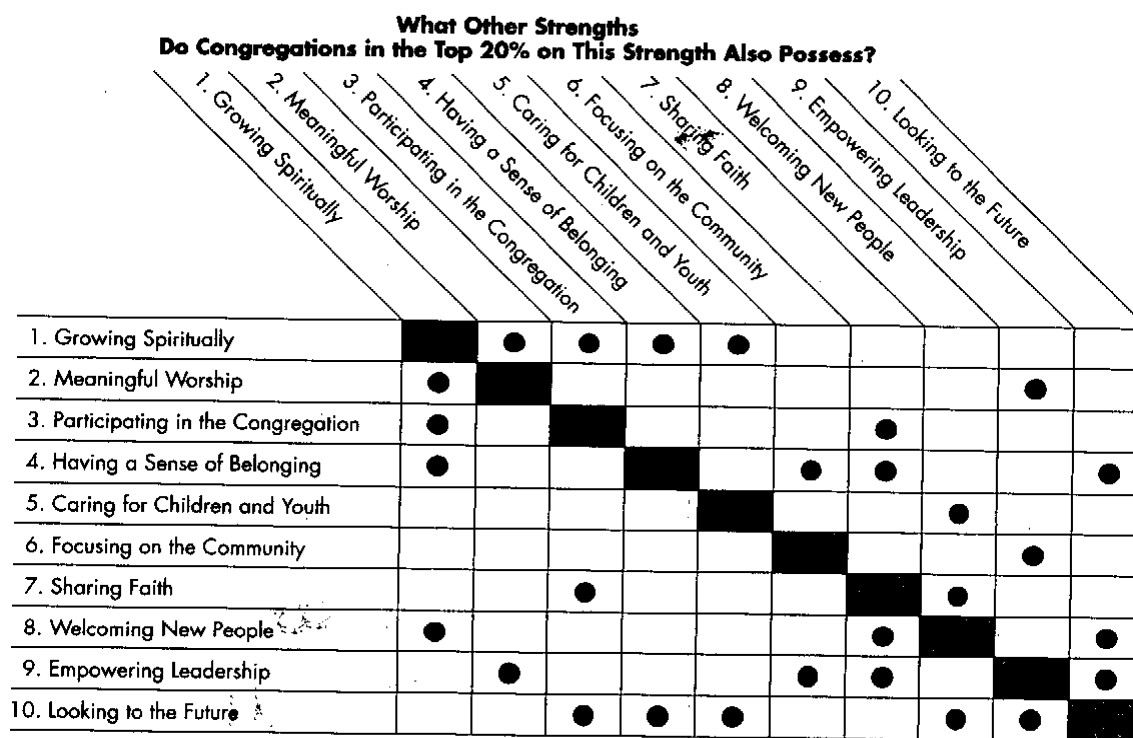
a congregation. Congregations also differ considerably in terms of faith sharing and in leadership styles.

From Strength to Strength

The following chart¹⁶¹ provides interesting data on the interrelationships of strengths in congregations.

Figure 3 Correlation Among Strengths Exhibited by Strong Congregations

Figure 11.2
Strength by Strength



For each strength listed across the top, the column below shows the other strengths that congregations in the top 20% on that strength also possess. For example, congregations in the top 20% on Growing Spiritually also tend to score high on Meaningful Warship, Participating in the Congregation, Having a Sense of Belonging, and Welcoming New People.

Based on logistic regression comparing congregations in the top 20% on the strength at the top of the column to other congregations.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p 120

The interrelationships amongst the various strengths clearly shows how strengths in one area are related to and predict other strengths. Focusing on the Future is related to and predicts strengths in five other areas: Participation in the Congregation, Sense of Belonging, Care for Children and Youth, Welcoming New People, And Empowering Leadership. Interestingly, Caring for Children and Youth is only related to one other strength: Welcoming New People. Natural Church Development (NCD)¹⁶² suggests that concentrating on improving weak areas will improve all other areas. According to Woolover and Bruce, if a congregation is weak in Caring for Children and Youth and puts efforts into this area only one other strength will be increased. Beyond the Ordinary, which suggests drawing on strengths, implies that focusing on Looking to the Future will provide strengths in an additional five areas. Callahan also argues that a church must “run to its strength.”¹⁶³ Taking energy away from strengths to concentrate on weaknesses only allows those strengths to decline. The answer would seem to be that a congregation must continue to maintain strengths it has, and in addition, should strategically choose which areas to strengthen to complement existing strengths which will provide the most overall benefit.

Summary

In looking at the question of how people join new faith communities, the most interesting results from this survey for the purpose of this thesis are those that identify the factors

¹⁶² Natural Church Development is an analytical instrument to measure eight areas in a congregation’s life: leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship, small groups, evangelism, and relationships. NCD suggests that congregations should put resources into the area in which they score the lowest.

¹⁶³ Callahan. p xvii

associated with positive and negative predictors of numerical growth. The positive factors are Caring for Children and Youth, Participating in the Congregation, and Welcoming Newcomers. Two of the positive indicators reinforce the findings of sociological research that affective bonds (Welcoming Newcomers) and intensive interaction (Participating in the Congregation) are critical in the process of people joining a new group. I do not see any correlation with the third – Caring for Children and Youth – unless it is part of intensive interaction where children and youth are involved along with their families. The negative predictors are Growing Spiritually, Focusing on the Community and Sharing Faith. The first makes sense sociologically, as demonstrated by Barker and others, that focusing on members makes attracting new members more difficult. The other two also logically correlate, as when the emphasis is on outsiders, retention rates fall. The study did not address this aspect so it remains a theoretical correlation. The study did note that congregations doing well in one or more of these areas were weak in the positive indicators for growth. Their study indicates several areas which people frequently identify as being essential for congregational vitality – size, worship style, leadership, and mission objectives – are not related to growth or being a vital congregation. They also state that fixing a weakness as advocated by Natural Church development will improve other areas is a myth. There are things in a church which give satisfaction and things which cause dissatisfaction. As long as the level of satisfaction is higher than the level of dissatisfaction then there is a positive atmosphere and vice versa. However, fixing an area of dissatisfaction does not improve overall satisfaction. It merely takes away a dissatisfier and there is usually another one ready to take its place. When the level

of dissatisfaction rises a church must concentrate on raising the level of satisfaction rather than reducing dissatisfaction. So fixing a weakness may not lead to overall improvement in the vitality of a church. A reliable study needs to be conducted in this area. Yet, if a church is declining in numbers it does need to look at outside contextual factors to determine if they are an influence, as well as examining how it can improve in areas which are positive predictors of growth.

Numerical Maintenance – Numerical Growth

A church, as any other organization, needs to address the issue of maintaining its membership so that the group remains viable as an organization. They will need to have at a minimum, replacement growth to maintain numbers as members die, move away or cease to be involved with the church for whatever reason. They will need to be aware of how this replacement growth occurs. They will still need to have mechanisms in place to welcome newcomers who for whatever reason are attracted to that place – transfer growth, new growth through attraction by worship services, ministries, etc. A church may maintain its size even though growth is inhibited because it is still functioning as a vital church and vital and vibrant churches attract new members. However, the new members which are attracted even in these circumstances are often transfer growth and people who have or who have had an affiliation with the church in some way or another. As these links become more and more residual there will be smaller and smaller pools of potential members to draw on. A church will then be required to address the issue of whether or not they wish to attract members from a pool which is not normally associated

with their group. If they do not, then with the declining attachment to and loss of residual affection for a denomination, they will go into terminal decline.

Chapter 5 Methodology

Grounded Theory Project

Rationale

I wanted to study the lived experience of individuals belonging to numerically growing parishes. I was interested in whether their experiences and understanding of evangelism and Christian identity related to their understanding of membership and inviting people to join their faith community. I wanted to learn if there was a commonality amongst the peoples' experiences and what might account for that. I wanted to go beyond a simple description of growth. As there was no data or indication that growth was a result of evangelism it was not possible to conduct a phenomenological study of evangelism. Using Grounded Theory I could investigate the experience of growth in growing parishes and from that data, develop a mid-range theory of why this growth was occurring. Therefore my guiding research question became "How does an Anglican faith community's identity and understanding of evangelism affect the way they understand people to belong to their faith community and how they invite new members to belong?" In a Grounded Theory approach I would examine three substantive areas: identity, belonging, and evangelism. I would collect and examine data to see what emerged as common themes in the interpretation the interviewees gave to their experience. I could then compare how peoples' experiences of being part of a growing parish related to theories of how and why parishes grow.

Study Population

Three parishes with numerical growth over the previous ten year period participated in the study. Figures 4 to 6 (pError! Bookmark not defined.,Error! Bookmark not defined.,Error! Bookmark not defined.) illustrate the numerical growth. The parish populations were verified to ensure that they were representative of the Diocesan demographic as a whole. (Fig7 pError! Bookmark not defined. Fig8 pError! Bookmark not defined. Fig9 pError! Bookmark not defined. & Fig10 pError! Bookmark not defined.). Four people from each parish were interviewed: the parish priest, a long term member of the parish in a senior leadership position and two people new to the parish and, if possible new, to the Christian faith.

Data Collection

In two of the three parishes the interviews were conducted on the same day in the same room of the parish in a random order as determined by the person's availability. Individuals from the third parish were interviewed on four different days due to scheduling difficulties. The interviews were conducted in the same location and setting outside the parish. Interviewees were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study and asked if they were willing to participate. They signed a confidentiality agreement approved by the Ethics Review Committee of St Stephen's College. Next they completed the questionnaire "Is Your Congregation an Evangelizing Community? An Evangelism Assessment for Churches". During the interview, questions were read from the list to ensure uniformity. The interview took place in a conversational and relaxed manner.

Subjects were asked to refrain from discussing the interview with other subjects until all interviews were completed.

The interviews were recorded using digital and analogue recorders and initial transcription performed using voice transcription software. For this process, the researcher listened to the recording, identified the speaker and repeated the interview word for word. The software transcribed the researcher's voice to print. The transcript was then verified for accuracy by comparing with the original recording.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed by identifying common phrases, repeated words, similar thoughts and the results recorded on file cards. The data was condensed into spreadsheets under the following categories: Describing the Parish, Evangelism, Growth, Membership Belonging, Needs, Conversion and Reasons for Growth, arranged by parish horizontally and by interviewee vertically.

For each category responses were compared within each parish and across parishes by priest, newcomer and long term attendee. Responses to the questions were grouped by similarity.

Responses were compared and grouped into tables by respondent – priest, new comer and long term member and by parish. Similar responses were given a category name and grouped together in columns in the tables. The spreadsheets and tables were compared for accuracy. The data was further condensed and the tables of priests, newcomers and long term members merged into sixteen tables.

Chapter 6 Results

Defining Conversion And How It Occurs

Conversion, as identified by newcomers and long term members, was defined as change and transformation. ‘Awakening’ was mentioned at least twice by priests and twice by long term members. All categories of respondents said conversion could be either sudden or occurring over a period of time. (Table 5 p109)

Categories Of New Members In Church

Respondents in all categories identified new members as originating from 1) transfer growth primarily from closed Anglican parishes, and 2) switching because of dissatisfaction with previous church or regeneration resulting from a life crisis. Two parishes did not experience growth from people new to faith. Laity from one parish identified two people as converts but the priest did not mention them in the response. (Table 6 p110)

Definitions, Evangelistic Action, Reaction To Work Of Evangelism And Invitation To Respond

Respondents in all categories defined evangelism as “proclaiming”, “sharing “or “spreading” the “gospel” or “good news” and evangelistic action as “living one’s faith” and informing people of church events. Newcomers and long term members reacted adversely to the concept of evangelism because of personal experiences. Only one respondent (long term) included invitation as part of evangelism. (Table 7 p111)

Impressions Of Congregational Understandings About Evangelism

All clergy and long term members reported that many members of the congregation feel negatively about evangelism. (Table 8 pError! Bookmark not defined.)

How Is Membership In The Parish Defined?

All respondents defined membership by praxis. (Table 9 p113)

What are Requirements For Membership?

All respondents except one newcomer indicated “no requirements” for membership or that they were not aware of any requirements. There was no commonality in responses about beliefs required for membership. Responses ranged from nothing, to understanding who Jesus is. (Table 10 p114)

What Makes A Person A Member?

All respondents identified that praxis makes a person a member. One newcomer stated membership comes through baptism. (Table 11 p115)

How People Come To Belong

All respondents reported that belonging occurred through participation and “being made to feel that they belong.” All respondents reported that there is no formal invitation to become a member of their faith community. People are invited to join groups, and to participate in activities or events. All respondents reported that there are no formal

occasions to bear witness to belonging. Stories of how one comes to faith are recounted in small groups in informal settings. (Table 12 p116)

Responses To Request For Membership

Clergy indicated they would have a conversation with a person requesting membership.

Two long term members encouraged people to sign up on the parish list. (Table 13 p117)

Use Of Analytical Instruments To Help Determine Identity Of Church

All newcomers and long term members identified a variety of homemade tools to solicit people's opinions on different aspects of church life. (Table 14 p118)

Needs Which People Bring To The Church

All but one respondent reported that people bring spiritual needs to be met. All

newcomers also reported people bring material needs. (Table 15 p119)

Needs Which The Church Is Able To Meet

All respondents except one clergy identified that the church could meet spiritual needs.

All long term members identified various ways the church meets material needs. All

clergy identified the need to belong as a need the church can meet. (Table 16 p120)

Desire And Reasons For Growth

All respondents except one newcomer identified their parish as wanting to grow.

Replacement growth, financial need and increased capacity resulting from growth were

practical reasons for growth. All categories of respondents identified having something to

share as underlying desire for growth. There was no commonality identified in reasons for growth. Some respondents noted negative reactions to growth. (Table 17 p121, Table 18 p122)

Why People Are Attracted To The Church

All respondents except for one long term member identified faith formation as a reason why people are attracted to the church. All newcomers and two priests identified worship . All newcomers identified personal connections. (Table 19 p123)

Method By Which People First Become Aware Of The Church

All respondents identified personal connections as the method by which people became aware of the church. All categories of respondents identified policy about the church or church events as awareness raisers. (Table 20 p124)

Where Leadership Is Vested And The Effects Of Leadership On Growth

All clergy and two long term members noted that leadership is dispersed in the congregation and leadership is essential for growth. (Table 21 p125)

Evangelism Survey

No adult baptisms were recorded on the Parish Annual Return (PAR) for any of the parishes for the years 2009-2010. In contrast those respondents who replied to the question offered estimates ranging between “one to two” and “seven to ten”. While the written question clearly stated adult or teen baptisms it is possible that respondents

reported the number of children baptised. In one parish lay respondents verbally reported two recent young adult baptisms when categorising newcomers. Parish baptismal records indicated one adult baptism in 2009 and one in 2010 though this was not reflected in the PAR.

The greatest difference was between clergy and new comer's assessment of their parish as an evangelising community. Clergy rated the parish lower and newcomers higher.

Laity in one parish were unable to give an estimate of the number of teen or adult baptisms in the past two years. (Table 22 p126, Table 23 p127)

Table 5 Defining Conversion and How It Occurs

Category			
	Parish	Definition of Conversion	How Does Conversion Occur
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not sure has definition saying yes to God beginning to trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> long process or instant awakening usually a crisis others always have faith
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> don't use the word talk of intentionality, 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> awakening within the human spirit that God is present with us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quiet awakening
Newcomers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> someone who believes there is a higher power, acknowledges Jesus as divine with important teaching how to live and accepting that intensely enough to live life in deeper, richer way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acceptance which brings change evolution, gradual coming to faith sudden conversion romantic notion
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> movement from unbelief to belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bring new knowledge into life and being
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> transformation like Saul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emotional spiritual
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> convert means to change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> awakening in mind and heart and self of need for change or Christ in your life or God many stages many ways continue to convert happens many times in life sudden or gradual
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> taking on something new or awakening to prior beliefs real awakening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> realize there is a higher power lot of people in church never had one (comments that's presumptuous to say)
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cut and dried or not so much 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ongoing process

Table 6 Categories of New Members in Church

Category					
	Parish	Transfer	Switching	Regeneration	Conversion
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> closure of Anglican churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from Protestant churches 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not the unchurched
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> moved to area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dissatisfied with previous church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exploring faith in response to crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no new Christians
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> transfers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reawakening of faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not aware of anyone who had full conversion experience
Newcomers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> closure of Anglican churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> second and third generation evangelicals looking for depth lapsed Catholic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> others who are not sure why they are there Anglicans coming back people searching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase in converts
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> moved to area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> other churches 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not new to the faith
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> transfer growth 			
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> closure of Anglican churches 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> coming back to faith during life crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two new to the faith
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new to town closed Anglican church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shuffling among churches Come from other churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lapsed – return through crisis 	
	C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dissatisfied with previous church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> had spiritual awakening coming because of life transitions seekers with previous affiliation 	

Table 7 Evangelism: Definition, The Action In Evangelism, Reaction to Work of Evangelism and Invitation to Respond

Category					
	Parish	Definition	Action	Reaction	Invitation
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talking with people in comfortable situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite to safe places to talk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hope for people to come to faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no invitation to commitment
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proclaiming the good news, • sharing the good news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everything we do here is a visible sacrament • I hope people get that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • we minister to the people God sends us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don't go out into the world seeking people out and bringing them in
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • someone who is a light bearer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lived out faith 		
New comers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spreading the gospel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing people we are in contact with that we are people of faith • care for others • outreach programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tainted word 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not being afraid to let people know you are Christian and go to church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing your true self • speaking • Bible study, website 		
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share and receive the gospel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach • let people know of events in church 		
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in word and deed • bring the gospel message to the world • ultimately propositional 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not lose it in good works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invitation to another kind of world through Christ
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • going out and bringing people in to your faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let people know church is very important to you and your faith • letting people know they're having a Bible series • way they live their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put off terribly by evangelistic people • not a comfortable place 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tricky word, struggles • live your faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not overly enthusiastic • enter into conversations • need to gently explain • support anybody who is doing something for the betterment of anybody else • have to be in relationship with people and God to do it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bad experience with Baptist church and evangelism explosion 	

Table 8 What the Congregation’s Understandings Is About Evangelism?

		Category		
	Parish	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some embarrassed 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some strong
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no single understanding • scary word for some 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sharing this is what my church means to me • sharing this is what my relationship with God means to me
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TV preacher evangelist • not embraced word as part of culture in a good way 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lived out faith
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different reaction to evangelicals • what they see on Sun AM TV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not afraid of word evangelism 	
	B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social outreach to Third World and locally 	
	C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can't really say for the congregation 	
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some freaked out • generally uncomfortable, • idea threatens • Catholics don't do evangelism • related to American political positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people from evangelical backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finding opportunity to speak • our goal is...come and grow in faith with us
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evangelism scares people off • wouldn't be comfortable • don't aggressively promote 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inviting people who attend events to church • similar to own definition • bringing people in
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what we have been told it is • they don't feel qualified • we haven't discussed it 		

Table 9 How Parish Membership is Defined

Category			
	Parish	Praxis	Doctrine
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being involved and active • attracted by the worship 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anybody who comes and says I am fed here and I want to be a part of this community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very porous • very loosely defined
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open altar – anyone who comes is seen as a member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baptism and Eucharist
Newcomers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sincere about the faith • appreciate deepness of tradition • a capacity to love and receive love in the context of • Christ and our relationship with God • stand to be challenged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creedal belief (then redefines)
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to be involved • missed if not present • feel like you are important 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regular attendance • fellowship 	
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • different levels of commitment 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • committed to participating in social justice • open minded, inclusive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no definition
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or two visits and considered member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easiest is by the canons • say ownership rather than membership

Table 10 Requirements for Parish Membership

		Category		
	Parish	None	Praxis	Beliefs
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> informally – doesn't know not really thought about it defined by canons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> on parish role financial contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there's no expectations around what they need to believe trying to build on whatever blocks the holy spirit has given
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no requirements 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seeking relationship with God believe that the Christian tradition has something to offer and they'll draw nearer to God
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no requirements 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding who Jesus is under the creeds adhering to Christian tradition not believe just anything – here is who we are through our creeds and as followers of Jesus
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no, show up and we will deal with it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempt to become part of a community and experience the joy and love of Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> belief in a greater higher power and subscribe to the idea of community not encountered as an issue
	B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a need to go on Sundays and have yourself refilled, having a desire a need, a want to have God in your life and the things you feel God represents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no they are an empty vessel
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no requirements unaware of any 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> never questioned doesn't know what beliefs are required as Christian all her life
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no formal requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> three months attendance liturgical acceptance offered but not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no doctrinal litmus test doesn't believe there are any required beliefs, end result is orthodox Christian teaching but begin where people are
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> did not know of formal requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attend six months to vote 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assume they would be Christian person would not comfortable if no belief in Jesus Christ and God no set list of requirements
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not for formal membership 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no assumptions come empty our job to fill you

Table 11 What Makes a Person a Member?

Category			
	Parish	Praxis	Confessional Stance
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> anybody who comes coming and joining in the life of the parish 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation basically showing up after three Sundays asked for contact info and offered giving number attend newcomers dinner 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> willingness to be involved see as place where life exists and be involved and share that life 	
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular attendance positive attitude connectedness with people people feel loved and wanted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baptism
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> two levels – immersed or Sunday only wanting to be a part of the process 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has not been explained to her
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular attendance and involvement receiving or giving in the church in some regular way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not members of Anglican communion but members of broader family (even if not baptised)
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participating whatever reason they are there and whatever they want to contribute is a member just being there attendance active participation coming in good standing for six months to vote letting people know you are a member 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ownership one or two visits and we would consider you a member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canons

Table 12 How People Come To Belong To A Parish

Category					
	Parish	Praxis	Personal Choice	Formal Invitation	Witness to belonging
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through relationship feel welcomed and noticed having something to give parish roll 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no particular point invited to join 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no formal chance to tell stories
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hard question show up and you belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only kind of belonging required is they choose to belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> invited to join groups, formal link after 3 Sundays people invited to participate in groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tell stories in informal settings
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> occurs when people make connection with the church family and their own personal life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> making decision based on what they encounter within the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> people invited to events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tell stories in small groups
New comer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regular attendance at church and coffee hour 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can be formally received into communion invitation to confirmation class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tell stories during coffee hour
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being included by members make them feel like they belong 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through Alpha and Cursillo 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> slide right in 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has yet to find out invited to teach and sing never asked to belong to church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tell stories at coffee time
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> happens over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> let people make that decision themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> less pressure with larger congregation liturgical acceptance ceremony on request not aware of invitation to belong unless at formal level of clergy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tell their stories at coffee hour and in small groups
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good question people come, are made welcome and feel like they belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hard for young people automatic for other age group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no point where people invited to belong no invitation but envelope lady offers envelopes and name tags sure priest gives invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mostly tell stories in informal settings no formal opportunities in small groups
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel valued feel wanted and needed 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> anyone who shows up belongs so not asked to belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no formal opportunity to tell stories

Table 13 Responses to Requests for Parish Membership

Category			
	Parish	Action of Responder	Engagement
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conversation about what that means for person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide opportunities for making relationships
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take contact info • have conversation about involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have people invite them to groups
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • say great and have a conversation 	
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unaware of requests • talk with priest • list person on parish role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • envelopes (optional) • attend
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give them times, offer to pick them up • encourage them 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbal response of “you are welcome” • hope deacon or warden explains what is involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • come as often as you like
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • don’t know if there is prescribed way of becoming a member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no doctrinal litmus test • do think you need to be confirmed in the Anglican communion
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you are here and welcome • talk with priest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put name on parish list, • take envelopes
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • certainly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • put name on parish role for mailings • told to show up on Sunday

Table 14 Use of Analytical Instruments to Help Determine Identity of Church

Category					
	Parish	Usage	External	Homemade	Results
Priests	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not to any great extent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pick and choose sections 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> already has good identity as Anglo-Catholic
	B			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-devised strategic planning questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parish brochure five year plan
	C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gifts discernment 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no follow up
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> none used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parish profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> surveys on logo and web site 	
	B			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> survey by priest on where you want the church to go 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not used in her time 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sermons and discussions in church 	
Long Term	A			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> narrative budget 	
	B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parish profile partnered with other churches for discussions on future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sessions about issues 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a lot over her time depends on minister if used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> many different ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> many different ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> same results with different tools

Table 15 Needs Which People Bring to the Church

		Category			
	Parish	Spiritual	Material	Belonging	Emotional
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worship prayer needs at difficult times in life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> immigrants in transition 		
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> faith formation for children spiritual needs hungry and thirsty for relationship with God 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> education needs
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> answers to life's questions hope 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need for community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assurance in struggles place to be safe to be themselves
Newcomers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> theological depth seeking a depth not found in own tradition spiritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> financial 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emotional
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduce children to faith sense of purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shelter food clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sense of belonging 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prayer hunger and thirst for truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clothing shelter food 		
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> see things as sacred worship pastoral care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being a person in a different setting 		
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to be part of a family that has same faith and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> health issues 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uncertainty of future grieving
	C				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fears – of economic, failure, change

Table 16 Needs Which the Church Is Able To Meet

	Category				
	Parish	Spiritual	Material	Belonging	Emotional
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • friendship 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healing prayer ministry • keeping • helping grow relationship with God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • casserole ministry • discretionary fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social supporting interaction 	
	C			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needing to feel they belong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • need to feel valued, • accepted
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • theological depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food • shelter 		
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purpose • Christian formation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spiritual needs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcome • being with people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional needs • priest listens • priest counsels • visit sick
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • place to find answers to questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financial needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meaningful community 	
	• B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spiritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ageing casserole ministry • sick • financial • illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of community 	
	• C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spiritual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • food • housing or directions to obtain them 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotional counselling

Table 17 **Desire and Reasons for Growth: Priests and Newcomers**

Category						
	Parish	Interest in Numerical Growth	Rationale, Practical	Rationale, Theological	Reasons Stated for Past Numerical Growth	Reactions to growth
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wants to grow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no growth going to die, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preaching gospel of Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> appointment of full time rector, mandate to grow doing things to high standards solid groundwork of previous rectors prayerful support community is welcoming good relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> growth is exciting buzz of excitement
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> yes and no for growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no growth will diminish and close, aging congregation, finances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> want to share with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> different model of church with volunteers instead of paid staff quality of Sunday worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fear of loss of intimacy
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> desire for growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> want to know they are a healthy parish 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> willingness to accept change gracefully vision to grow as a Christian saying yes to the gifts of God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some resistance to growth
Newcomers	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grow numerically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue parish witness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> something to share grow in faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sincerity and respect for tradition non-judgementalness class of liturgy scholarly approach arrival of full time rector desire of parish council and parish to grow not just survive 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grow numerically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elderly congregation increased monies and volunteers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> transfer growth openness and willingness to accept small children 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hasn't seen expressed intention to grow 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contemporary service 	

Table 18 **Desire and Reasons For Growth: Long Term**

Long Term	Parish	Interest in Numerical growth	Rationale, Practical	Rationale, Theological	Reasons stated for past numerical growth	Reactions to growth
	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • financially required • grow or shrink and disappear • critical mass of community • accomplish more with larger numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gospel duty to grow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • welcoming • community • purged all the nasty people so people left nice and easy to get on with • worship intellectually satisfying • preaching • positive energy of growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • challenges with growth
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paying bills • ageing congregation, people dying, • replacement growth • support young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grow if living church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • friendly and welcoming • people were invited • encouraged by friends • good sermons • people in church • direction of church • leadership • good priests 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desire for growth but resentment of diocesan statistical approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more fun with more people • greater chance of connecting with someone similar • more singing voices • more children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more intense prayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • primary reason is willingness of average everyday members not to keep faith a secret or place of worship a secret 	

Table 19 Why People Are Attracted To the Church

Retention Factors					
	Parish	Worship	Faith Formation	Personal Connection	Other
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worship solemnity contemplative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> children's ministry 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social outreach
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunday worship music preaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> education programmes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> young (recently established) parish
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> asked to wrestle with scripture and apply in life freedom to ask questions 		
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sincere depth, compline as safe place to come and sit contemplative atmosphere worship reverence and music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching church freedom ask questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inviting to coffee feeling of care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social outreach
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sermons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowing people in church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> building and location,
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> worship music Eucharist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunday school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> welcoming feeling word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only Anglican church in town similar in style to former church events
Lon Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> music worship people put off by incense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> family programmes 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> thoughtful parish reputation-seen as creative
	B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> spiritual guidance and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> friends in church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uncomfortable in present church already church goer reputation – open and welcoming
	C				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> past affiliation as Anglican current church not doing it

Table 20 Method by Which People First Become Aware of the Church

		Category		
	Parish	Church initiated, Personal	Church initiated, Impersonal	Person Initiated
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal contact- door knocking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advertising 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advertising terrible job of marketing and advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> website Facebook newcomer to city group
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal contact with members of church 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> looking for Anglican church and only church in town
Newcomer	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personally recommends to friends door knocking personal contact word-of-mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advertising flyers 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowing somebody in the church 		
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> events held at church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seek it out themselves
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> invited by members personal contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth and family programmes attending choral events advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> walk ins
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> word of mouth knowing people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> activities events 	
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> members telling people 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> funerals and memorials

Table 21 Where Is Leadership Vested and Effect of Leadership on Growth

Category				
	Parish	Importance	Location	Effect
Priest	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> essential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vested in parish council, wardens and lay leadership 	
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> critical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> broadened over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> functional which attracts functional people
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tremendous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dispersed community of gathered ministers 	
Newcomer	A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> rector spouse parish council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good priest able to provide vision and direction
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel comfortable with minister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> need leadership in minister and other people minister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> people engaged in leadership tasks
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not long enough to observe 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leadership team dynamic
Long Term	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> essential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leadership spread through congregation not concentrated in one person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> full time priest with long term vested interest in development of congregation right leadership at the right time
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> really important priest progressive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong role of priest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> without good leadership there is no growth
	C		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> broadened from clergy to include lay people over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some of growth has to be attributed to leadership

Table 22 Evangelism Survey Results Part 1

		Clergy	New	Long Term
1. In the past two years, the number of adult and teen baptisms we have had is:	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing 1-2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 3 or more • Thrive 3 or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 3 or more
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual 0 Adults 4 Children 		
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 3 or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response • No response
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual 0 Adults 3 Children 		
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 7-10 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response • Thrive 3-6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 7-10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual 2 Adult 14 Children 			
2. We offer programs for those wanting to explore Christian faith (e.g. Alpha):	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally • Thrive Regularly
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally
3. We publicize our activities (through flyers, posters, door hangers, word of mouth) in the neighbourhood:	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally • Grow Occasionally
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally
4. When visitors come to our church, we find that they are likely to return:	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally • Thrive Regularly
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly • Grow Occasionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive Regularly
5. When newcomers attend our church, we make them feel welcome and at home from the moment they arrive at the door till the moment they leave.	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 4 • Thrive 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 4
	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow 4 • Thrive 5
	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 5 • Thrive 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrive 4

Table 23 Evangelism Survey Result Part 2

6. Our leaders and many of our members understand the importance of evangelism and are enthusiastic about it.	A	• Thrive 4	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 4	• Steps 3
	B	• Steps 2	• Steps 3	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 5
	C	• Steps 2	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 5	• Steps 3
7. Many of our members are confident and relaxed in sharing their faith	A	• Grow 3	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 4	• Grow 3
	B	• Thrive 5	• Thrive 4	• Thrive 4 • Thrive 5
	C	• Grow 3	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 5	• Grow 3
8. We run several events each year intended as “easy access” events (either on Sundays or at other times during the week) for new people who may not yet be Christians.	A	• Thrive 5	• Thrive 5 • Steps 2	• Thrive 5
	B	• Steps 1	• No response	• Thrive 5 • Steps 3
	C	• Steps 2	• No response • Thrive 4	• Steps 2
9. A suitable portion of our annual budget is allocated to evangelism (e.g., evangelistic programs, hospitality for new people, etc.)	A	• Thrive 5	• Thrive 4 • Steps 2	• Thrive 4
	B	• Steps 1	• No response	• No response • Steps 3
	C	• Steps 2	• Thrive 3 • Thrive 3	• Steps 2
10. Our sermons are readily accessible to those who have no Christian background.	A	• Steps 3	• Thrive 5 • Steps 3	• Steps 3
	B	• Thrive 4	• Thrive 5	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 4
	C	• Thrive 4	• Thrive 5 • Thrive 5	• Thrive 4

Chapter 7 Discussion

Identity: What Makes Us Who We Are?

The requirements for membership have not been previously explored from the point of view of a member of the group. In Chapter One, I identified some factors which influence identity. My research focused on who the faith communities I studied understood themselves to be, the demographics of the community, worship style and their understanding and engagement in evangelism. It was heartening that within the parishes respondents self-identified consistently suggesting that a parish while comprised of a variety of individuals is on the whole fairly homogenous. A homogenous parish is more likely to achieve unity around vision and purpose than a heterogeneous one. The uniqueness of each parish's identity is further supported by the fact that the identity of each parish differed. This encouragingly suggests that there isn't a single 'type' of parish which is experiencing growth. Parish identities as described by respondents differed. Two parishes had very clear strong identities while one parish's identity was described as not being extreme.

Woolever and Bruce's landmark study¹⁶⁴ noted three factors of a parish's identity that were positive predictors for growth: Welcoming Newcomers, Caring for Children, and Participation in the Congregation. In my research laity noted characteristics of the parish as being warm and welcoming which agrees with the literature for congregations which

¹⁶⁴ Woolever and Bruce.

are growing. Woolever and Bruce's research identified a second factor Caring for Children as characteristic of growing parishes. However, none of these numerically growing parishes reported this as part of their identity. Does this mean that they are caring for children but do not see it as part of their identity? This may be the case as respondents did mention the presence of children and the need to care for them when answering other questions. I would therefore recommend that parishes wishing to grow need to include children as part of their vision for their parish and in conceptualizing who they are.

A third predictor of growth noted by Woolever and Bruce was Participation in the Congregation. One newcomer noted participation as part of the identity while the priest in this same congregation noted this as a factor in the growth but not as identity. Again, emphasis on member participation may be present and would contribute to growth however, was not included in these parishes' self-understanding.

Definition of Membership: If You Attend – You're In

These parishes sit squarely in the Anglican tradition of defining their Christian identity as regular participation in the sacraments as well as the life and fellowship of the church.

Two previous studies (Snow and Phillips 1980; Staples and Mauss 1987) also used praxis to define membership. The canonical definition of a parishioner in the Diocese of British Columbia¹⁶⁵ is “any baptized person who shall have been in regular attendance at a

¹⁶⁵THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SYNOD ARTICLE I - DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS
Para B

church of the Diocese for a period of not less than three months.”¹⁶⁶ Respondents agreed with this definition as including regular attendance but did not define a duration for regular attendance, nor indicate a requirement for baptism. This may indicate a disconnect between membership and the meaning of belonging to the church as belonging to the body of Christ.

Respondents used the same criteria for defining a member and what makes a person a member. The agreement in these data solidly supports the finding that baptism plays a diminished to non-existent role in their understanding of membership

Historically, the Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia defines membership in its canons which are then approved by the synod, a process known as group endorsement and most commonly used by church organizations. In contrast, this research is the first to document membership by self-identification. This is disturbing because it elevates the self over the group, loses connection with the church Catholic and reflects a congregational understanding of church polity instead of a diocesan one. This suggests people do not see themselves as members of the diocese. While this could indicate a loyalty focused on the parish, it raises questions about their understanding of what it means to be a member of the body of Christ and the Diocese of British Columbia. It also raises the danger of compromising the parish identity if the person self-identifying as a member is not in accord with the tenets of the parish.

¹⁶⁶ Regularly is not defined in the canon.

It was clear from this research the role of baptism was not closely associated with being incorporated into the body of Christ through the local community of faith. The only way one becomes a member of the body of Christ is incorporation through baptism. Having respondents who defined membership through participation but did not state the criterion of baptism leads one to question whether this was an unstated assumption or was not a criterion. I would question the role and understanding of baptism in the life of these faith communities. If a community doesn't have many baptisms, is it more difficult to make the connection because they don't see them or hear the language of the service? Or is it just not the language they use? Is baptism understood as a concrete act where grace is actually conferred as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace? These are valuable questions for a future study.

Only one individual identified that there were two requirements but suggested that one could still be considered a member of the parish without being baptised or a part of the Anglican Communion. Given this persons' upbringing in a non-Christian tradition it is possible that he doesn't have a fully informed understanding of the sacramental aspect of baptism.

Requirements: Belonging Before Believing

A finding of this research is that respondents can easily identify what makes a member but that two-thirds of the respondents indicated there weren't requirements for membership. One possible explanation for this contradictory information is that although they have a parochial understanding of membership they are not willing to impose

requirements for membership because they want to be welcoming. A second possible explanation might be that respondents are not aware of the canonical definitions. A third explanation could be that the judicatory does not ensure that requirements for membership are widely communicated nor enforced. The parishes know very clearly who they are but do not articulate their identity in terms of membership requirements.

Required Beliefs: So What Do I Have To Believe?

Hunter proposed two understandings of faith formation and membership. (p40ff) The Roman model, wherein people are required to have a complete understanding of Christianity before they are allowed to be baptised and become members, and the Celtic model where people are immediately welcomed into the community upon request and then their beliefs are formed through participation in the life of the community as Christians. Butler Bass, based on her observations, reports that in current culture spiritual engagement follows the second model of belonging, behaving and believing. She does not address the question of why a group might want or be inclined to ask people to belong. Butler Bass' universalism¹⁶⁷ affirms all spiritualities equally which I believe does not allow any place for evangelism.

My research found both models of belief for membership articulated in these parishes, sometimes by the same individual. Some respondents said "People need a belief in Christian faith for membership" as described in the first model, despite having previously stated there were "no requirements for membership" and membership is by participation.

¹⁶⁷ Butler Bass. p 268ff.

Respondents did not seem aware of the contradictions between these statements.

Respondents were able to articulate particular aspects of the faith community when asked about identity. However, these contradictions seem to indicate that there is some confusion in understanding who they are and what their faith community actually is.

This confusion may contribute to the difficulty in inviting people, as it seems they do not have a clear understanding of who they are.

My research indicated that people were invited to events or to attend church rather than being invited to be part of the community.

The second model identified people as having minimal understanding of Christian faith and that it was the responsibility of the Christian faith community to form them as Christians. Historically the first model has been the dominant understanding. My research suggests there is a movement towards more closely embracing the second model.

If You Ask You're In

People that requested membership in a parish would be directed to talk with clergy or wardens. The person in charge of the nominal role would gather identifying information and the applicant would be encouraged to continue attending church. Neither clergy nor lay respondents referred to establishing their baptismal status or the possibility of reception into the Anglican Church of Canada prior to the person being entered on the nominal role. Lay respondents clearly indicated that initiating the process for formal acceptance to be a responsibility of the church hierarchy. This may be because the laity do not feel qualified to explain what is required for membership. I would advocate that all

members of a faith community should be instructed on how to share their faith and invite people to belong as they will be the first line of inquiry by someone expressing interest in the Christian faith and a desire to belong to the faith community.

Membership: What's It All Mean?

Respondents' answers about membership clearly reflected intrinsic, bounded set thinking as defined by Hiebert (Chapter One). I was impressed by how closely the parishes fit with Hiebert's model in the categories of Christian and Church. This reinforces my theory that using robust and validated assessment tools better informs us about our Christian lives and activities. A clearer self-understanding enables us to work towards change in who we are, if change is required, and to better focus our work and efforts in our participation of the reign of God. My research showed that these parishes understand faith as a set of beliefs to adhere to, and that membership is through behaviour. People belong as they come to adopt group norms of behaviour and believe what is taught. Respondents are still clearly in what Cox refers to as the Age of Belief. In contrast, my own understanding of faith is trust in God. It is described by Hiebert's extrinsic, centred set. The focus of the Hebrew Scriptures is on the relationship of God with the people of Israel. The focus of the New Testament writings is on the Christian's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Given the dominance of bounded set thinking in western society I am not surprised but I am concerned that faith is seen as what one believes and how one behaves rather than our relationship with God in Jesus. It is possible that because people are so firmly inculcated in bounded set thinking that they do not use relational language to

describe faith as trust, as Jesus did in describing his relationship to God as Abba. It is perplexing that clergy were comfortable using relational language in other parts of the interview but did not use it in describing belief and membership. I would recommend clergy to use the paradigm of the extrinsic centred set to inform their thinking about faith as trust in a person and the Christian faith as a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Clergy should also be encouraged to develop a comfort level with relational language in talking about faith and model this use of language for the members of their faith community.

Belonging: I Feel Therefore I Am

I created a question about belonging¹⁶⁸ to approach the concept of membership from a different perspective. While I see membership and belonging as integrally linked together the results of this study discovered respondents did not equate belonging to membership. Instead belonging is reported as a subjective feeling by all the respondents. This corresponds to Cox's Age of the Spirit where experience is the basis for an encounter with the divine and priority given to experience. Some alluded to a positive relationship between membership and belonging while others indicated that belonging was achieved through praxis. Similar to membership, respondents indicated that belonging did not have formal procedures for recognition. Therefore, is it possible to invite individuals to belong if there are no procedures to recognise belonging? Given that belonging is a feeling, it

¹⁶⁸ How is belonging achieved in your congregation?

follows that parishes can create an atmosphere where a person is likely to feel they belong, however it would not be possible to invite a person to belong.

Defining Conversion: Change In Beliefs or Commitment to a Person

Only one respondent used the classic paradigm of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus as an illustration of conversion as a passive event. This is expected because the individual came from a non-Anglican background which uses the 'classic' paradigm as their understanding of conversion.

The remainder of respondents identified conversion as change and transformation, thereby agreeing with the central research findings of Kilbourne and Richardson.

Respondents did not deviate in their responses from established research.

This signifies movement away from the classic paradigm of conversion and is further evidenced by respondents indicating that conversion occurs over time, was a process or happened many times in one's life. None of the respondents identified a defining moment for conversion. If there isn't a defining moment, this could significantly diminish the opportunities to ask a person to commit to a faith community or to the person of Jesus.

Some respondents identified conversion as taking on something new or movement from unbelief to belief. This definition is reflected in the literature and is a clear definition by a lay person. It is interesting that the respondents did not relate any details of what stage an individual is at prior to conversion. If a person converts to something new, then it is surprising that no one mentioned or made reference to where the starting place is. As well, no one mentions the role of the advocate, as noted by Rambo (p68), in being the one

who introduces the convert to the new reality. Bowen's illustration of coming to faith describes a progression along a line. At some point in the process people put their trust in God through Jesus. People need to be encouraged to acknowledge their trust in God through Jesus. Others would benefit greatly if they were aware in their relationships of their role as an advocate for God. As advocates they could learn how to be sensitively appropriate in offering an invitation to trust in God through Jesus.

In contrast to the lay people, the clergy's definitions were "saying yes to God", talking of intentionality and awakening. I was surprised that one cleric initially did not have a definition for conversion at all and another did not use the word at all. I did not find any research studying clergy awareness and use of this term conversion. I would predict a ripple effect if clergy were to not use the term conversion. As evangelism includes an invitation to commit to a new way of life in Jesus *i.e.* to be converted, the lack of a definition of conversion or the reluctance to use the term would seriously inhibit evangelistic efforts. This warns us of the importance and relevance attendant upon the expectation that clergy should be able to define and use the term conversion when talking about faith in their parish.

Both clergy and laity used the words "awakening" or "re-awakening". My understanding is that awakening is connected to something new and re-awakening is associated with returning to a previous held or currently dormant belief. Re-awakening could be explained as respondents' own personal experience or knowledge of others another's. The use of the term awakening emphasizes conversion as a moment in time even though the respondents go on to speak of conversion as a process. On the surface the respondents

agree with Kirk¹⁶⁹ that in conversion there is an initial commitment. They did not articulate an ongoing transformation process as Kirk does. This is surprising as Christian life is described in the New Testament as one of transformation from an old life to a new life. The respondents may not use the language of transformation and sanctification, or they may still have a predominant understanding that conversion is an event or they may not understand the process.

Only one sixth of respondents used relational language with respect to Jesus or God. This is at odds with the Christian faith which is understood to be a personal relationship with God in Christ. This could be that personal language about God and Jesus has not been internalized by the respondents, or they are not experienced in using personal language about God when articulating their faith, or they are not comfortable with personal language about faith. Without this language, individuals will not be able to connect with others at a personal level when describing their faith. This may explain why they talk about evangelism as inviting people to church or church events instead of into a relationship with God in Christ. If the clergy and lay leadership do not use relational language about God this may substantially affect evangelism by members of their community. It might be useful for parishes to offer opportunities for people to be taught relational language and to be mentored in the use of relational language.

¹⁶⁹ Mike Booker and Mark Irleand, *Evangelism - Which Way Now?: An Evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell Church and Other Contemporary Strategies for Evangelism*, 2nd ed. (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).

Evangelism: We Don't Like The Word. Our Evangelism Is Good Deeds

It was not surprising, given the many definitions of evangelism in the literature that respondents had a number of definitions as well. This suggests to me that a single common understanding of evangelism either within or among parishes does not exist. Consequently, without a common understanding of evangelism, communal and mutual support for evangelistic engagement might be hard to sustain. To facilitate evangelism parishes could be encouraged to read and adopt definitions articulated by the Anglican Church.

Eleven of twelve respondents did not include invitation as part of their understanding of evangelism. I would say evangelism in its definition needs to include invitation while recognizing that evangelism is a process. Therefore, invitation will not be a part of every evangelistic encounter but must be extended at some point.

It is disturbing that the respondents and especially clergy did not refer to the definition of evangelism used by the Anglican Communion, considering the recent Decade of Evangelism or Vision 2019. Vision 2019 in its original drafts did not refer to evangelism. This suggested to me that evangelism was not a major concern of both those who self-selected and those who were approached to provide input to a vision for the Anglican Church of Canada. I expressed this concern to the drafting committee and the final draft adopted by the General Synod in June 2010 included these statements in explicating the Marks of Mission “[T]he church needs to engage in primary evangelism—sharing the good news and inviting a response” and “In this post-Christian culture, the church is called again into the work of evangelism—making new believers. In baptism, new

believers take up citizenship in the Kingdom and membership in the Body of Christ.” The World Council of Churches, of which the Anglican Church of Canada is a member, says, “Evangelism, while not excluding the different dimensions of mission, focuses on explicit and intentional voicing of the gospel, including the invitation to personal conversion to a new life in Christ, and to discipleship. (§7).”¹⁷⁰ These ecumenical and Anglican definitions of evangelism contain an explicit expectation of conversion and both explicit and implicit understandings of invitation. Clergy and laity might find it useful to reflect on why officially adopted definitions of evangelism always include invitation.

Most respondents reacted adversely to the word evangelism and did not use relational language or language of faith when describing evangelism. Respondents interpreted most people in the congregation as having negative images and associations about evangelism. It may be that people in a North American context equate being evangelical with being fundamentalist. They hear “evangel-” and they cease to hear. This would agree with Bowen’s suggestion that the word “evangelism” is beyond rehabilitation and that we need to find other ways to express the concept of sharing faith and inviting people to become part of the Christian story. Respondents have these images that suggest negative encounters with evangelism and a lack of experience with authentic Anglican evangelism. If people do not use the language of faith it is because they don’t hear it, see it or use it in their everyday life. They encounter language of faith as formal liturgical

¹⁷⁰ You are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches quoted in Werner Dietrich, "Evangelism from a Wcc Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 96, no. Nos 382/383 (2005).p 184

language which is outside their everyday vocabulary. I would recommend that parishes agree on a new way of expressing the intent of evangelism such as sharing our faith stories and inviting people to become part of this story. As recommended previously, opportunities for learning faith and relational language and the opportunity to use and practise it could be beneficial.

I further addressed evangelism by asking people if there were opportunities to tell their faith stories. Respondents clearly indicated that there were no formal occasions where people told their faith stories. People said that telling stories occurred in small groups and over the coffee hour after church. Faith story telling does not appear to occur outside of these situations. I would suggest that people need to be encouraged and taught how to talk about faith in non-church settings with the same comfort level they have in the coffee hour after church. I would hope that talking about faith would create opportunities for parishioners to invite people to share the life of the faith community. Through this I would hope they would be more attracted to the person of Jesus. Resources currently available to assist in this area are the course “Evangelism 101” by Harold Percy and the book Evangelism for Normal People by John Bowen.

Liturgical Evangelism: People Will Encounter God If They Come To Church

Respondents give the impression that the Good News is communicated in worship in the church building not in interactions with Christians outside the church setting. This information in conjunction with indicating that a high profile role for clergy in the life of

the faith community is expected, means that clergy are expected to be experienced and proficient in communicating the Christian faith. While respondents see worship in the church as a primary setting for evangelistic encounter their aversion to evangelism appears to constrain them from inviting people to worship services. If they are only willing to invite people to church events consideration could be given to how to incorporate the telling of the Christian story at these events.

Evaluation: We Think We Are Doing Well

The greatest difference was between clergy and new comer's assessment of their parish as an evangelising community. Clergy rated the parish lower and newcomers higher. Clergy may have had higher expectations given their knowledge. Clergy would be expected to have a greater knowledge of the number of baptisms, programmes, new people returning and budgeting than recent arrivals in the parish. Newcomers may be basing their answers on their own recent experiences of being welcomed to the parish. The great difference between the clergy's and newcomer's assessments of the communities evangelising likely reflects the different perspective of these groups of parishioners.

I was surprised that the lay respondents in one parish were unable to give an estimate of the number of teen or adult baptisms in the past two years. I wonder about the effectiveness of the mechanisms employed by the parish to alert people to coming baptisms such as including the names of those to be baptised in the prayers of the people, leaflet or newsletter.

My research clearly indicates that all respondents were unable to accurately reflect the number of teen and adult baptisms. I wonder if people combined the figures for adult and child baptisms instead of stating them separately. Further research into how people see the role of baptism and its relationship to the life of the faith community might help discover the reason for the discrepancy.

A second concern is that parish baptismal records and parish statistical reporting to the diocese were inconsistent in one case. I would suggest that the judicatory examine its verification mechanisms and that audits by non-parish personnel of parish records be considered to avoid this type of error in the future.

The parishes were all identified as growing. However parishes did not identify themselves as evangelising parishes which were bringing people to faith and commitment in Christ. Parishes can grow numerically without engaging in evangelism but it will be a “circulation of the saints” with new members being drawn from existing Christian faith traditions. As David Jenkins said when asked where liberal churches would get new members “where they have always come from – the evangelicals.”¹⁷¹ This is supported by the data that the newcomers of with Parish A came from the evangelical tradition. If part of our Christian responsibility is to make disciples then we need to look beyond simple church growth.

¹⁷¹ Ian Markham, "Two Conditions for a Growing Liberal Church: Right Theology and Right Clergy," in *Why Liberal Churches Are Growing*, ed. Martyn Percy and Ian Markham (London: T&T Clark International, 2006). p 163

Circulation of the Saints

Transfer growth was cited as the most common reason for new members in the parishes. This agrees with the work of Bibby, Stark and Finke, Suchamn and Woolever and Bruce who reported that growth comes primarily from migration, with only one or two percent coming from people who are new to the faith. Switching was also reported as a reason for growth in these parishes. This runs counter to published research reporting that switching occurred within faith families rather than among them. It is striking that one newcomer from a Roman Catholic background had been received into the Anglican Church, however another who had been attending for over eight years and called themselves a member of the parish still considered themselves to be a Roman Catholic. This suggests that their membership in the Anglican Church is not deeply rooted and if circumstances changed they might return to the Roman Catholic Church. Switching may also occur among faith families when the choice of churches is limited and the Anglican Church most closely matches their preferences. Although the Anglican Church is considered to be Mainline Protestant it is possible that an individual parish may more closely resemble another faith family in its style. It is not clear from the current study whether newcomers in the regeneration category came from an Anglican background. A future study would be needed to confirm Bibby's research that people return to their initial denominational exposure.

Needs We Can Meet: The Spiritual Needs People Bring

Spiritual needs were the only area where there was agreement between the needs people bring and the needs the church is able to meet. This suggests that people see the role of the parish as one which primarily provides spiritual support and sustenance and is therefore fulfilling its main function. Bibby's research suggests that meeting spiritual needs can be a connection point with people outside the church. These connections could then provide opportunities for faith sharing by members of the parish. Future research could explore why spiritual needs was the only area of agreement in the needs the church can meet.

Desire for Growth: People in Church or Disciples for the Kingdom

The desire for growth reflects a common interest among churches across Canada. Is this really a desire for numerical growth or for replacement growth? Do we want young people who act like old people? It does appear that there is in these parishes a desire to grow as expressed in having something to share. However replacement growth for aging congregants and financial needs were the first two reasons given for desiring growth. These reasons show the underlying concern of parishioners that if they do not grow the parish will cease to exist. Therefore this implies growth for the sake of the current parish members rather than growth as a result of reaching out for the good of others. I wonder if parishioners have considered that an increase in the number of members of the body of Christ who have accepted the God given mandate to work for the coming reign of God will only happen when more than replacement growth is hoped for and achieved. Parishes

need to remember that numerical growth is important for spiritual reasons and not just for financial reasons or replacement of an aging population.

Knowledge of factors that influence parish growth would be useful for those parishes wanting to grow. The high quality of the worship was offered as a reason the parish had grown. This may be because worship is where most people spend the majority of their time in their church life. Tremendous amounts of time and effort go into preparation of worship. People may think that because so much effort is expended in this area that it must have an effect on growth. People may also cite this as a reason because they like the worship it must be attractive for others. I would suggest that while recognizing the importance of worship and associated preparation for the spiritual vitality of a parish, that people need to be aware that the role of worship is not for church growth and is not a predictor of growth.

All respondents identified leadership as essential for growth. While leadership was described as shared and dispersed, responses from the membership section indicated high expectations concerning the clerical role. Respondents stated their parish grew because of the arrival of a full time incumbent and the attractive qualities of a progressive priest. While there is little evidence that a priest alone will cause a parish to grow, the wrong person in the ministerial role can certainly inhibit growth. Attributing growth factors unrelated to growth such as worship and leadership may prevent parishes identifying the unique qualities of their parish that do attract people. A study of the continuing perception that parishes will grow if the right person is appointed needs to be done.

In agreement with Woolever and Bruce's research, three respondents believed their parish grew because the community was welcoming, one because the community was accepting of small children and one clergy noted high use of volunteers vs. paid staff (Participation In The Church). Future research to elucidate factors that correlate positively with these predictors of church growth would be beneficial for those parishes wanting to grow.

Attraction to Church: Why People Stay Once They Are There

Respondents interpreted this question as "Why people who have come through the church doors are attracted to remain?" instead of "What brings them to the church in the first place?" Respondents identified worship, faith formation and relationship connections as retention factors. Rephrasing this question in a future study would likely obtain clearer answers to the intended question.

Initial Awareness of Church: Finding Out About The Faith Community

Respondents identified that people's initial awareness of church often came through friendship networks. This agrees with Snow and Machalek's research¹⁷² that fifty-nine to eighty two per cent of people join a group because they know someone in it. I wonder how drawing people from a friendship network will affect the makeup of the community. Does the homogeneity of friendship groups affect the demographics of the faith community and does the faith community reflect the local area where it is established?

¹⁷²Snow, "The Sociology of Conversion."

Chapter 8 Conclusions

The reader will recall that my research question was: “How does an Anglican faith community’s identity and understanding of evangelism affect the way they understand people to belong to their faith community and how they invite new members to belong?”

This research provides four substantial results which specifically address this question.

Firstly, respondents were very clearly aware of their own parish’s identity. This did not include being a member of the Anglican Church or the Body of Christ.

Secondly, their understanding of membership and belonging was that anyone who attended and participated belonged.

Thirdly, membership was by self-identification.

Fourthly, respondents reacted negatively to evangelism.

Identity in general affected the way they understood people to belong but it was the negative attitude to evangelism which had the greatest impact on their understanding of belonging and invitation to belong.

Summary

My study examined three parishes which were growing numerically and how they experienced identity, evangelism and belonging. I can conclude their growth was unrelated to evangelism, they did not link baptism with membership, and they understood faith as content not relationship. Their growth appears to be connected to two of Woolever and Bruce’s predictors for growth: Participating in the Congregation and

Welcoming New People. This suggests that churches which are looking to grow numerically may do so if they emphasise the predictors: Participating in the Congregation, Caring for Children and Youth and Welcoming New People.

The Anglican Church of Canada needs to develop a national definition of membership.

People in the study did not have a clear understanding of what it means to be an Anglican and to belong to an Anglican parish. An important finding in this study was that as people were unable to define what it means to belong they were not able to extend an invitation to others to belong. Firstly, the benefits of having a national definition of membership would enhance the sense of belonging and identification a person has as a member of the Anglican Church of Canada. Secondly, it would enable people to know what the expectations of membership are and allow them to articulate to others what it means to belong and to offer them an invitation to belong. Thirdly, it would enhance ongoing pastoral care of members when they move. Fourthly, it would assist in determining if the source of parish growth is from new converts or through transfer and migration.

As part of the process to work under the authority of the Bishop of British Columbia applicants could be asked to outline their understanding of membership and evangelism and their relationship to Christian mission.

Providing opportunities for clergy and laity to engage with each other about best practices for sharing faith stories would facilitate greater understanding of evangelism. However, growth needs to be seen as the result of who we are as a Christian community and how we communicate this to others. A renewed emphasis on baptism and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ needs to inform our experience to fully

reflect the wholeness of the body of Christ. Our evangelism needs to be shaped by that understanding of relationship so evangelism becomes the process of introducing people to the person – Jesus Christ rather than trying to convince them to adopt a new belief paradigm. Conversion follows then as a commitment to a person and by adopting a new way of living. If the word evangelism is tainted beyond redemption we need to look for a new way for expressing this. Part of this will be the understanding that evangelism is not what we do but rather who we are, the way we live and our joyful expectation that people will want to join us in knowing, loving and following Jesus and our willingness to invite them to join us.

“Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Chas. H. Brent, "With God in Prayer " (Philadelphia and London: George W. Jacobs and Co, 1907). <http://anglicanhistory.org/asia/brent/withgod1907/>. PII

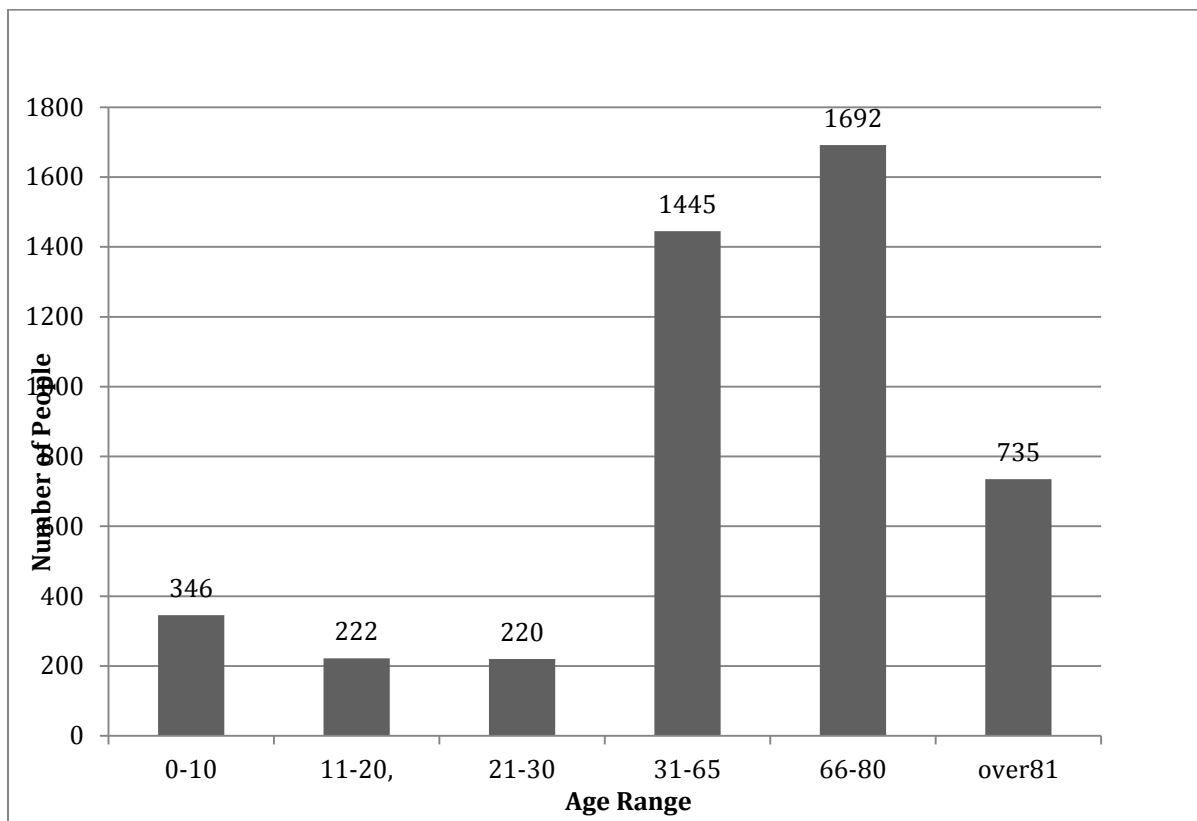
Figure 4 Age Categories of People Attending Church in the Diocese of BC

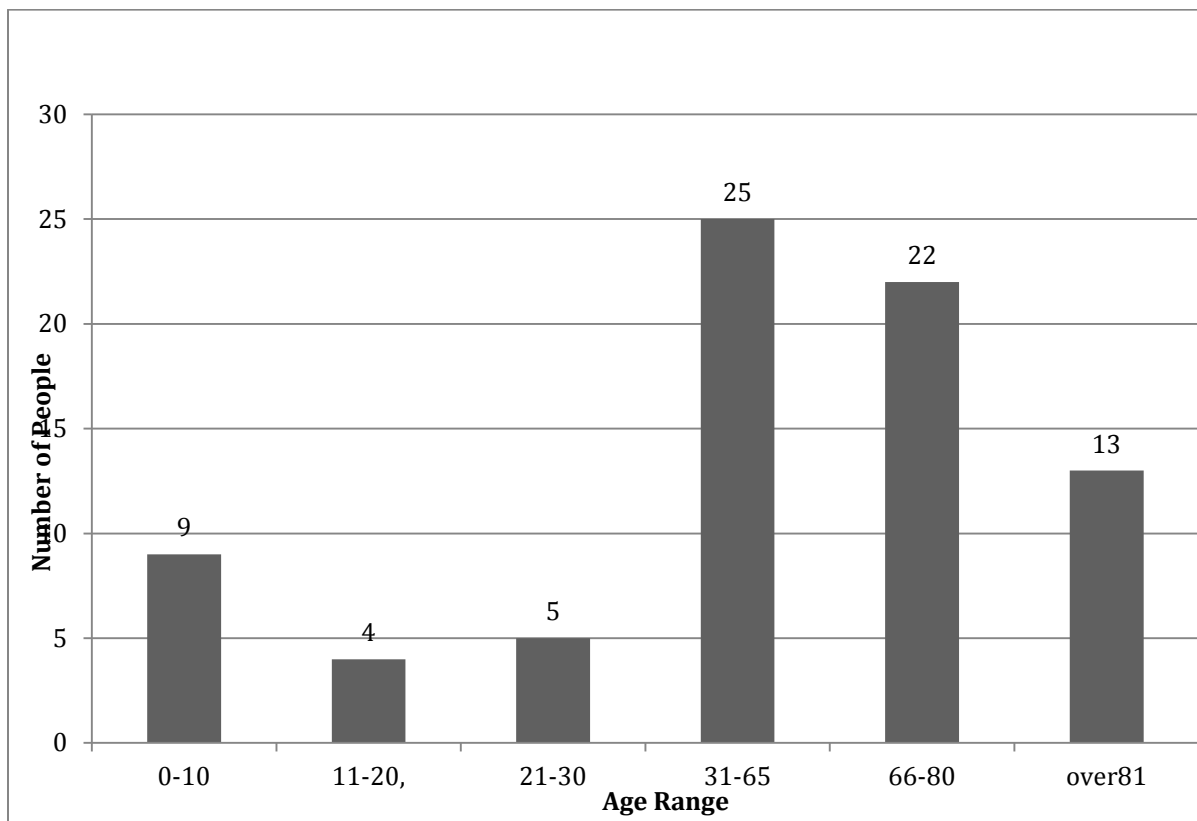
Figure 5 Age Categories of People Attending Parish A

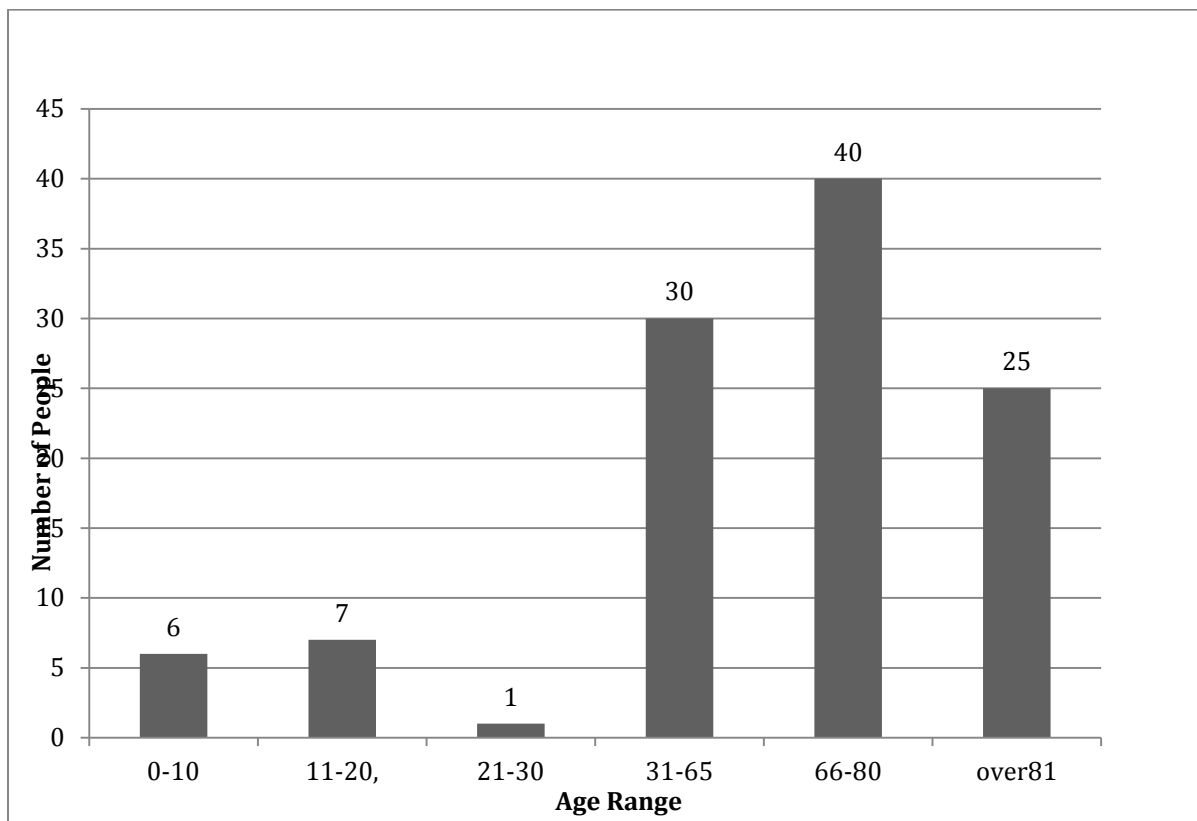
Figure 6 Age Categories of People Attending Parish B

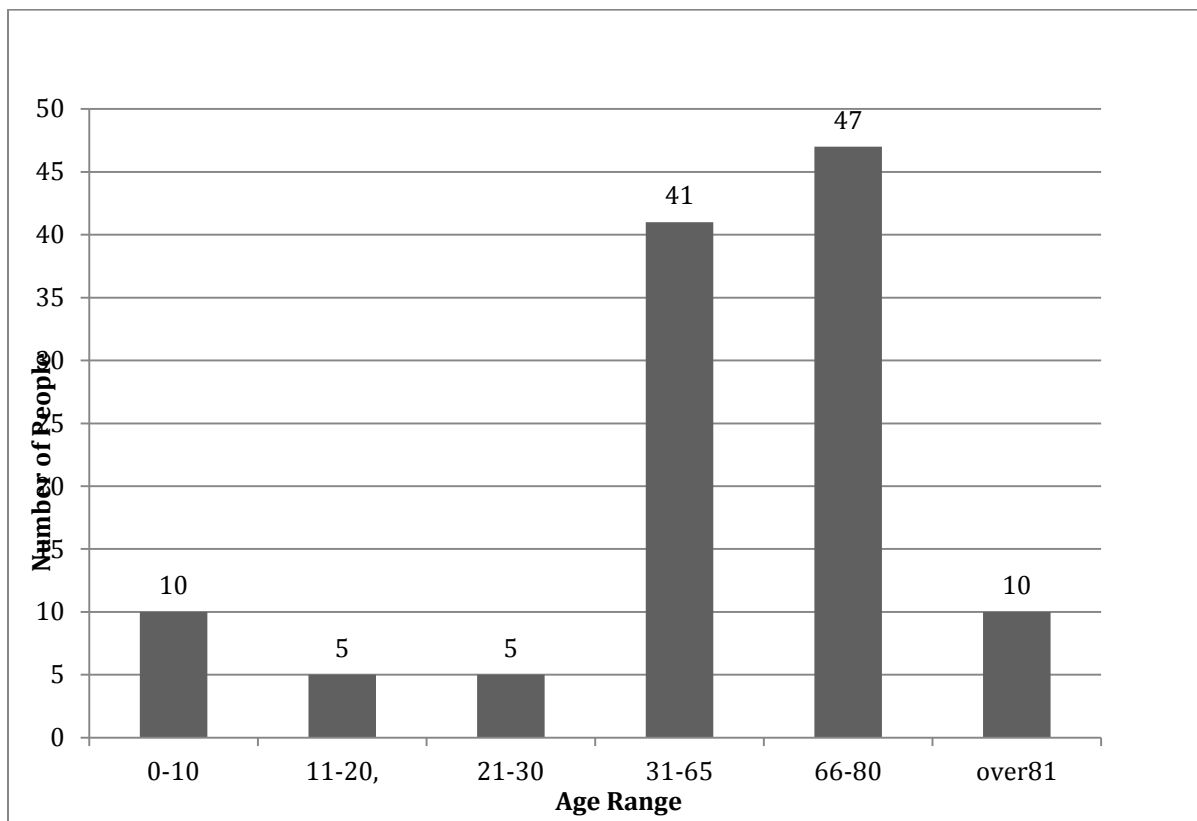
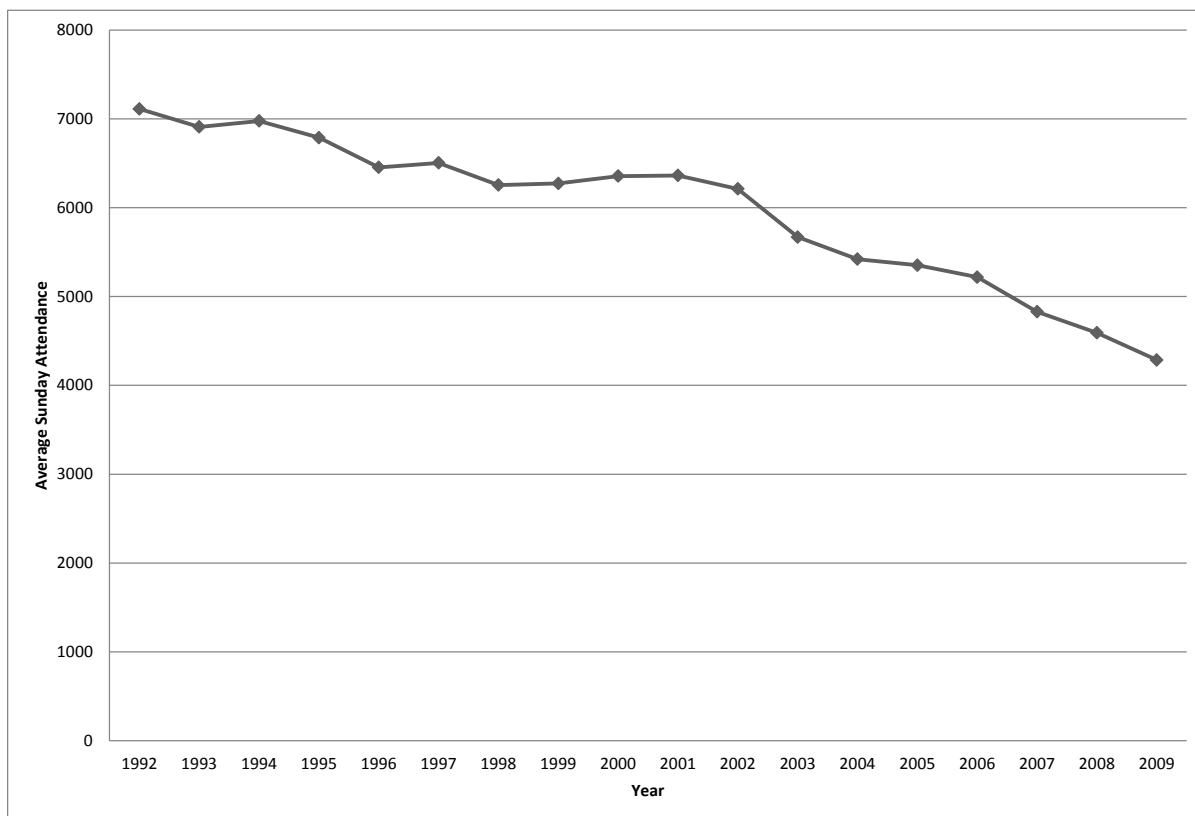
Figure 7 Age Categories of People Attending Parish C

Figure 8 Average Sunday Attendance¹⁷⁴ for the Diocese of BC 1992-2009

¹⁷⁴ 2000 includes estimates from five parishes which did not submit returns.

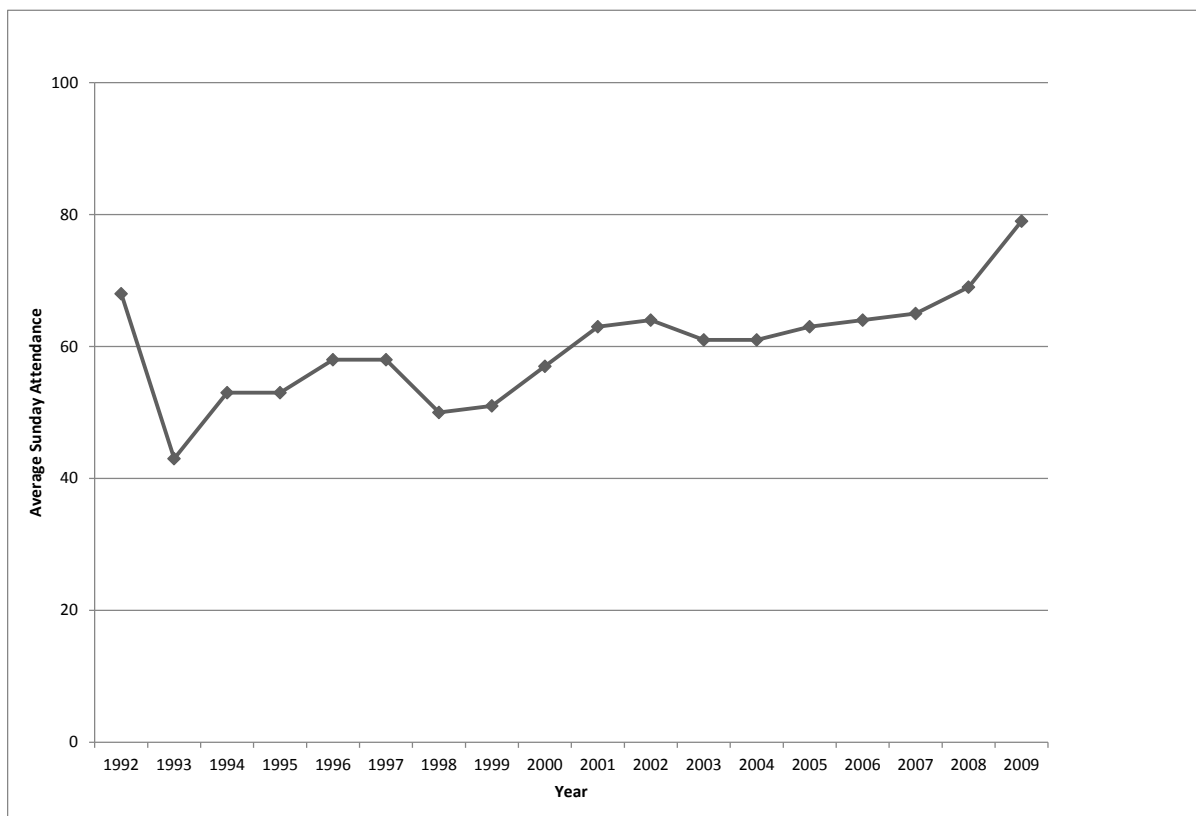
Figure 9 Average Sunday Attendance Parish A 1992-2009

Figure 10 Average Sunday Attendance Parish B 1992-2009

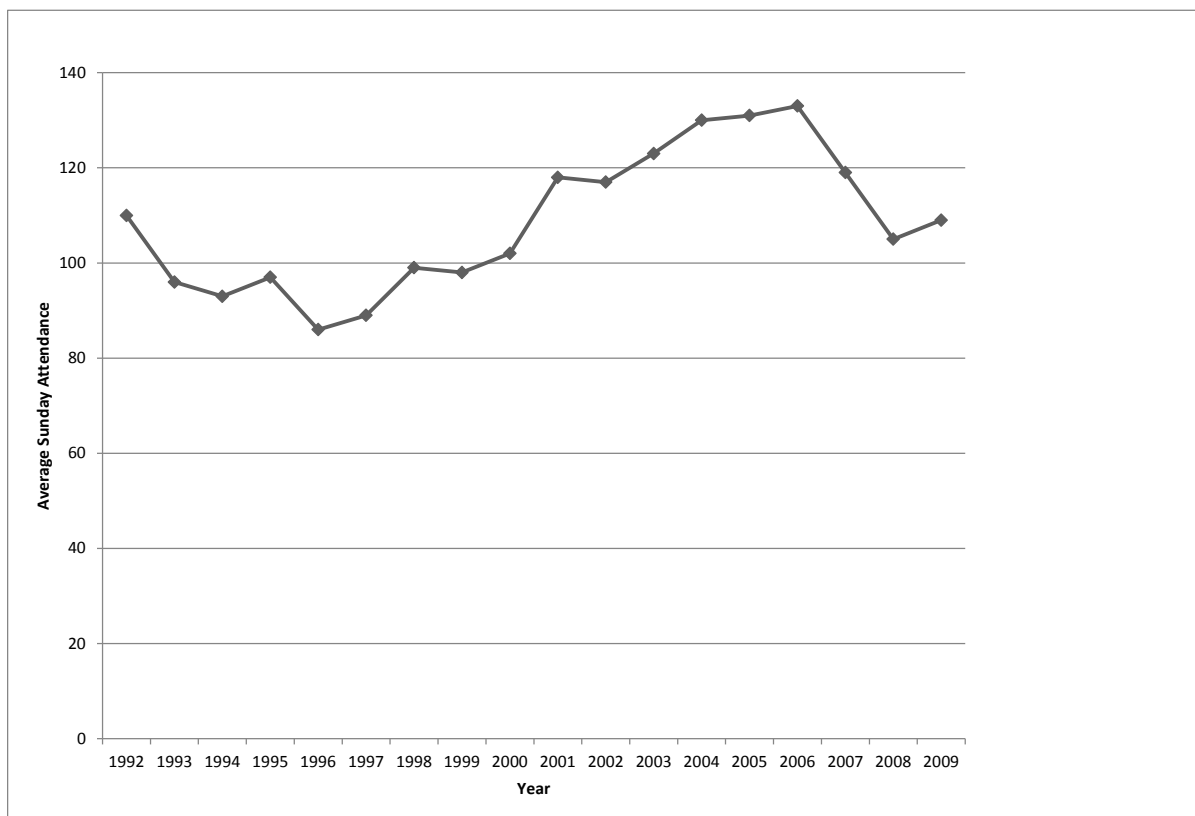
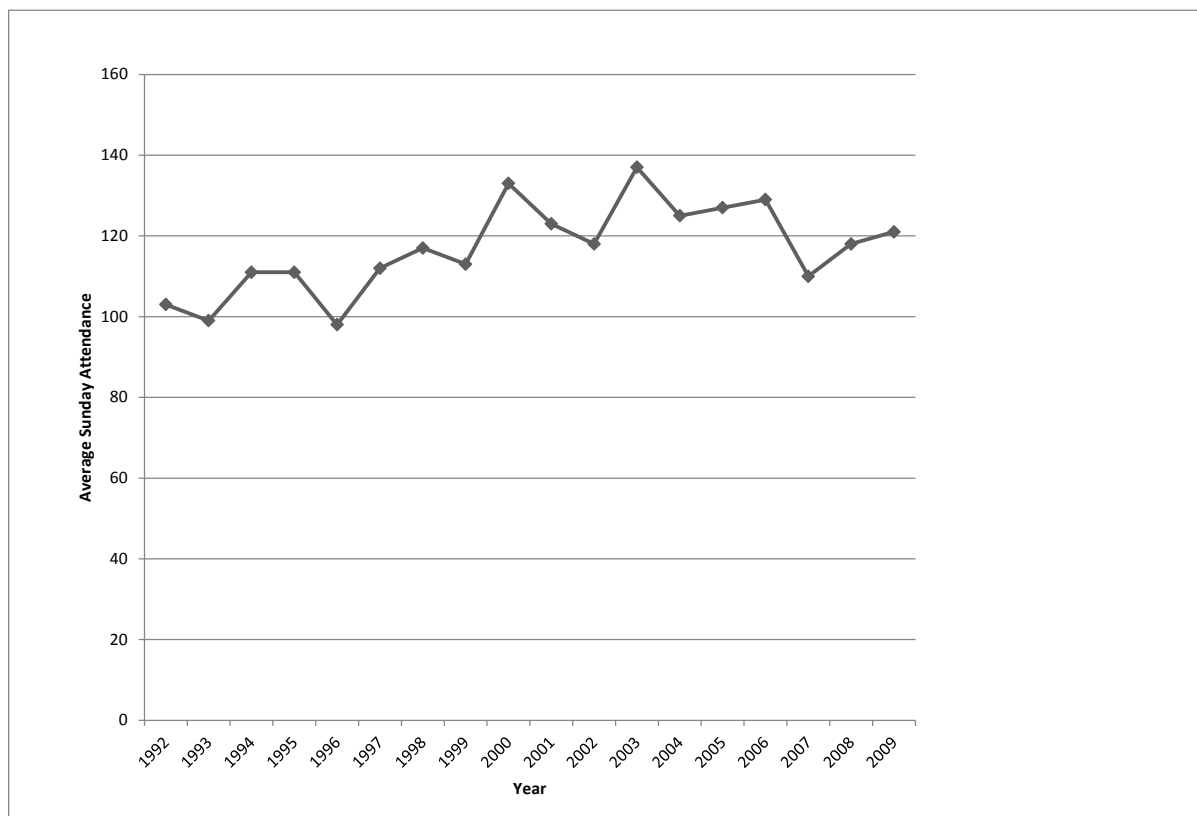


Figure 11 Average Sunday Attendance Parish C 1992-2009

Appendices

Interview questions

Identity

- How would you describe your congregation, its make up and socio-economic aspects?
- What factors contribute to making your congregation what it is?
- How do you define what it means to be a member of [insert faith community's name]? What makes a person a member?
- What are the requirements for membership?
- Are there any underlying assumptions about what a person has to believe before they become a member and participate in the life of [insert faith community's name]??
- So what would happen if a person came up and said I want to become a member of St [insert faith community's name]?
- What needs are the congregation equipped to meet?
- What needs are the congregation actually able to meet in terms of people's needs who come.
- What needs do people bring to the church that need to be met?

- Have you ever used any analytical instruments to help the congregation understand who they are and their congregational identity?
- In some ways it is looking at some of the earlier questions in a slightly different perspective. We can identify people who are attending the church worship and attending church events without actually being members of the congregation, without actually belonging. How is belonging achieved in your congregation?
- Is there any particular point at which you invite people to belong?

Conversion

- How would you describe the people who have recently joined your faith community? Would they be new converts, transfer growth, peoples whose faith has been reawakened because they have had substantial exposure at another point in their life?
- How would you define conversion?
- How does conversion happen?

Evangelism

- What attracts people to begin attending [insert faith community's name]?
- What then is the most important or the important factors in terms of initial contact with the church and community?
- Are there opportunities for people to tell their stories about how they became members of [insert faith community's name]?
- How do you define evangelism?
- What is the congregation's understanding of evangelism?

- Would there be any expectation or hope that people would come to faith?
- How does the congregation engage in evangelism?
- Is there any point where people are invited to make a commitment if they have not made one before?

Growth

- What role has leadership played in the growth of the congregation?
- Is there an understanding in the congregation that you actually want to increase numerically and expressed intention to grow?
- Why does the congregation want to grow?

Summary

To recap, what would be the things that you identify as the things to which you would attribute growth in the congregation in the time you've been there?

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