

From Silver Screen to Sacred Home: The Journey of an Evangelical Congregation through the
Lens of Space

by

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Abstract

In this manuscript, the author unravels the journey of *Next Christian Community*, an Evangelical congregation in St. Albert, from being a subsidiary ministry within *St. Albert Alliance Church*, its mother church, to becoming its own independent entity through the lens of space. After *Next Christian Community* separated from *St. Albert Alliance Church*, it moved into a once operating movie theatre, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre in St. Albert. Due to *Next Christian Community's* members' renovation and decoration processes, the former use of the movie theatre is now hardly recognizable. In contrast to their Evangelical background, members of *Next Christian Community* incorporated a variety of religious symbolism such as crosses in various forms, stained glass, paintings that depict biblical narratives, prayer benches, and a separated prayer area within the sanctuary. The display of these objects in their worship facility suggests that members of *Next Christian Community* have a fascination with and a longing for conventional/traditional church spaces. Despite this fascination with and longing for conventional/traditional church spaces, they nonetheless left traces that are reminders of the space's former use as a movie theatre.

Throughout this work, the author uses her ethnographic data in order to argue that *Next Christian Community's* members not just simply transformed a former movie theatre into their worship facility but instead created a spatial hybrid that combines church space, home space, and community space. By seeking to understand and to explain such a spatial hybrid, the author contributes to the discussion surrounding the shift, the 'on-going process of re-articulation,' in the production of contemporary worship spaces, showing how an Evangelical congregation rearticulates its relationship to the sacred, and subsequently its relationship to the profane. Furthermore, the author finds that this re-articulation of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, as part of a congregation's identity production, cannot be separated from the space it produces. In other words, this research finds that the process of producing a congregational identity cannot be separated from a congregation's spatial

production. The author particularly draws on both Émile Durkheim's monograph, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), and Otto Friedrich Bollnow's and Jürgen Hasse's phenomenological perspective in order to unravel the unconventionality-conventionality of both *Next Christian Community's* church space and members of the congregation's vision of how a church community can be. Similar to *Next Christian Community's* spatial production that challenges the conventional perception of worship spaces, the author seeks to challenge the conventional form of academic writing. Similar to *Next Christian Community's* unconventional-conventional church space, the form of writing in this manuscript is both unconventional and conventional.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Janine Muster. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Research on the conversion of movie theatre spaces into churches in Edmonton and surrounding areas”, No. Pro00033829, 12th of October 2012.

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Introducing the Background

The Windows

George Herbert¹

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?
 He is a brittle crazie glasse:
 Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
 This glorious and transcendent place,
 To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,
 Making thy life to shine within
 The holy Preachers; then the light and glorie
 More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:
 Which else shows watrish, bleak, & thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
 When they combine and mingle, bring
 A strong regard and aw: but speech alone
 Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
 And in the eare, not conscience ring.

Every time I walk through *St. Thomas Church* in Leipzig, Germany, I am impressed. The nave is long and the ceiling is high. Every footstep echoes in this big open space. It leaves me with the feeling of being small, almost insignificant. Every window has stained glass. It creates interesting reflections when the sun shines through. At the one end of the nave is a part where visitors are not allowed to enter. Johann Sebastian Bach has been buried here. At the other end of the nave is the organ that is being used during mass. The sound of the organ echoing through this wide open space completes each worship service, a significant sound that belongs to my experience attending worship services at *St. Thomas Church*.

Paintings on the wall show who has been cantor at this church for the last centuries. At the end of this separate space is a big golden shrine that shows biblical narratives. Walking

¹ George Herbert was an English priest and poet who lived from 1593 to 1633.

through *St. Thomas Church* does not create a feeling unique to this specific space. It is a feeling that a walk through many Christian church buildings in Germany would create. The richness of religious symbols, the wide open space, the stained glass windows, the echoes, the sound of the organ, the fact that entering requires a certain behaviour (quietness, no head cover) – all of this creates a feeling of awe. It creates the feeling that those buildings are meant to be sacred. Visitors know that those buildings were set-aside for a specific purpose: for Christian communities to seek the presence of the Divine.

I grew up in Germany with the perspective that Christian communities usually meet in those purposefully built spaces – sites that house exclusively the accoutrements of religious ritual: altars, pews, crosses, organs, etc. Those specific buildings not only house church communities but also function as those communities' decoration.

Naively, I came to Canada with the assumption that there are boundaries where church communities would/should/could meet. I was surprised when I walked through downtown Edmonton. A movie theatre marquee did not advertise the latest movies but instead the Sunday service hours of *City Centre Church*, an Evangelical congregation in Edmonton.

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:20)

Evangelical church communities (Evangelicals are a branch of Protestantism) that meet in movie theatres in Edmonton and in St. Albert became the focus of my research as a Bachelor's student. For my Bachelor's Thesis, I examined three Evangelical church communities that all chose to meet in movie theatres: *City Centre Church*, *City South Church* (a branch of *City Centre Church*) and *Next Christian Community*. From October 2012 through January 2013, I participated in their services (at each church once) and conducted focus group

interviews (Wohlrab-Sahr and Przyborski, 2010: 101-115) with the leaders and founding members of those church communities. I wanted to know why they chose to meet in places that were not purposefully built as specifically set-aside worship spaces. I wanted to know what it meant for them to feel close to God in a place of entertainment, in a place that (in my opinion) hardly allows the creation of a devotional mood, in a place where the awe seems to be missing.

During my research as a Bachelor's student, I became particularly interested in *Next Christian Community*. When I entered *Next Christian Community's* church space, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre in St. Albert, for the first time, I was surprised. Its church space contains numerous religious artefacts: crosses in various forms, stained glass, paintings that depict biblical narratives, two small prayer benches, and a separated prayer area within the sanctuary. Due to the community's renovation/decoration processes, it hardly felt like entering a movie theatre. Rather, it felt like entering a modern church building.

By talking to *City Centre Church's*/*City South Church's* leaders and founding members, however, I learned that many Evangelical church communities have separated from the notion to meet in purposefully built, specifically set-aside worship spaces. Instead, many Evangelical church communities, including *City Centre Church* and *City South Church*, view their meeting spaces as a secondary necessity and prefer to meet in spaces that hardly contain any religious artefacts, are practical and convenient. Thus *Next Christian Community's* particular transformation of the former movie theatre differs from the spaces other Evangelical congregations seem to prefer.

Next Christian Community's unique spatial transformation further suggests that its members have a different attitude towards their church space than the members of other Evangelical congregations, which piqued my interest and became the basis for my research as a Master's student. By examining *Next Christian Community* and its unique spatial creation in more depth, I seek to understand the importance of worship spaces for Evangelical

congregations in contemporary Canadian society. Furthermore, I am interested in understanding the relationship between the worship spaces Evangelical church communities produce and their congregational identity.

Before I introduce the research questions that my Master's Thesis seeks to answer, I briefly reveal some of the findings of my Bachelor's Thesis, particularly focusing on *City Centre Church's* and *City South Church's* members' attitudes towards their church spaces. Furthermore, I revisit the findings of my Bachelor's Thesis by drawing on Harold Turner's monograph *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (1979). In this monograph, Turner discusses the historical and theological developments of Christian faiths by focussing on the diverse worship spaces they produced. In his discussion, he describes the purposefully built, specifically set-aside, cathedral-like worship spaces (*domus dei*) erected during Christendom, comparing them to the plain and rather informal worship spaces (*domus ecclesiae*) that developed as a result of the Reformation. By focusing on *City Centre Church* and *City South Church* and by drawing on Turner's discussion surrounding Christian worship spaces, I am able to show in what ways *Next Christian Community's* members' attitude towards their church space differs from other Evangelical congregations, thereby suggesting that *Next Christian Community's* spatial creation is, indeed, an interesting case worth investigating.

For my Bachelor's Thesis, I first encountered *City Centre Church* and its branch, *City South Church*. By talking to the leaders and founding members of these church communities, I discovered that for them the word, "church," refers to the people and not to the building. According to them, church communities can worship in any place, even in movie theatres. It is a concept that seems to harken back to Early Christianity. *City Centre Church* and its

branch, *City South Church*, hardly had any religious symbols in their spaces, and the movie theatres remained to be movie theatres. Their Lead Pastor explained the church communities' choice of worshipping in cinemas by referring to the New Testament: "Corinthians says you are the temple, the Holy Spirit and that word you--I was always taught as a kid is just me as an individual but it's all of you--when you guys gather together as a community you are a temple. And so we allow that to really define the environments that we meet in" (Lead Pastor of *City Centre Church/City South Church*, Focus Group Interview 2012: 9-10).

According to Harold Turner, the New Testament deliberately does not mention particular holy sites as places of worship for Christian communities (Turner, 1979: 129). Early Christianity regarded God's presence as universal and was therefore wary of the notion that God must be approached only in specifically sacred spaces. Turner argues further that, with Christianity, a new idea of a temple developed: Christ in community. "It is therefore Jesus Christ in union with his Church, or the Church as the body of Christ, that is the new temple where God dwells in or through the Spirit" (Turner, 1979: 129). This concept allowed worshippers to gather and pray in common places that were convenient and safe. Early Christian communities primarily used private houses to gather for worship. These houses did not contain many religious symbols: this was done in order to keep parishioners focused on worship itself (Turner, 1979: 152-153). The first church buildings designated as temples of worship were erected by Constantine, the Roman Emperor who legalized Christianity in 380 A.D. and subsequently decreed it to be the state religion of Rome (Turner, 1979: 158-160). The church traditions that developed between the times of Constantine and the Reformation are referred to as those of Christendom.

Church buildings as temples of worship mostly remained despite the fact that the Protestant Reformation had been the catalyst for "the first great 'liturgical movement' in the modern sense" (Turner, 1979: 205). Similar to the church communities before Constantine, the Protestant Reformation focused on the communal nature of worship and removed the

distinction between the clergy and laity. “With this new emphasis upon the Church as the community of Christ’s people sharing in a common worship, the church building was conceived once again as a *domus ecclesiae* rather than a *domus dei*” (Turner, 1979: 205).

Church communities’ emphases on their meeting space had shifted: instead of focusing on designated temples of worship (*domus dei*) including specific symbolism, the buildings themselves were a secondary necessity. Turner describes the Protestant church buildings that developed after the Reformation as a “Protestant Plain Style” (Turner, 1979: 221). The buildings were simple, well-lighted, and hardly contained any religious symbols. Puritan migration in 1630 brought this Protestant architecture also to North America. This style of church building had broken with the temple tradition and, according to Turner, was more reminiscent of Early Christianity than to the cathedral-like buildings erected in the Christendom tradition. Turner, however, recognizes that “the great majority of Protestants were confined to medieval buildings and their adaptations, so that the new style remained no more than a token of what could have been the great revolution in the churches of this section of Christendom” (Turner, 1979: 222). Turner concludes “that the repeated revivals of the *domus dei* in Christian history testify to its inherent value in ministering to the hunger of the human spirit for a sacred place instinct with the Divine Presence” (Turner, 1979: 258). He nonetheless endorses the attempts that have been made to return to the original notion of the New Testament: Christ in community as the temple of Christianity – *domus ecclesiae*.

Paul Post (2012), however, revisits the house church of Dura Europos² – a prototype for the spatial concept of Early Christianity. By providing an in-depth encounter of the Dura church, Post challenges Turner’s argument that Early Christians gathered for worship in

² The city of Dura Europos was founded in 303 B.C. along the Euphrates. The house church of Dura Europos is known as the oldest Christian space. According to Post, the house was built in 232 and was converted into a Christian cultic space around 240 (Post, 2012: 228). Converting the typical Dura dwelling into a house church involved two major changes: “a large hall was created by removing a dividing wall in area 4 and thus creating an assembly hall for approximately 70 people, and by converting room 6 into a baptistery” (Post, 2012: 229). Post discusses the baptistery as a cosmic-sacral decorated room. His research jeopardizes the prevalent presentation of Dura. According to him, it is not a simple and homey house church (Post, 2012: 244).

private houses that hardly contained religious symbols, were homey, and informal. Post instead finds that “[t]he word ‘house’ does not fit here, nor does the term *domus ecclesiae*, which evokes too much the idea of a ‘just a roof above some heads’ or ‘in one house or another.’ Rather, it is a cultic space like a temple, an extremely sacral place” (Post, 2012: 243).

Those informal and homey house churches that Turner describes in his monograph, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (1979), may not have actually existed in Early Christianity. I, however, argue that some of Turner’s findings are nonetheless relevant: his observation of the ‘Protestant Plain Style’ that developed after the Reformation (including church communities’ repeated revival of the *domus dei*) and the fact that the New Testament deliberately does not mention particular holy sites as places of worship for Christians accompanied by Christianity’s new form of temple (Christ in community).

As the above mentioned quote revealed, *City Centre Church/City South Church’s* Lead Pastor quotes the New Testament and refers to the community as the actual temple. Furthermore, this idea reflects/informs the environment of *City Centre Church’s* and *City South Church’s* meeting spaces. Accordingly, *City Centre Church* and *City South Church* meet in informal and profane spaces that scarcely contain any religious symbols. The former has made no renovations to the theatre, while the latter meets in theatres of a currently operating multiplex. By meeting in commercial buildings and by using or transforming them into worship places minimally adorned with religious accoutrements, many Evangelical church communities’ spaces differ substantially from the cathedral-like spaces characteristic for those church communities that hold on to the spatial traditions of Christendom (*domus dei*). Evangelicals, as a branch of Protestantism, often use meeting spaces more reminiscent of the plain church buildings developed after the Reformation. For many Evangelical churches, the congregation members themselves form the basis for the sacredness while the meeting spaces

remain functional. The Pastor of *City South Church* agrees with the Lead Pastor of *City Centre Church/City South Church* and further elaborates:

Even going back to what [the Lead Pastor of *City Centre Church/City Centre Church*] was talking earlier about; all space being sacred space. So, we don't necessarily feel and believe that there is, you know, we need to bring these items into a building to make it sacred or holy or a church. Where I mean, we can go to a movie theatre and that's a church or we can go into someone's home and that's a church. Church is what we saw often in the New Testament. Our spaces are lot less sacred than our people. Like, our people are what makes the church essentially and the places are just functional. It's like the vehicle really (Pastor of *City South Church*, Focus Group Interview 2012: 15).

My experiences with both *City Centre Church* and *City South Church* created the expectation that *Next Christian Community's* members would use their worship facility in similar ways as do the members of *City Centre Church* and *City South Church*. I expected *Next Christian Community's* space, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, to still be a movie theatre that its members nonetheless use in order to worship. Surprisingly, *Next Christian Community's* church space shares more similarities with the spatial traditions of Christendom (*domus dei*), than with the plain, functional meeting spaces (*domus ecclesiae*) other Evangelical congregations seem to prefer:

Observation notes from the 15th of September 2013: Entering *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary: Above the stage is a cross. It has light bulbs in it and shines in a warm yellow. Right and left from the cross are on each side two pictures – back-lit stained glass. Two of them show an orange red sky and houses. The other two depict a purple blue sky with buildings that look like conventional church buildings. Movie tapes are running through the pictures. Right and left from the stage are three candles on each side. On the left side of the stage is a baptismal tank. In the back of the room, where the entrance is and the electric equipment, is in the left corner a separate area – a space for private prayers occupying approximately five percent of the room. It displays three larger candleholders made out of metal and two small prayer benches. The two small prayer benches are made out of wood. There also is a little metal table with another metal candleholder on it. This candleholder holds six candles. There also are two metal circles on the wall that have crosses in them. The area is separated through a screen. In front of one of the screens that separate the area from the rest of the sanctuary is another little table with candles on it. On the left side of the sanctuary is a larger painting on the wall. It shows the sun either rising or setting and three crosses on a hill. The majority of that picture is sky and sun. Compared to the rays of the sun and the sky, the three crosses and the hill seem small. Looking very closely at the picture, it shows that the rays of the sun as well as the sky are painted by handprints.

As this description reveals, *Next Christian Community* had renovated and significantly changed the space of the movie theatre to create a distinct worship facility. When talking to the church leader and founding members, I sensed that *Next Christian Community's* members had developed a specific idea of what a church community should/could be and where a church community should/could meet.

During my research as a Bachelor's student, I further learned that *Next Christian Community* started out as a subsidiary ministry of *St. Albert Alliance Church*. When *Next Christian Community* grew into a bigger ministry, it left *St. Albert Alliance Church* and became its own church.³ *Next Christian Community* rented other church spaces in St. Albert (*Grace Family Baptist Church* and the *Salvation Army Church and Community Centre*) before it settled into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. During the research for my Bachelor's Thesis, I discovered that *Next Christian Community's* members' attitude towards their church space not only differs from *City Centre Church/City South Church* as well as from other Evangelical church communities but also that *Next Christian Community's* early members' shared past at *St. Albert Alliance Church* has shaped their particular attitude.

Therefore, *Next Christian Community's* narrative surrounding its beginning as a subsidiary ministry, its transitioning years of renting other church facilities in St. Albert, and its unique transformation of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre became the focus of my Master's Thesis. By examining *Next Christian Community* in more depth, I aim to answer following research questions: How is the physical church space of *Next Christian Community* an expression of the identity of the congregation? How did *Next Christian Community's* particular identity, including its vision of doing church, develop? In what ways does *Next Christian Community's* vision of doing church correspond with the particular church space its

³ Due to the fact that *Next Christian Community* is a congregation that first belonged to and then split from another congregation, I occasionally refer to it as a splinter group. Scholars such as Roger Finke and Christopher Scheitle (2009), however, use the term, 'schism,' when they describe/address/discuss groups that came into being by separating from another group.

members produced?

By examining *Next Christian Community*, I seek to understand the relationship between physical church space and congregational identity among Evangelical churches in contemporary Canadian society. As I mentioned above, that there are church communities in Edmonton and area that meet in movie theatres is something I have not been able to observe in my German homeland, and this has lead me to investigate my specific topic with a focus on the spatial elements of Evangelical church identities.

While *Next Christian Community*'s members transformed almost the entire facility and incorporated a variety of religious symbolism, they nonetheless left traces that are reminders of the space's former use as a movie theatre. Throughout my work, I argue that *Next Christian Community*'s members not just simply transformed a former movie theatre into their worship facility but instead created a unique spatial combination. By doing so, I seek to develop a theoretical approach that may be useful in examining/understanding/encountering such spatial hybrids. In my chapter, "Setting the Stage: Situating *Next Christian Community* within a Theoretical Framework," I further focus on *Next Christian Community*'s spatial hybrid, introducing and discussing theories that I use in order to analyze and to interpret the data that I collected as an ethnographer at *Next Christian Community*.

Methodological Orientation & Data Collection Techniques

i. Introducing Ethnography

Due to my interest in *Next Christian Community*'s shared values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies as a splinter group and what role space plays/played in its congregational identity production, I decided that ethnography, as a qualitative research design, would be the most appropriate fit in encountering this research topic. In *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (2007), John Creswell states that researchers choose ethnography when they are interested in describing and interpreting the “shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2007: 68). In his monograph, *Ethnography* (2000), John Brewer offers the following definition of the term:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally (Brewer, 2000: 10).

According to Brewer and Creswell, ethnographers encounter the meaning of the language, the behaviour, and the interaction among the members of a culture-sharing group. In order to understand the world of the members of a group, ethnographers are immersed in the day-to-day lives of the persons they intend to study. This understanding-process usually involves spending a ‘long’ period of time in the field, partaking and observing. In addition to participant observation, ethnographers draw from a variety of other data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, content analysis, spatial mapping, and audio/visual methods.

The strength of ethnographers is that they are able to provide a deep understanding of a culture-sharing group, due to their extensive fieldwork, participant observation, and the closeness they develop with their participants. Ethnographers, however, also have been criticized for precisely the same reasons. Some scholars argue that the closeness

ethnographers develop towards their participants during their fieldwork creates a subjective outcome. Ethnography, as a qualitative research design, has been criticized by both the social scientists who think that social science should be modelled on natural science and by postmodernists who object to the existence of any true statements (Brewer, 2000: 19-25).

According to postmodernists and social scientists who take a natural science approach, ethnography is no more than investigative journalism (Brewer, 2000: 16). “Thus, ethnographers are seen as simply hanging loose on street corners or in bars, or going with the flow, waiting for a little tittle tattle, the exotic and the erotic, like a hack from the tabloids, doing our ethnography unrigorously and unsystematically” (Brewer, 2000: 15-16).

Ethnographers, similar to journalists, do rely on unstructured and flexible methods due to the unpredictable nature of the field. Critics of ethnography, however, find that this flexibility jeopardizes the objectivity, reliability (the extent to which measurements of a phenomenon are consistent), and generalizability (the applicability of the data to other similar cases) of ethnographic research (Brewer, 2000: 46).

According to Brewer, researchers who choose to do ethnography are nonetheless able to be both flexible as well as systematic throughout their data collection phase. For example, ethnographers are able to minimize the limits of ethnographic studies by not solely relying on participant observation. According to Brewer, ethnographers are able to offset deficiencies of reliability and objectivity by combining a variety of data collection techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis of internal and external resources (Brewer, 2000; Willey, 2013: 11).

Furthermore, by keeping detailed, extensive, and reflexive fieldnotes, ethnographers are able to bracket their own perceptions and biases (Delamont, 2004: 18). They will be able to reach a better understanding of their own position within the field. By being constantly reflexive, ethnographers are able to acknowledge the constructed nature of their own observations (Delamont, 2004: 18). Scholars such as Ault (2004), Barley (1990), Hirschauer

(2006), and Wacquant (2004) further show in their work that long-term field research can function as a key method that ensures a higher reliability of the findings.

Additionally, Brewer encourages ethnographers to establish data authority.

Ethnographers are able to establish authority of their data by acknowledging and discussing problems that arose during all stages of their fieldwork such as difficulties in accessing the field, difficulties in leaving the field, and difficulties in finding interview participants (Brewer, 2000: 51-55). According to Brewer, it also is important to outline the grounds on which ethnographers develop the categorization system they use in order to interpret the collected data. Ethnographers must identify clearly whether their categorization system comes from the respondents themselves and/or if it is based on theoretical concepts that already exist.

Additionally, by considering and discussing rival explanations and possible alternative ways of organizing the data, ethnographers are able to strengthen the validity of their outcomes. These reflections help readers to understand why ethnographers chose one explanation over the other or why they focused on interviewing specific individuals and excluded others. A discussion of the power relations between the ethnographers and their participants also is necessary. By discussing the existing, emerging, and changing nature of power relations, ethnographers are able to determine “the effects of class, gender, race and religion on the practice and writing up of the research” (Brewer, 2000: 54).

If ethnographers acknowledge and apply these recommendations, then they are able to contribute insightful knowledge. In the introduction of their monograph, *Ethnographies Revisited: Constructing Theory in the Field* (2009), Anthony Puddephatt, William Shaffir, and Steven Kleinknecht argue that ethnographic work is particularly valuable because “its authors are able to generate new theoretical concepts, identify the steps in a particular social process, reveal the organizational principles of social groupings, identify explanatory mechanisms in social dynamics, and link these issues to broader theoretical frames of understanding” (Puddephatt, Shaffir, and Kleinknecht, 2009: 1-2). Thus while ethnographers and journalists

both work closely with participants in order to gain a better understanding of the participants' world, "ethnographers differ from journalists mostly because of a six-letter word: theory" (Puddephatt, Shaffir, and Kleinknecht, 2009: 1).

ii. Doing Ethnography at Next Christian Community

Gaining access to the field can be problematic and may take a long period of time. Occasionally it becomes impossible for researchers to gain access to the groups they intend to study. Due to my prior research with *Next Christian Community* (the pilot project for my Bachelor's Thesis), I already established a connection with the Lead Pastor. Therefore, it was unproblematic for me to return to *Next Christian Community* as a Master's student, joining the congregation for further research. I joined *Next Christian Community's* Sunday service on the 15th of September 2013. Until April 2015, I regularly participated in its church services. During my time as an ethnographer at *Next Christian Community*, I took extensive fieldnotes of every event that I shared with the members of the congregation, inside and outside their church space. I embraced every available opportunity to engage with the congregation. Doing so, allowed me to gain an understanding of *Next Christian Community's* shared values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies as a splinter group and what role space plays/played in its congregational identity production.

Next Christian Community's worship services start with one or two songs played by the band, usually consisting of a drummer, a keyboardist, a bassist and a guitarist. While there usually is a lead singer, two small movie screens project the lyrics, and many congregation members sing along. After singing, the Pastor responsible for kids' church holds a short sermon suitable for the children before they go into their separate classrooms. The kids' Pastor often uses scientific experiments, toys, or other objects to illustrate her analogies, which I find helpful for adults also. Parents usually laugh along to these stories/short sermons.

After the kids have left, the Associate Pastor makes announcements, leads the prayer of confession,⁴ and asks the persons on the end of each seating row to pass around the offering baskets. After singing the Doxology *a capella*,⁵ congregation members greet each other by saying: “Peace be with you.” The service continues with a congregation member reading a passage from scripture on stage. The sermon of the Lead Pastor follows. Afterwards, the band plays again. Service ends with a blessing provided by a member of the congregation and closes with the line: “In the name of the Father who created you, the Son who redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit who sanctified you, go and be who Jesus wants you to be.”

While the structure of the service mostly remains the same, some sermons have been more spiritually challenging and emotional than others. The sermons that were more spiritual challenging provoked the most interaction with the space itself:

Observation notes from the 17th of November 2013: It is an interesting service this Sunday. The Lead Pastor talks about the need to “die to Jesus” and encourages congregants to use the prayer area. Instead of having two separate areas, he opens up the space – he removes the dividers that usually separate the prayer area from the rest of the sanctuary. He acknowledges that praying this openly may feel uncomfortable. He nonetheless wants congregation members to know that this space is safe. Here, persons are allowed to be vulnerable. While the band is playing, some congregation members pray on their knees. I observe persons using the prayer area as well as the two prayer benches in the prayer area. (Previously, I had observed the use of the prayer benches during another sermon where the Lead Pastor also suggested this specific kind of prayer.) I feel that the idea of praying on knees, including the use of the prayer benches, is not a part of all members’ church tradition – some use that space while others seem to feel uncomfortable. This service is the first service during which I observed congregation members crying while they were worshipping.

In addition to worshipping, *Next Christian Community*’s members also interact with their space after their services. On the last Sunday of each month, congregation members bring soup and share them with each other after service. *Next Christian Community*’s members call these gatherings Soup Sundays.⁶ During my time as an ethnographer at *Next Christian*

⁴ On 8th December, the prayer of confession was different; it was instead a version written by the Lead Pastor.

⁵ Singing the Doxology *a capella* stopped when the Associate Pastor left *Next Christian Community* and a new Associate Pastor joined the congregation.

⁶ Eventually those Soup Sundays turned into Snack Sundays and members started to bring snacks instead of home-cooked soups. The general concept of this event, however, remained the same: socializing, making

Community, I actively participated in Soup Sundays by contributing home-cooked soup and by enjoying those meals together with the congregation. Occasionally a group of members would meet after service to have a communal lunch in a restaurant or a pub either in St. Albert or in Edmonton. I usually joined those lunches when I was invited. Attending those lunches allowed me to observe *Next Christian Community's* members' interactions and behaviours outside their church space, helping me to counter-balance my observations of their interactions and behaviours inside their church space – an experience helpful in further understanding their congregational identity production.

In addition to the Sunday services and the events following them, I participated in a variety of other activities that took place in *Next Christian Community's* church space such as cooking for Snug (a shelter in Edmonton that serves women living on the street), a yoga course that took place from October 2014 to November 2014 and was part of the community's attempt to offer unconventional Bible study groups, the annual meeting at the end of the year 2014, a social justice film festival that took place in *Next Christian Community's* church space throughout February 2015 but was independent of the church community, and *Next Christian Community's* tenth anniversary celebration in April 2015.

In April 2014, I received an unexpected e-mail that further intensified and deepened my relationship with the congregation. In this e-mail, the Lead Pastor asked me if I would be willing to prepare coffee once a month for the congregation before the start of the worship service. He explained that I was particularly suitable for this task because I usually got to St. Albert by bus, arriving twenty minutes before the start of the service. I usually was one of the first persons entering *Next Christian Community's* church space every Sunday morning (Lead Pastor, e-mail, 3rd of April 2014). Volunteering as *Next Christian Community's* 'coffee lady' from May 2014 to August 2014 was an interesting experience. I got to know the majority of *Next Christian Community's* members by preparing and serving them coffee, tea, and juice

before service and by cleaning up the coffee counter after service. Many conversations developed over the coffee counter. It allowed me to observe members mingling before and after service, to introduce myself as a researcher, and to recruit suitable interview participants. Although I did not audio-record these conversations, I reflected on them in my field journal. When the Lead Pastor asked me if I would be willing to help with the coffee counter for another church season, I declined and ended my ethnographic fieldwork (participating in *Next Christian Community's* worship service and other activities) as soon as I completed my interviewing process. After being at *Next Christian Community* as an ethnographer for one year and a half, it was time for me to leave the field.

The amount of time I spent at *Next Christian Community's* church space and with the members of the congregation allowed me to collect in-depth data. Furthermore, it allowed me to build trust between me and my potential interview participants. Such a long and in-depth encounter, however, also provided challenges. While it was unproblematic for me to join the congregation, the familiarity I developed (especially over the coffee counter and over lunch with *Next Christian Community's* members and with their space) made it challenging for me to leave the field. I became more and more comfortable at *Next Christian Community*, almost looking forward to those Sunday mornings. Similar to Georg Simmel's "Stranger" (Simmel, 1908), my objective distance from *Next Christian Community* shifted towards becoming a confidante. My research identity started to fade.

Meredith McGuire, who has studied the movement of Pentecostal Catholics as an ethnographer, states that it is necessary for ethnographers to leave the field as soon as it turns into a comfortable and natural environment and the relationship between researchers and research participants starts to shift. She describes that process as "the risk of 'going native'" (McGuire 1982: 21). By not returning to the community after I finished my last interview and by declining the offer to volunteer as a 'coffee lady' for another church season, I avoided the "the risk of 'going native'" and remained my accountability as a social scientist.

With the intention of counter-balancing my assumptions and the constructed nature of participant observation, I described what I saw and experienced as naively as possible (Tjora, 2006: 430). Once I gained more familiarity with *Next Christian Community*, my notes became more interpretive. Throughout the entire research process, I used my field journal to reflect upon my research such as difficulties that emerged during my fieldwork, the power relations between my participants and me, and any impacts that my non-religious background may have on my research.

McGuire, who is familiar with participant observation, asks, “What should the attitude of the participant-observer be?” (McGuire, 1982: 22). According to her, the answer lies in the research question. She explains that participant observers can have a variety of different stances such as the full participant, the critical participant, participation alone vs. together with another person, and the stranger stance. These orientations always should refer to and flow from the research question (McGuire, 1982: 23-25).

During my first few months at *Next Christian Community*, I adopted a stranger stance due to my German background, the fact that I am not a member of *Next Christian Community*, and my unfamiliarity with Christianity in general. This stance, however, allowed me to be close enough to understand the situation, while the distance that remained allowed me to reflect as a researcher (Wohlrab-Sahr and Przyborski, 2010: 63).

By adopting McGuire’s advice, I participated in *Next Christian Community*’s services as much as my non-religious background allowed me to participate. I avoided joining in spiritual activities (such as deep prayers on knees or practicing Communion) throughout my entire time in the field for two reasons (McGuire, 1982: 21-22). First, I sought to simply observe those situations and capture them instead of challenging my own spirituality. Sara

Delamont, for example, addresses that issue in her article “Ethnography and Participant Observation (2004).” Ethnographers are not required to do the same activities as the persons they seek to study. Instead, ethnographers most likely interact with them while they do their routine or observe them in order to find out how and why they do specific acts (Delamont, 2004: 206). Second, it would be dishonest to actively participate in those spiritual acts when I do not hold the correlative spiritual beliefs. In other words, it would be unethical (McGuire, 1982: 21). Coming from a non-religious background, however, allowed me to question aspects about the community’s space, identity, and behaviour, which researchers with a religious background might not have questioned.

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, I continued to remind community members of my role as a researcher within their congregation⁷ and about the limited time I would be able to stay with them. By doing so, I was able to prevent most conversion attempts. Furthermore, I continued to reaffirm my status as a non-religious person when I was asked and/or thought it was necessary. For example, after a month of regularly attending *Next Christian Community’s* service, I received an e-mail from the Lead Pastor asking if I could read Romans 8:28 to 31 in German as a part of the upcoming worship service. Altogether, the Pastor had asked six persons who all speak a second language to read this specific passage during *Next Christian Community’s* service. He wanted “to show how God is our unifier, how He chooses each one of us, no matter language, colour or creed” (Lead Pastor, e-mail, 15th of October 2013). I decided to actively participate and read the passage in German for this specific worship service, but not without reaffirming my status as a researcher and as a non-religious person to

⁷ When I started my fieldwork at *Next Christian Community* in September 2013, only the Lead Pastor and the members I interviewed for my Bachelor’s Thesis were aware of my identity/role as a researcher. In October 2013, I asked the Lead Pastor to distribute a flyer through *Next Christian Community’s* newsletter. This flyer explained my status as a researcher, my research project, and my search for interview participants, informing the members of the congregation about my motivations for joining them. Throughout my fieldwork, I was able to interact with the majority of *Next Christian Community’s* members. Despite the flyer, I continued to come across members who did not know who I was. They wanted to know how I became aware of *Next Christian Community*, why I joined the congregation, and asked me about my journey of faith. I provided honest answers, openly expressed my identity as both a non-religious person and a researcher, and talked about my research to those who were interested.

the Lead Pastor.

While my openness to *Next Christian Community's* members was necessary in order to remain my status as an ethical researcher, it also provided me with valuable insights into *Next Christian Community's* identity. For example, as a church community, *Next Christian Community's* members seek to be welcoming, open, and non-judgemental to every person who wants to be part of their congregation, regardless of the person's personal background (Next Christian Community, 2016). Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, I learned that *Next Christian Community* strongly desires to be a community to which everybody can belong even if they do not entirely share the same spiritual belief system. During my interview process, the pastoral staff especially was interested in learning about my personal experiences at *Next Christian Community*, often precisely because of my non-religious background. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that *Next Christian Community's* pastoral staff utilized my presence at their congregation as an opportunity to explore whether or not they are successful in implementing this particular aspect of the congregation's identity.

iii. Collecting Data through Interviewing

Throughout my time as an ethnographer at *Next Christian Community*, I conducted eleven interviews with primarily long-term members of the congregation. I focused on long-term members⁸ due to my interest in *Next Christian Community's* transition from a ministry to a church community independent from its mother church. Throughout my research process, it became clear that understanding this transition is an essential aspect of the development of *Next Christian Community's* identity and the role that its own permanent physical church

⁸ Persons who were members of *Next Christian Community* since its beginning as a ministry at *St. Albert Alliance Church* qualify as long-term members. By being an ethnographer, participating in *Next Christian Community's* activities, and by talking to the members before and after service as well as during other community-related activities, I was able to identify the persons who fit this description. I approached those persons in private conversations, asking them if they would like to participate in my research project.

space played/plays in this process. Consequently, my interview participants, with the exception of Käthe and Bernhard⁹, had been with *Next Christian Community* since it was a ministry at *St. Albert Alliance Church*. They had been part of the congregation's journey gathering for worship in different spaces in St. Albert and had been actively involved in repurposing the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, the space that became *Next Christian Community's* permanent church space. Furthermore, they were able to reflect on changes in the community's identity throughout its journey. Additionally, some of my interview participants have memories of the Village Landing Movie Theatre as a functioning business and revealed their knowledge of and attachment to the space by commemorating and sharing aspects of their time growing up in St. Albert.

Although most of my interview participants (such as the entire pastoral staff) have allowed me to use their real identities, I gave each of them a pseudonym in order to protect them as well as their relationship with other church communities in St. Albert (Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, 2010: 22-25). Although I kept the original names of the church communities, I gave ten of my interview participants common German names – Margit, Birgit, Horst, Hilde, Marianne, Helmut, Günther, Falk, Bernhard (the Associate Pastor), and Käthe (responsible for children ministry). I did not, however, give the Lead Pastor an additional pseudonym and instead continue throughout my entire work to refer to him as the Lead Pastor. Doing so may make it easier for readers to distinguish between his and congregation members' contributions.

Throughout my interview process, I learned that the Lead Pastor is in a special position. Many of my interview participants described *Next Christian Community* as the Lead Pastor's 'baby.' Occasionally they suggested that only the Lead Pastor would be capable of

⁹ Bernhard joined *Next Christian Community* as an Associate Pastor only recently, in the spring of 2014. Similar to Bernhard, Käthe did not experience *St. Albert Alliance Church* and/or the ministry that later became *Next Christian Community*. She first visited the congregation when it met at *Salvation Army Church* and joined the pastoral staff shortly after the congregation moved into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre (Käthe, Interview 2015: 30-31).

answering certain questions about *Next Christian Community's* history and the congregation's development with certainty. During my interview with the Lead Pastor, however, I learned that *Next Christian Community*, as a ministry, started without the Lead Pastor's direct involvement. When he joined *St. Albert Alliance Church* on staff, the discussion on starting and developing such a ministry already had started. Furthermore, the Lead Pastor was not responsible for it during the first couple of years of its existence. Despite the Lead Pastor's late involvement, the ministry only started to flourish once he became responsible for this group. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that his input significantly shaped *Next Christian Community's* identity. I nonetheless regard all of my interviews as equally important due to the fact that *Next Christian Community* is a congregation that functions in a democratic way, including a board of elders and congregational votes on communal issues. By talking to the members of the community, I learned that the Lead Pastor is not the sole decision-maker of the congregation. I still acknowledge his role as the leader of the community and find his contributions to be an inextricable aspect of *Next Christian Community's* development.

Out of the eleven interviews, three of my interview participants belong(ed)¹⁰ to the pastoral staff of the congregation – Bernhard, Käthe, and the Lead Pastor. During my ethnographic fieldwork at *Next Christian Community*, an Associate Pastor left the congregation and was replaced by a new Associate Pastor, Bernhard. Bernhard had been the Pastor of *Sole Cafe*, a small congregation that *Next Christian Community* had adopted and helped to flourish. When *Sole Cafe* ceased to exist, he joined *Next Christian Community's* pastoral staff and became the congregation's new Associate Pastor. Bernhard, as a newer member of the congregation, was the only person whom I interviewed who was not entirely familiar with *Next Christian Community's* history and development. Bernhard did not

¹⁰ Although I am no longer participating at *Next Christian Community's* worship service, I still receive its newsletters. By reading these newsletters, I learned that all pastoral staff members whom I interviewed and got to know during my fieldwork are no longer with *Next Christian Community*, including the Lead Pastor. Recently, the community has been seeking for a new Lead Pastor. These developments may change the identity of the congregation significantly.

experience the community's different stages of identity, how these looked and/or changed, and what role *Next Christian Community's* different meeting spaces played. Furthermore, Bernhard was not actively involved in choosing and transforming the former Village Landing Movie Theatre into *Next Christian Community's* permanent church space. The interview with Bernhard nonetheless provides an interesting supplement to the opinions and experiences of the long-term members I interviewed. Furthermore, this interview helps to contextualize my participant observation and captures *Next Christian Community's* members' interaction with their space from a recent perspective.

I divided my interviews into two parts: a mobile interview that included a tour through *Next Christian Community's* space (Brown and Durrheim, 2009) and a semi-structured life-world interview (Kvale, 2007), for which I prepared an interview guide. Although I planned on starting with the mobile interview to get to know my interview participants and to gain the trust necessary for the second part of my interview, not every interview situation allowed me to follow this particular order. Furthermore, I learned that this particular order was not completely necessary because I was able to develop trust with my interview participants by regularly participating in *Next Christian Community's* congregational events. Depending on the interview situation and the desires of my interview participants, we would either start the interview process with the tour through *Next Christian Community's* church space or with the semi-structured life-world interview. Often, however, both interview methods morphed together and created a dynamic interview situation: moving back and forth between the semi-structured life-world interview and the tour. Lindsay Brown and Kevin Durrheim reflect on mobile interviewing as a method in their article "Different Kinds of Knowing: Generating Qualitative Data Through Mobile Interviewing (2009)." They state:

Mobile inter-active interviewing methods occupy an interesting point along a continuum drawn between naturalistic data-collection methods and those interviewing methods that are directed/produced by the interviewer. Working at this position on this continuum – where a relational power circulates but does not settle in the relationship between researcher and participant – researchers doing mobile data generation can, to some extent, subvert the traditional authority/power relations between interviewer and interviewee. It is a strange blending and stretching of roles for researcher/participant and participant/leader, and it is not always clear who is in ‘authority’, but it does offer a useful place to be to explore the boundaries of these power relations in the research relationship (Brown and Durrheim, 2009: 925).

As Brown and Durrheim suggest in this quote, a mobile interview can lead to an interesting dynamic, and occasionally to a strange mix that blends the roles between researcher and participant, the roles between participant and leader, and, as in my case, between different interview methods.

Due to the nature of the mobile interview, I did not experience the traditional power relations between interviewer and interviewee. I found that my mix between mobile interview and semi-structured life-world interview dissolved these boundaries. Consequently, I did not control the sequence of the tours through *Next Christian Community’s* church space. I usually suggested transitioning from the semi-structured life-world interview to the tour (or the other way around) in order to assure that the tour will, in fact, take place. My interview participants, however, were able to structure their own tours depending on their memories of and attachments to the space and its different rooms. For example, members without kids were less concerned or familiar with the kids’ spaces and did not talk about them with the same intensity as those with kids. Therefore, my interview participants usually took over the role as tour guides while I followed them and listened to their narratives surrounding the space, its former use, and its transformation process. I documented the interviews as well as the tours on an audio recording device and transcribed this material after I completed my interviewing process. In order to also visually capture *Next Christian Community’s* church space and its decorative items, I used photography as an additional method during my mobile interviews.

In her monograph, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in*

Research (2001), Sarah Pink provides an introduction of the values and issues using photography in ethnographic research. Pink mentions that persons who look at the photographs build their own subjective opinions of what the pictures represent. This interpretation might differ from the intention of the ethnographers who took the picture (Pink, 2001: 51). Pink states:

The same photographic image may have a variety of (perhaps conflicting) meanings invested in it at different stages of ethnographic research and representation, as it is viewed by different eyes and audiences in diverse temporal historical, spatial, and cultural context. Therefore it seems important that ethnographers seek to understand the individual, local, and broader cultural discourses in which photographs are made meaningful, in both fieldwork situations and academic discourses. Photographs produced as part of an ethnographic project will be given different meanings by the subjects of those images, local people in that context, the researcher, and other (sometimes critical) audiences (Pink, 2001: 51-52).

Being familiar with the subjective nature of photographs, I nonetheless feel that the photographs that my interview participants took during our tour through *Next Christian Community's* church space are a valuable component to my written text. One way of offsetting my subjectivity as an ethnographer was to provide the participants with a camera and to encourage them to take the photographs themselves.

I provided my interview participants with a digital camera at the beginning of our tour through *Next Christian Community's* church space and encouraged them during the tour to take pictures of the rooms and the objects meaningful to them. I informed them that the objects or the rooms they choose to take pictures of can be meaningful to them in either negative or positive ways. By doing so, I sought to not influence their decision-making process. By taking the pictures themselves, my interview participants were not only able to choose what they would like to capture themselves (objects and rooms they like or dislike), they also were able to choose how they would like to capture the rooms and objects. They were able to decide by themselves in which angles they would like to take the pictures, whether or not they would like to use zoom, and how many objects they would like to capture

in each picture. After my interview participants took a photograph, I discussed the pictures with them. I recorded their perspectives of what the object(s) in the photograph(s) meant to them as well as their reasons for choosing the specific object(s) and the specific set up(s) (angle, zoom, number of objects in the pictures). Those photographs help to visualize the space in more depth and function as a supplement to my observational notes. Because interview participants took the pictures, the pictures provide a clearer understanding of their subjective experiences, contrasted with my experience as a researcher. The spaces and objects photographed are elements that refer back to *Next Christian Community's* congregational identity, particularly in combination with the participants' narratives.

As I mentioned above, the tours through *Next Christian Community's* physical church space did not follow any particular structure and/or order and therefore differed from interview participant to interview participant depending on their memories of, connections with, and attachments to *Next Christian Community's* space. The semi-structured life-world interview part (Kvale, 2007), however, included an interview guide. In his monograph, *Doing Interviews* (2007), Steinar Kvale discusses techniques of how researchers are able to collect valuable data by using interviewing as a data collection method. Kvale states that a semi-structured life-world interview “seeks to obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon; it will have a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as some suggested questions” (Kvale, 2007: 51). While this interview format seeks to cover certain themes, it also allows researchers to be open towards changes. Sequences and forms of questions may differ from interview to interview depending on the answers that participants provide and the stories they tell. According to Kvale, the setting of the interview stage is important since it should encourage interview participants to describe their points of view on their lives and worlds (Kvale, 2007: 55). Additionally, interviewers must establish rapport with their interview participants through “attentive listening, with the interviewer showing interest, understanding and respect for what

the subject says, and with an interviewer at ease and clear about what he or she wants to know” (Kvale, 2007: 55).

The interview stage is prepared with a script. According to Kvale, the interview guide is the script that structures the course of the interview. While the interview guide for a semi-structured life-world interview usually includes an outline of the topics the interviewers seek to cover as well as some suggested questions, it also should allow flexibility (Kvale, 2007: 56-57). Kvale suggests that interviewers should be prepared to continually make decisions ‘on-the-spot:’ what to ask the interview participants, how to ask the interview participants, which answers should be followed up, which answers should be interpreted, or commented on, and which not (Kvale, 2007: 81).

I chose semi-structured life-world interviews for my research project because this interview format allowed me to develop open conversations with my interview participants about their experiences with *Next Christian Community*. I prepared an interview guide that covered themes and topics and included some suggested questions such as questions about how members experience *Next Christian Community*, *Next Christian Community*’s church space, the transformation from a movie theatre to a church space, and congregation members’ experiences at *St. Albert Alliance Church* in comparison to *Next Christian Community*. I developed these questions by keeping my leading research questions in mind. The openness and flexibility of this interview format, however, allowed me to respond to my interview participants’ answers and stories. By providing a conversational atmosphere, I encouraged my interview participants to share topics/themes/issues about *Next Christian Community* valuable and important to them as congregation members. By doing so, my interview guide functioned often as a reminder of themes I intended to cover, not as a strict interview guideline.

This interview format fits to my general methodological orientation as an ethnographer taking the unpredictable nature of fieldwork into account. The less structured interview format, however, provided some difficulties. I had no strict time limit for the length

of my interviews. Instead, I allowed for conversations to emerge, for my interview participants to explore certain thoughts, and for them to share their stories/opinions/ideas for as long as they wanted. Fortunately, if my interview participants' narratives wandered off topic, then I always was able to guide them back to the main topic of our conversations. The conversations that developed during my interviews provided me with unexpected answers and therefore with rich knowledge about *Next Christian Community*. Such an approach, however, made my transcribing and analyzing process particularly challenging and time consuming.

Shortly after each interview, I reflected upon the interview in my field journal focusing on three topics. First, I captured the context of the interview through a narrative description which included the setting of the interview, my feelings/experiences of the interview, the facial expressions of my interview participants, and power relations that emerged throughout the interview. Second, I provided a methodological reflection of the interview. By doing so, I was able to recognize technical and procedural issues that arose, what went well throughout the interview, and what did not, what questions worked, what questions did not work, and whether or not the sequencing of my questions was successful. Third, I provided an analytical summary of the interview, focusing on key contributions of the interview towards my research questions, new directions in my thought process that emerged, new questions or topics I added to my interview guide, and how the themes of the interview compare to previous interviews. By reflecting systematically upon each interview shortly after each interview's completion, I was able to make appropriate adjustments towards my interview guide and to my own behaviour as an interviewer. Additionally, I was able to capture my initial interpretations, which were necessary and valuable for my analyzing process.

Analyzing the Collected Data

I used grounded theory's analyzing method (Gibbs, 2007: 13-18; Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Wohlrab-Sahr and Przyborski, 2010: 204-216) in order to manually code and analyze my collected data (various observation notes, interview transcripts, reflexive fieldnotes, and annual reports). Grounded theory's analyzing process begins with open coding. In their monograph, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (1998), Strauss and Corbin state that in order "to uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 102). According to Strauss and Corbin, in the process of open coding, researchers are able to identify concepts, breaking down the data into abstract parts such as events, happenings, objects, and actions/interactions that are found to be related in meaning and seem to be significant for the researchers.

In a next step, parts that are related in meaning are labelled and grouped together – they become concepts. "Eventually, the analyst realizes that certain concepts can be grouped under a more abstract higher order concept, based on its ability to explain what is going on" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 113). Concepts that are linked with each other are grouped into broader categories. Categories are concepts that originate from the data and stand for phenomena. "Phenomena are important analytical ideas that emerge from our data. They answer the question 'What is going on here?' They depict the problems, issues, concerns, and matters that are important to those being studied" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 114). Once a category is identified, the researcher needs to develop its specific properties and dimensions.

A further step of grounded theory's analyzing process is called axial coding. Throughout axial coding, researchers should reassemble the data that were fractured during open coding. "In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 124). Axial

coding involves the act of relating categories to subcategories determining how categories are crosscut and linked. While the category refers to a phenomenon, the subcategory “answers questions about the phenomenon such as when, where, who, how, and with what consequences, thus giving the concept greater explanatory power” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 125).

According to Strauss and Corbin, data should become theory throughout selective coding. In open coding, researchers are concerned with generating categories, while in axial coding researchers develop systematically categories and link them with subcategories. “However, it is not until the major categories are finally integrated to form a larger theoretical scheme that the research findings take the form of a theory” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 143). Therefore, selective coding describes the process of integrating and refining categories. In this step, researchers need to decide on a central/core category. Despite the fact that the central/core category evolves from the data, it is an abstraction. “In an exaggerated sense, it consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words that seem to explain what ‘this research is all about’” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 146). According to Strauss and Corbin, the central/core category has high analytical power because of its ability to pull all other categories together, forming an explanatory whole.

In addition to coding manually using grounded theory’s analyzing method, I used *NVivo II* software. Due to the fact that I collected a large amount of data (various observation notes, interview transcripts, reflexive fieldnotes, etc.), I appreciated the computer-based coding program that not only allowed me to code but also to bring my data into an order both well-arranged and open to re-arrangement.

Furthermore, I captured my emerging and changing themes/thoughts/ideas by writing memos. In her monograph, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (2006), Kathy Charmaz describes memos as informal analytical notes that help to gain new insights into the collected data through the act of writing. According to

Charmaz, “memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process” (Charmaz 2006: 72). As I mentioned above, my first analytical steps took place shortly after each interview by reflecting upon them in my field journal. Transcribing each interview further enabled me to capture analytical thoughts within my transcripts. Throughout and after my coding process, I continued to write memos reflecting on each interview and my analytical ideas connected to them. I used memos as a space to actively engage with my material; comparing interviews, asking questions, and processing my thoughts towards unfolding themes, categories, and concepts (Charmaz, 2006: 72-73).

While grounded theory, as a qualitative research design, seeks to generate “a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (Creswell, 2007: 63), ethnography seeks to describe and to interpret the “shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2007: 68). I find that ethnography, including its extensive fieldwork, allowed me to gather knowledge about *Next Christian Community* (a culture-sharing group) mandatory for answering my research questions. Grounded theory’s analyzing method provided me with a systematic toolkit helpful and necessary for making sense of my collected data. Due to the fact that grounded theory’s analyzing method is primarily concerned with data-driven coding, I was able to stay as close to my data as possible – a process important for my final outcome. By not coding towards specific theoretical concepts provided by already existing literature, I sought to keep my mind open for unexpected themes that may emerge during my fieldwork. By doing so, I was able to cherish and respond to the often unpredictable nature of fieldwork as well as the less structured interview format I chose

to use.

Although I used grounded theory, including writing memos, as a systematic way of approaching and analyzing my data, I nonetheless argue that the writing process itself plays an equally important role in researchers' sense-making process. Developing codes, concepts, and categories and reflecting upon them through writing memos increases researchers' ability to create abstract ideas in order to generate new theoretical knowledge (Charmaz, 2006: 72). I, however, find that this process tends to disconnect researchers from their data, their feelings and experiences in the field, and their confusions and frustrations throughout the research process. Annette Markham's article, "'Go Ugly Early': Fragmented Narrative and Bricolage as Interpretative Method (2005)," provides an excellent example of how writing itself can be a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000: 926). Instead of presenting a linear picture of her ethnographic study, Markham uses a fragmented form that captures the confusions and ambiguities of both her topic and of ethnography itself. She argues that fragmented narratives reveal authors' interpretation processes and create space for readers' own interpretations. It is her goal to show that readers can learn about a topic even if "the outcome is not completed, controlled, or predicted by the form" (Markham, 2005: 816). Similarly, Richardson explains how qualitative research lives through the text itself. She argues that the constant hiding of researchers' Selves in their write-ups leads to sterile and impersonal texts (Richardson, 2000: 924-925).

While my writing is not as unconventional as Markham's, my assumptions, feelings, confusions, frustrations, and memories will be a part of my narrative. I feel that my unconventional-conventional style of writing reflects the unconventionality-conventionality of both *Next Christian Community's* church space and the members of the congregation's vision of how a church community can be.

Out of my analyzing process, four main themes emerged: 'struggling between the importance and unimportance of having one's own physical church space,' 'balancing the

sacred and the profane,’ ‘reconciling opposing Christian traditions,’ and ‘producing strong communal bonds in and through space.’ These themes capture *Next Christian Community’s* identity production, its production of space, and the role its physical church space played/plays in the community’s identity production. In other words, these themes explain how and why *Next Christian Community’s* members chose to produce such a particular church space.

The theme ‘struggling between the importance and unimportance of having one’s own physical church space’ captures *Next Christian Community’s* members’ decision-making process in selecting a suitable worship facility. Furthermore, it captures their attitude towards church spaces amidst a variety of spatial possibilities open to Evangelical church communities. My other three themes build upon the first theme and capture *Next Christian Community’s* unique way of re-purposing the former movie theatre. These themes are important because they form the foundation on which I base my discussions surrounding *Next Christian Community’s* narrative.

I capture these discussions surrounding *Next Christian Community’s* narrative in my three main chapters, “Act I: Separating from our Mother Church,” “Act II: Producing our own Space,” and “Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition.” Throughout these chapters, I intend to show how the physical church space of *Next Christian Community* is an expression of the identity of the congregation, how *Next Christian Community’s* particular identity, including its vision of doing church, developed, and in what ways *Next Christian Community’s* vision of doing church corresponds with its particular church space. Before I start to unravel *Next Christian Community’s* narrative, however, I introduce the theories that also inform my analyzing and interpretation process and further focus on the content of my three main chapters.

Setting the Stage: Situating *Next Christian Community* within a Theoretical Framework

In the introduction, “Ritual Spaces in Modern Western Culture: Some Current Trends,” to their monograph, *Sacred Places in Modern Western Culture* (2011), Paul Post, Arie Molendijk, and Justin Kroesen explain the changing landscape of rituals. According to them, traditional/conventional church spaces grow empty while multi-religious urban ritual spaces such as places of pilgrimage and war cemeteries gain popularity. This observation is true, especially in Europe:

Church buildings are exponents par excellence of the social, cultural and religious dynamic which has manifested itself in Europe since the ‘long 1960s’. Everything points to a considerable acceleration in the process of church closures. For instance in the Netherlands it is expected that some 1200 churches (about 25% procent [sic] of the total number) will be closed in the coming decade. Elsewhere in Europe similar trends are discernable. At the same time there is a growing interest in churches as places of contrast, as cultural heritage, as relics of a fascinating past or as a place of cultural tourism. In this perspective the question of the identity, or better, identities or profiles of the church building in contemporary Western context emerges as a central issue (Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen, 2011: 3-4).

Although traditional/conventional church spaces also grow empty in North America, church closure nonetheless seems to be less prevalent in North America than in Europe (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 338-339). The number of churches closing does not yet seem to outweigh the number of churches opening (Cannon Green, 2015). In North America, the “lack of state interference” (Finke and Scheitle, 2009: 13) since the nineteenth century and the development of a free religious market in the 1960s (Kyle, 2006: 226) create an environment that allows new religious groups to flourish (Finke and Scheitle, 2009: 12-13). Furthermore, newly-formed, contemporary church communities, specifically those that belong to an Evangelical denomination, hardly have any restrictions on where they should/could meet. Consequently, some of these congregations choose to gather in commercial buildings¹¹ such as movie

¹¹ *Next Christian Community* and *City Centre Church/City South Church* both meet/met in movie theatres in Edmonton. *Celebration Church* meets in an old car dealership in Edmonton. *Mars Hill Bible Church* renovated and meets in the Grand Village Mall in Grandville, Michigan.

theatres, car dealerships, and/or shopping malls, transforming these locations into their worship spaces.

Whether conventional/traditional church buildings turn into cultural heritage sites or commercial buildings turn into places of worship for contemporary church communities, both the European and the North American contexts show that the old categories and dichotomies are shifting. Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen call this shift an “on-going process of re-articulation” (Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen, 2011: 9). They acknowledge that clear definitions are no longer available and that “scholars have to deal with fluidity, describing transitions, hybrids and uneasy and often messy cross-overs, while articulating and re-articulating the ways these spaces are shaped, contested and refigured in sometimes uncanny ways” (Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen, 2011: 9).

In our interview, Birgit, for example, describes *Next Christian Community* as a church community that challenges the old categories and dichotomies with the mission to re-articulate, in an on-going process, what it means to be an Evangelical church community in contemporary Canadian culture:

And, I think this space [the former Village Landing Movie Theatre] in a way fit the mind-set of the people that were a part of Next [Christian Community] at that time. We were looking for something different as far as being a church family, being a church in the community. We wanted to be different than the majority of the Evangelical churches that were, that are around in St. Albert and in the area around. We didn't want to be a megachurch. We didn't want to be a big church. We wanted to be a community of believers that worship together but out in our community. And, some of this space just sort of fit that, fit in of, yeah, who we were (Birgit, Interview 2013: 35).

In her quote, Birgit describes the desire and intention of *Next Christian Community's* members to be a church community that is different from other local Evangelical church communities. Furthermore, she describes how the former Village Landing Movie Theatre fits to the mind-set of the congregation and to *Next Christian Community's* identity. Birgit illustrates the inextricability between the process of choosing, creating, and developing a church space and the process of becoming, being, and maintaining to be different as a church community. Birgit

is not alone in indicating the significance of the relationship between a church community's identity and its physical church space. Other interview participants make a similar connection between the desire and process of becoming, being, and maintaining to be different as a church community and the choice and transformation of the space that became *Next Christian Community's* permanent church space. For example, the Lead Pastor describes the community as "a bit of a niche church" (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 30), referring here to both *Next Christian Community's* unique spatial transformation of the former movie theatre and the identity the congregation developed. In this context, the congregation's transition from being a subsidiary ministry of *St. Albert Alliance Church* to becoming an independent congregation is especially important because this journey captures how physical church space can shape/supplement/reflect a church community's identity, helping it to become what it desires to be. In other words, *Next Christian Community's* members' narratives reveal how significant physical church spaces can be in the development of a congregational identity.

Throughout my thesis, I draw from my fieldnotes and from my interview participants' narratives about their individual journeys of faith, their memories of growing up with the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, their memories of belonging to and breaking away from *St. Albert Alliance Church*, the transitioning years of *Next Christian Community* meeting in different church spaces in St. Albert, and members' transformation of the former movie theatre into their permanent church space. All of these narratives capture the physical church spaces *Next Christian Community's* members experienced, most importantly the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. Understanding *Next Christian Community's* narrative through and by its use of space, the concept of space acts in two important ways: as an element for *Next Christian Community* to set itself apart from other church communities by developing a unique form of doing church manifested in a unique form of church space and as a lens through which I encountered and analyzed *Next Christian Community's* identity (behaviours, attitudes, interactions) as a culture-sharing group.

Social space in particular, when used as a lens, provides a method suitable in understanding the relationships of social and physical environments. Émile Durkheim was one of the first theorists who established the concept of social space in the 1890s (Haley, 2016: 486-487). In his monograph, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim argues that “there are a certain number of essential ideas which dominate our intellectual life; they are what philosophers since Aristotle have called the categories of understanding: ideas of time, space, class, number, cause, substance, personality, etc” (Durkheim, 1912: 9). Durkheim further finds that these categories are “the solid frame which encloses all thought; this does not seem to be able to liberate itself from them without destroying itself, for it seems that we cannot think objects that are not in time and space, which have no number, etc” (Durkheim, 1912: 9). According to Durkheim, these categories are the product of collective thoughts and activities, forming the basis for analyzing social phenomena.

Since Durkheim, a number of theorists contributed to the field and its development including Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Jürgen Hasse, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre. Similar to Durkheim, they find that space is not inherited from nature. Instead, humans produce and reproduce their spaces intentionally, including unexpected/unanticipated consequences. Throughout my work, I draw on some of these theorists, using space as a lens in order to examine *Next Christian Community*. Furthermore, I seek to unravel the ambiguous nature of *Next Christian Community*’s facility, describing the congregation’s spatial hybrid/cross-over and its consequences.

As I mentioned above, Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen acknowledge that clear definitions are no longer available. Throughout my work, I argue that *Next Christian Community*’s members did not simply transform a former movie theatre into a modern church building but instead created a spatial form that combines the profane elements of a space of entertainment with the sacred elements of a worship space. Furthermore, I argue that *Next*

Christian Community's particular spatial creation emerged due to its vision of doing church, indicating that different forms of doing church require corresponding forms of church spaces. *Next Christian Community's* spatial combination, however, challenges Durkheim's concept of the sacred and the profane.

In his monograph, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim states that spaces have a similar function as do calendars. "A calendar expresses the rhythm of the collective activities, while at the same time its function is to assure their regularity" (Durkheim, 1912: 10-11). While time refers to an individual experience only valuable for the individual who experiences it, time also refers to a group that comes together at specific times to share common experiences. According to Durkheim, this also is true for space: "space could not be what it is if it were not, like time, divided and differentiated" (Durkheim, 1912: 11). The divided and differentiated nature of calendars (time) and spaces allow individuals to share collective experiences and to develop social bonds. The collective cannot exist without the individuals who form the ideas, values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies important to the collective (Durkheim, 1912: 209). In turn, the collective develops distinctive characteristics of its own which impact the individuals within the collective (Durkheim, 1912: 209). Essentially, the values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies become inextricable aspects of the collective itself and are manifested in calendars (coming together on certain times) and locations (coming together in certain spaces). The particular times on and the particular spaces in which individuals come together as a group reveal aspects of this group's identity as a collective.

The interconnection between the individual, the collective, the time, and the space forms the base for Durkheim's definition of religion:

The really religious beliefs are always common to a determined group, which makes profession of adhering to them and of practising the rites connected with them. They are not merely received individually by all the members of the group; they are something belonging to the group, and they make its unity. The individuals which compose it feel themselves united to each other by the simple fact that they have a common faith. A society whose members are united by the fact that they think in the same way in regard to the sacred world and its relations

with the profane world, and by the fact that translate these common practices, is what is called a Church (Durkheim, 1912: 43-44).

A church is a group of people sharing similar thoughts regarding to the sacred world and its relationship with the profane world. According to Durkheim, religion is a practice that needs to mark off and maintain distance between the sacred and the profane. Therefore, individuals who belong to a religious group need to actively work on the maintenance of that distance (Durkheim, 1912: 37).

Due to the fact that *Next Christian Community* is an Evangelical church community, the individuals of the group share common religious beliefs, and thus are connected with each other. They have a collective consciousness. *Next Christian Community* has a space in which the group comes together, a space that is decorated in a specific way and therefore reveals aspects of *Next Christian Community's* collective identity. Durkheim's theory about the collective is helpful in understanding some of the temporal and spatial aspects of *Next Christian Community* as a collective.

Next Christian Community, however, not only created a church space in some regards reminiscent of a cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church building but also created spaces within its facility available for congregation members and non-congregation members to use for birthday parties, family reunions, music recitals, conference meetings, and various fitness classes (Next Christian Community, 2016). *Next Christian Community* does not seem to actively maintain the distance between the sacred and the profane within its church space. Just as the liturgical practices (calendars) differentiate sacred and profane along a temporal axis, a community's spatial representations (decorations, renovations) differentiate sacred and profane along a spatial axis. Durkheim states that "spatial representation consists essentially in a primary co-ordination of the data of sensuous experience. But this co-ordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent and if they were really interchangeable" (Durkheim, 1912: 11).

Next Christian Community has a specifically set-aside sanctuary where most of the community's worship activities (specifically Sunday services) take place. Framed dedication prayers throughout *Next Christian Community's* entire space, however, indicate that the members of *Next Christian Community* not only have physically transformed (through their renovation and through decoration processes) but also have spiritually transformed its entire church space. Using Durkheim's theory, it becomes clear that *Next Christian Community's* spiritual transformation (dedicating each room to God's glory through specific prayers) of its church space is a sacred element. According to him, sacred elements include both religious artefacts as well as religious rites/ceremonies with which groups develop a shared vision of sacredness, and thus develop a particular identity as religious communities. According to Durkheim, outsiders could not have provided those framed dedication prayers. Through the intra-communal activity of a spiritual transformation, *Next Christian Community* transformed a pre-existing space into a space differentiated as sacred.

If *Next Christian Community's* members consider its entire church space sacred, then profane activities such as birthday parties, family reunions, music recitals, conference meetings, and fitness classes take place in an entirely sacred space. This finding indicates that *Next Christian Community* uses its space interchangeably and contradicts Durkheim who argues that spaces cannot be qualitatively equivalent and cannot be used interchangeably. Instead of actively marking off and maintaining the distance between the sacred and the profane, *Next Christian Community* uses its church space interchangeably. Furthermore, *Next Christian Community's* spatial creation encourages the coexistence of the sacred and the profane within one single facility.

For *Next Christian Community*, this coexistence of the sacred and the profane within one single facility is necessary due to the fact that *Next Christian Community's* form of doing church includes both a longing for religious accoutrements as well as a desire to be a significant part of its surrounding community. If *Next Christian Community's* members want

to satisfy their longing for Christendom's spatial traditions and simultaneously want to invite their surrounding community into their church space, then it is inevitable for them to create a space that congregation members as well as non-congregation members would want to use on a regular basis. In other words, *Next Christian Community* needed to create a homey, welcoming, and inviting church space, accessible for the surrounding community to use.

In his monograph, *Human Space* (1963), the German philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow, however, states that a space that seeks to provoke a devotional mood such as a church space cannot also be homey, welcoming, and inviting because the intention of a church space differs from the intention of a homey space. The purpose of a homey space is to shelter and to protect its dwellers and to make them feel comfortable and relaxed. The purpose of a church space, including its particular architectural arrangements, is to put persons into a solemn and devotional mood and to make them aware of the presence and the power of the Divine (Bollnow, 1963: 142). Bollnow's discussion suggests that homeyness within a church space interferes with the development of such a mood. Church spaces, according to him, are not supposed to make persons feel comfortable and relaxed.

Bollnow understands spaces from a phenomenological perspective, a perspective that discusses the atmospheres that spaces provoke based on their particular architectural arrangements. In his article, "Atmospheres and Lived Spaces (2014)," Tonino Griffero defines the phenomenological meaning of atmospheres. According to him, atmospheres are specific subjective experiences that are "inextricably linked to felt body (*Leib*) processes" (Griffero, 2014: 29). Therefore, to perceive atmospheres means to be touched by them in the felt-body. "It does not only mean that this kind of perception is direct and deambulatory, kinaesthetic and affectively involving, synaesthetic or at least polymodal, but most of all it means to render oneself present to something through the body, or better through the felt-body understood as the extraorganic dimension and the absolute place one can only access in the first person" (Griffero, 2014: 32). Griffero's definition of the phenomenological meaning of

atmospheres suggests that when persons perceive spaces their entire bodies are involved.

According to him, the act of perceiving a space is, indeed, a very physical experience. When I use the word, atmosphere, throughout my work, then I refer to this phenomenological understanding of the word.

In his monograph, *Was Räume mit uns machen – und wir mit ihnen: Kritische Phänomenologie des Raumes* (2014), Jürgen Hasse also uses a phenomenological perspective in order to focus on the point of intersection in which persons come into contact with spaces (Hasse, 2014: 12). Similar to Bollnow and Griffero, he finds that the architectural arrangements of most spaces are intentional, provoking a bodily communication (*leibliche Kommunikation*). For example, the immense heights of buildings such as banks not only seek to symbolize their general influences. This architectural feature also seeks to transmit power in such a way that it is noticeable within one's body. Hasse finds that through bodily communication, spatial arrangements purposefully create and justify the prevalent social order (Hasse, 2014: 47). In other words, the power of institutions becomes visible and can be perceived physically through specific spatial arrangements.

Hasse further explains that persons, in this case, have a double role as both rational decision-makers who produce particular spaces (*rational agierende Gestalter - Akteur*) and as users who are affected by them (*emotional Betroffene - Patheur*). According to Hasse, there is no clear border between those two roles, between the *Akteur* and the *Patheur* (Hasse, 2014: 14). For example, the person who builds a home/house by following a certain plan becomes an *Akteur*. The same person who then lives in this house and is affected by its atmosphere turns into a *Patheur* (Hasse, 2014: 45). This observation also is true for members of *Next Christian Community*. As *Akteure*, *Next Christian Community's* members purposefully were able to create a church space that could support their form of doing church. As *Patheure*, they are affected by the atmosphere of the space they produced.

In order to adequately analyze the physical church space *Next Christian Community's*

members produced, including the way congregation members as well as non-congregation members are affected by it, I combine aspects of Durkheim's theory with Bollnow's and Hasse's phenomenological perspective. Durkheim's theory is a valuable foundation due to the fact that religion for him is "something eminently social. Religious representations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of the assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain or recreate certain mental states in these groups" (Durkheim, 1912: 10). According to Durkheim, religious artifacts, rites, and ceremonies express what is sacred for a group, maintaining and recreating this shared understanding of sacredness. Furthermore, they help the group to develop a collective identity. Most importantly, religious artifacts, rites, and ceremonies are collective activities, available for researcher to observe, to describe, and to interpret.

Despite the fact that some of *Next Christian Community's* procedures differ from conventional Christian worship practices, they nonetheless are reminiscent of Durkheim's description of religious artifacts, rites, and ceremonies. Accordingly, some of the decorative objects that hang in *Next Christian Community's* church space are not only overtly Christian artifacts but also are reminders of religious rites and ceremonies unique to *Next Christian Community*. Due to fact that *Next Christian Community* has its own physical church space, members can display these decorative objects. Displayed in *Next Christian Community's* church space, these decorative objects are able to recreate a certain mental state in the members of the congregation. It adds to both the community's collective understanding of sacredness and to the sacredness of their physical church space. Bollnow's and Hasse's phenomenological perspective, however, helps to explain why it is possible for persons to actually perceive a sacred atmosphere within a space.

For Durkheim, spaces are primarily important because the particular spaces in which individuals come together as a group reveal aspects of this group's identity. Bollnow and

Hasse focus on spatial arrangements, and thus make it possible to analyze the physical transformation of *Next Christian Community's* facility. Throughout my work, I draw on Durkheim's, Bollnow's, and Hasse's theories in order to argue that *Next Christian Community's* members created a spatial combination of church space, home space, and community space in which the sacred and the profane can coexist. As such it is a space that is able to satisfy both *Next Christian Community's* longing for Christendom's spatial tradition and its desire to be a significant part of its surrounding community. It, however, also is a space that confuses persons' perceptions precisely because it combines spatial elements that often are perceived as incompatible.

Furthermore, *Next Christian Community's* members' longing for the spatial features of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings is not typical for an Evangelical congregation. Instead, many Evangelical church communities have broken with Christendom's spatial traditions in their physical church spaces, making this unconventionality an expression of their identities. Monographs such as *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity* (2006), *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005), and *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (2012) are helpful (in addition to Durkheim's, Bollnow's, and Hasse's theories) because they specifically focus on Evangelical church traditions, including their corresponding worship facilities. Furthermore, these resources are valuable in order to examine how *Next Christian Community* mixes Evangelical traditions with Christendom's liturgical and spatial traditions, making this unconventionality-conventionality an expression of its identity manifested in its physical church space.

In the following three chapters, I seek to capture *Next Christian Community's* journey

from its inception as a subsidiary ministry to becoming its own independent entity.

Furthermore, the titles of my following three chapters are a reference to a three-act structure often used in plays or movies, indicating a beginning, a middle, and an end (Brütsch: 2015: 301). Similar to a play or a movie, “Act I: Separating from our Mother Church,” establishes the two main characters, *Next Christian Community* and *St. Albert Alliance Church*, the relationship they have with each other, and their world (Brütsch, 2015: 302). *Next Christian Community*’s early members’ longing for a different form of doing church, however, led to a ‘dramatic situation’ between these two church communities and led to their inevitable separation (Brütsch, 2015: 302). This situation raised ‘dramatic questions’ *Next Christian Community* needed to answer: ‘Where do we go from here?’ and ‘What kind of church community do we want to be?’ Accordingly, this chapter focuses on *Next Christian Community*’s separation process, its search for a suitable worship space, and the congregation’s decision to move into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre.

In his article, “The three-act structure: Myth or magical formula? (2015),” Matthias Brütsch finds that the second act usually “develops the story and complicates the action by bringing the main character into conflict with antagonistic forces and obstacles he or she has to overcome” (Brütsch, 2015: 302). Therefore, in “Act II: Producing our own Space,” I focus on *Next Christian Community* further finding answers to its ‘dramatic questions,’ the questions that its separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church* raised. In this chapter, I explain *Next Christian Community*’s transformation process of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, a space that the congregation created in order to support its identity, its idea of what kind of church community it desires to be. *Next Christian Community*’s transformation process led to the spatial combination of church space, home space, and community space. Although this spatial combination fits to the congregation’s form of doing church, it simultaneously challenges congregation members’ as well as non-congregation members’ perception of space.

The third and last chapter, “Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition,” leaves the main character, *Next Christian Community*, with a ‘new sense of who it really is.’ It primarily focuses on *Next Christian Community*’s worship activities, further highlighting the congregation’s mix of Evangelicalism’s traditions with Christendom’s traditions. In this chapter, I primarily draw on Jan Assmann’s theory on cultural memory and communicative memory. Assmann is a German cultural scientist and Egyptologist who built upon Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory, identifying cultural memory as a particular way of remembering. According to Assmann, cultural memory “ensures the members of a given society (group) have feelings of community, unity, and connections based on a common past. Its goal is the transfer of selected content and interpretation of the past so that members of a given society can create common memory and common identity on its basis” (Karkowska, 2013: 370). By using Assmann’s theory on memory, I am able to show how *Next Christian Community* uses its worship activities and its decorative objects in order to communicate its own form of doing church to newer members, canonizing and archiving its collective identity.

Similar to a play or a movie, all of these three chapters are connected and built upon each other. They are, in many instances, inseparable, reconstructing the steps/phases that are involved when a ministry separates from its mother church and becomes its own independent congregation.¹²

¹² Finke and Scheitle, for example, provide a theoretical approach towards understanding the separation processes of religious groups (schism). In their article, “Understanding schisms: theoretical explanation of their origins,” in the monograph, *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide* (2009), they discuss the environments that can either encourage or hinder the development of schisms. For example, they find that the development of schisms depend on the degree of state regulation/state interference and on the internal operations of organizations, particularly “the exchange of resources that occur between congregations and the larger denominational structure” (Finke and Scheitle, 2009: 19). I acknowledge Finke’s and Scheitle’s contribution. Furthermore, my work addresses similar issues and shares many of their findings. I, however, do not use their theoretical approach when I discuss *Next Christian Community*’s separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church*. I focus on *Next Christian Community*’s steps from being a ministry within *St. Albert Alliance Church* to becoming its own independent entity in order to understand the congregation’s particular identity, how it developed, and how the congregation is able to strengthen it. Most importantly, I particularly focus on the role space played/plays in *Next Christian Community*’s congregational identity production.

Act I: Separating from our Mother Church

When I interviewed Margit, I was still at the beginning of my research and determined to increase my knowledge on Evangelicalism, a Christian faith not as common and as established in Germany as it is in North America. Coming from a non-religious background and growing up in Germany allowed me to question aspects about Christianity in North America that researchers with a religious background and/or an upbringing in North America might not have questioned. Margit has been a part of the Evangelical church tradition since she was a teenager. During our interview, she states:

Yeah, cause some of it's--cause some of it's so hard to define as to what's unique to Next [Christian Community], what's unique to the Alliance tradition, what's part of Evangelicalism, what's part of my own experience of what matters to me and doesn't matter to me ... (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 15).

Interestingly, this quote reveals Margit's struggle to clearly identify *Next Christian Community's* uniqueness as a congregation that belongs to Christian and Missionary Alliance, which is an Evangelical denomination within Protestant Christianity. Consequently, this quote captures the general atmosphere of my interview with Margit: an on-going discussion about different church traditions, how *Next Christian Community* is situated within them, and the congregation's connection to its mother church, *St. Albert Alliance Church*.

My following interviews built upon my interview experience with Margit further seeking to understand *Next Christian Community's* identity, particularly as a church community that belongs to Christian and Missionary Alliance and therefore is embedded within Evangelicalism. Throughout my interviews, I realized that both my interview participants and I continuously wrestled with identifying various aspects of Evangelical traditions and how *Next Christian Community's* identity is placed within them. Identifying these aspects, however, is an important process that helps to understand *Next Christian Community* in the context of the local Evangelical contemporaries from which it seeks to set

itself apart.

My research on Evangelicalism revealed that the confusion surrounding Evangelical denominations is inevitable due to the complicated history of Evangelicalism that evolved, changed, and developed throughout centuries. Richard Kyle is a scholar who captures the complexity of this particular Christian faith in his monograph, *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity* (2006). In his first chapter, Kyle briefly introduces certain aspects of Evangelicalism (including a working definition of the term) before he attempts to capture Evangelicalism in America throughout different centuries. Essentially, his goal is to unravel Evangelicalism's paradoxical relationship with American culture. According to him, Evangelicalism is embedded within American culture more than any other religion (Kyle, 2006: 1). He argues that Evangelicalism has not created a Christian America but instead developed an Americanized Christianity (Kyle, 2006: 1). Although Kyle focuses primarily on Evangelicalism within an American context, similar developments took place and can be observed within a Canadian context (Reimer and Wilkinson, 2015: 20-25).

The word, 'evangelical,' comes from the Greek word, *evangelion*, and means 'good news.' The English Bibles translated the word, *evangelion*, into the word, 'gospel,' referring to "Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, and his kingdom, that is, the rule of God over humanity. On the part of people, it entails faith and repentance, and the need for a spiritual rebirth" (Kyle, 2006: 10). Kyle, however, acknowledges that this understanding of the term, *evangelion*, applies to the majority of Christian faiths (Kyle, 2006: 10). With the intention to differentiate Evangelicalism from other Christian faiths, Kyle shows how the word, Evangelicalism, has been used historically. He sees Evangelicalism as a whole, despite its disconnected and occasionally opposing parts.

The many subgroups have their special characteristics, but no one denomination can equate its distinctives with evangelicalism as a whole. Still, there are some common denominators running through the movement. To recognize these threads while still allowing for considerable diversity is a key to ‘unlocking’ the puzzle of evangelicalism. So evangelicalism must be seen as movement, an ethos, and a mood that cuts across many denominational lines (Kyle, 2006: 10).

In this quote, Kyle suggests that Evangelicalism as a whole is a movement. Throughout his work, he further classifies Evangelicalism as a broad movement, rejecting the idea that Evangelicalism primarily emerged out of Fundamentalism in the 1940s (Kyle, 2006: 11), which is an approach that understands Evangelicalism as a narrow movement. According to him, three major periods in Christianity shaped Evangelicalism as a broad movement: “the Reformation, especially its expression in Puritanism; the revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and the twentieth-century conservative reaction to the modern world, which has been called fundamentalism” (Kyle, 2006: 13).

During the nineteenth century, there was no need for Evangelicals to identify themselves. They were embedded within the Protestant mainstream. In Europe, for example, the word, ‘evangelical’ (*evangelisch* in German), often refers to Protestant or Lutheran churches. With the rise of Fundamentalism and liberalism in the early twentieth century, Evangelicals needed a more distinctive definition. Kyle continues to introduce and discuss a variety of scholars who attempted to categorize Evangelicals into different sub-groups. One example is Timothy Weber’s classification into four branches:

The classical evangelicals are ‘loyal primarily to the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation’ and largely include the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Next are the pietistic evangelicals who ‘stand in the Reformation tradition’ but who ‘seek to complete it by incorporating the experiential emphases of Puritanism and the evangelical awakenings ...’ He includes Methodist, Baptist, holiness groups, and Pentecostals in this branch. Third are those ‘shaped by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy,’ namely, the fundamentalist evangelicals. In this category, he lists not only the fundamentalists but their neo-evangelical offspring who came out of fundamentalism in the 1940s. Last are the progressive evangelicals, who came out of the other three branches but are more in tune with modernity. They can most often be found in the attempts to reform evangelicalism and conservative elements within the mainline Protestant churches (Kyle, 2006: 15-16).

This categorization shows the complexity of Evangelicalism. While Timothy Weber finds

only four sub-groups, Robert Webber categorizes Evangelicalism even further and finds fourteen different Evangelical sub-groups. He introduces them in his monograph, *Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity* (1978). Webber also acknowledges the extreme difficulty to clearly define the word, 'evangelical.' According to him, Evangelicals share the common faith of their Protestant heritage and are diversified due to the historic, cultural, and social movements/settings that gave birth to them (1978: 30-34).

Despite Evangelicalism's diversity, Kyle acknowledges certain common characteristics of Evangelical faith and practice. Amongst others, he quotes the British historian, David Bebbington, who distinguishes four different attitudes unique to Evangelicals: "conversionism (the need to change lives, especially by the new birth); activism (sharing the gospel); biblicism (regarding the Bible as the ultimate authority); and crucicentricism (an emphasis on the death of Christ as the only means of salvation)" (Kyle, 2006: 11).

Both Webber and Kyle acknowledge Evangelicals' prominence and power in North America, especially in the United States. While Webber takes a subcultural approach to Evangelicalism, Kyle argues that Evangelicals have created a counterfeit culture because they continuously adapt(ed) themselves to North American culture. He calls this phenomenon the "evangelical paradox:" while Evangelicals embrace traditional values and historic faith, they also seek to spread the 'good news.' Spreading the 'good news' meant/means to reach out and was/is accompanied by a quantitative over a qualitative orientation and by focusing on church growth. Kyle discusses the disestablishment of religion in America and its development of a free market for religion. If Evangelicals want to grow numerically and to succeed in the free market, then their product needs to appeal to the majority. "As a result, evangelicals are at once a very traditional but culturally accommodating people" (Kyle, 2006: 2). Kyle draws on the "evangelical paradox" throughout his monograph in order to examine the developments of Evangelicalism and Evangelicals' embeddedness within American culture, starting from the

eighteenth century and going into the twenty-first century with the intention to show that church cannot be understood if it is isolated from its surrounding culture.

While I find it necessary to understand the essentials of Evangelicalism, the movement's diversity, and its commonalities, I do not seek to outline the developments of Evangelicalism from its beginning throughout different centuries in such detail. I argue that such an undertaking does not contribute towards understanding *Next Christian Community's* identity building process and its unique form of doing church. I, however, find Kyle's argument on Evangelicalism and the movement's embeddedness within its culture, despite his particular focus on Evangelicalism in America, valuable in understanding the Evangelical landscape that surrounded *Next Christian Community* during its inception as a subsidiary ministry within *St. Albert Alliance Church*.

During my analyzing process, I sensed that *St. Albert Alliance Church* had adopted characteristics reminiscent of the seeker church tradition, while its ministry (*Next Christian Community*) had adopted characteristics reminiscent of the emerging church tradition. Both of these church traditions were dominant during the time *Next Christian Community* developed as a ministry, influencing the Evangelical landscape. In this chapter, I use Keith Roberts's and David Yamane's monograph, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (2012), and Eddie Gibbs's and Ryan Bolger's monograph, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005), in addition to Kyle's work, in order to discuss both traditions' forms of doing church, including their corresponding forms of church spaces. Due to the fact that the seeker church tradition's form of doing church is distinctly different from the emerging church tradition's form of doing church, the worship facilities they use also differ significantly. Although *Next Christian Community* had adopted characteristics of the emerging church tradition, the congregation continued to evolve and further developed its own form of doing church. *Next Christian Community* needed to leave its mother church in order to find its own worship facility that could support its unique identity.

Despite the fact that *Next Christian Community's* members could have transformed any given space into their worship facility, their narratives reveal that they strongly desired to move into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. According to my interview participants, the former movie theatre is embedded within the St. Albert community, and thus has significant memories attached to it. For *Next Christian Community's* members, it is a space of importance. In accordance with their Evangelical background, *Next Christian Community's* members, however, also highlight the unimportance of having one's own physical church space within their narratives by explaining that church spaces should not be defining and that a church community does not rely on a permanent physical worship facility.

In this chapter, I argue that *Next Christian Community's* early members experience a tension between the importance and unimportance of having one's own physical church space because of their Evangelical background, their shared past at *St. Albert Alliance Church*, and their experiences with other seeker-sensitive churches in and around St. Albert. I further argue that this tension allows *Next Christian Community* to set itself apart from other church traditions and enables it to establish its own form of doing church manifested in a corresponding form of church space.

“And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom” (Elizabeth Appell).

On the 11th of April, 2015, I joined *Next Christian Community's* members to celebrate their congregation's tenth birthday. The celebration took place at BBQ's Acres' main room and started at 6:00pm. Celebrating the congregation's birth included a buffet, a bar, a festive dress code, and an entertainment program during which persons could win prizes by answering questions about *Next Christian Community's* history. Throughout the evening,

various bands were playing, some of which were *Next Christian Community's* own worship bands. It was a pleasant evening. *Next Christian Community's* members ate, drank, danced, laughed, and enjoyed themselves celebrating the existence of their church community.

During my interview with the Lead Pastor, however, I learned that the community does not count its time as a ministry of *St. Albert Alliance Church* when celebrating ten years of *Next Christian Community*: "At that point it's still--our time at St. Albert Alliance [Church] was no different than the children's ministry here. It was a ministry of the church. It wasn't its own entity. So, that's why we celebrate the ten years as just the time on its own" (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 21). The Lead Pastor's quote reveals that *Next Christian Community's* members' celebration of the congregation's beginning similarly is a celebration of its separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church*. It indicates that the achievement of becoming an own independent entity was/is highly important to them.

Next Christian Community's time at *St. Albert Alliance Church* is nonetheless significant. The congregation existed as a ministry for about five years before the group separated from *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Talking to my interview participants, I learned that the congregation's early members' shared experience at *St. Albert Alliance Church* had an impact on *Next Christian Community's* identity building process. Therefore, the congregation's socialization as a ministry within *St. Albert Alliance Church* cannot be separated from the congregation's development as its own independent entity, particularly its members' choice and creation of their own physical church space. Birgit is one of my interview participants who remembers *Next Christian Community's* time as a ministry within *St. Albert Alliance Church*. She states:

As I said, Next [Christian Community] started as a college and career group, which means it was started by young adults that were in university, young singles, early career, you know, that was kinda the focus of it. And, at the same time, St. Albert Alliance [Church] was the big church we were going to, it was kinda going through a bit of a crisis or turmoil in leadership and direction. And there were some of us that were really tired of the big church, megachurch mentality, and we wanted a small more intimate group of people to worship with . . . (Birgit,

Interview 2013: 35).

In her quote, Birgit explains that the congregation started as a college and career group. *St. Albert Alliance Church's* pastoral staff created this group to satisfy the needs of university students, young adults in their early careers, and singles. According to the Lead Pastor, *Next Christian Community* “was a Sunday night church service. It meant to reach Gen-Xers” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 18).

In this quote, Birgit also describes *St. Albert Alliance Church* as ‘the big church.’ Birgit is not the only person who uses this phrase when talking about *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Many of my interview participants make this reference when they talk about their mother church. Furthermore, Birgit describes *St. Albert Alliance Church* as a church that had adopted a megachurch mentality, a mentality that she describes as tiring.

St. Albert Alliance Church, however, is by definition not a megachurch. According to Keith Roberts and David Yamane (2012: 206), a Protestant congregation qualifies as a megachurch, if its average weekend attendance (not membership) is more than 2000 persons (adults and children). Megachurches also have huge complex facilities, occasionally spread out through multiple locations, that often include gimmicks such as auto repair clinics, bowling alleys, basket ball courts, rooms for weight lifting, aerobics, and arts and crafts, music wings, bookstores, coffee shops, etc (Kyle, 2006: 222; Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 205).

Scholars such as Richard Kyle (2006) and Keith Roberts and David Yamane (2012) have defined megachurches and have argued that, in addition to their high attendance numbers and their large multi-purpose facilities, megachurches offer services that are more reminiscent of an entertainment program than a spiritual service, “one that can compete with the theatre and popular concerts” (Kyle, 2006: 222). Furthermore, megachurches often provide recovery services and how-to-do-it seminars for their members/attendees to support them during various life crises such as alcohol issues, finical problems, and difficulties during

parenting.

Such characteristics do not accurately describe *St. Albert Alliance Church*. To call *St. Albert Alliance Church* ‘the big church’ is nonetheless reasonable. In her quote, Birgit refers to a time during which *St. Albert Alliance Church* was, indeed, a fairly large church in St. Albert. During our interview, the Lead Pastor remembers: “I am twenty-eight years old. The church is 1200 people. [...] There is a staff of twenty-five” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 15). According to the Lead Pastor, *St. Albert Alliance Church* offered four services during this time: a Saturday night service, two Sunday morning services, and the Sunday night service that became *Next Christian Community* (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 18). By using the word, megachurch, or the phrase, megachurch mentality, my interview participants describe *St. Albert Alliance Church* as a large church that intended to become an even larger church. This desire is characteristic for many megachurches.¹³

Megachurches’ efforts to cater to persons’ spiritual, personal, and physical needs often are intentional and seek to attract members/attendees in large numbers. This approach is characteristic of new paradigm churches including seeker churches.¹⁴ Not all megachurches, however, have the characteristics that would identify them as seeker churches. Also, not all seeker churches have an average weekly attendance of more than 2000 persons and are by definition not megachurches (Kyle, 2006: 232-233). Churches, regardless of their numbers, qualify as seeker churches if they use customer-sensitive methods to be user-friendly and appealing (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 206). Seeker churches’ efforts to create an appealing product by using customer-sensitive methods respond to the rise of consumerism starting in the 1960s in North America (Kyle, 2006: 226; Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 206-207). “As the

¹³ It is important to note that megachurches are a phenomenon that is especially prevalent in the United States. While there are megachurches in Canada and also around Edmonton such as *Beulah Alliance Church* and *Millwoods Pentecostal Assembly*, their attendance numbers are significantly lower than in the United States. There are megachurches in the United States that count more than 10.000 attendees. Canada does not have churches with such a high attendance number. They are nonetheless megachurches once 2000 persons attend their services regularly (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2016).

¹⁴ Here, Roberts and Yamane (2012: 207) use Miller’s approach who finds that seeker churches are one type of new paradigm churches.

consumer culture came to dominate American society, the churches felt pressure to tap the popular tastes and enthusiasms. They had to market their faith. Denominations that successfully did so grew; those who failed declined” (Kyle, 2006: 226).

According to Kyle, the seeker church movement has shaped many Evangelical congregations significantly. Traditionally, Evangelical churches have been believer’s churches, requiring a strong commitment to Christ. From the 1960s onwards, many Evangelical churches shifted towards becoming seeker churches. Instead of focusing on the doctrine itself, they started focusing on how to deliver the doctrine effectively. While these churches still hold onto the basics of the Evangelical theology (divinity of Christ, salvation by faith, authority of scripture, etc), they are ultimately more interested in church growth (Kyle, 2006: 223-224). As I mentioned above, the essence of Evangelicalism is to spread the ‘good news’ and to evangelize which is the reason why Evangelicals tend to be more focused on church growth and are more likely to adopt a quantitative orientation than other Christian faiths. Kyle further acknowledges that Evangelicalism’s adaptability to changing cultural situations is another important aspect in order to understand Evangelical congregations’ numerical orientation and their successful growth (Kyle, 2006: 224).

As I mentioned above, *St. Albert Alliance Church* is by definition not a megachurch. It also is important to note that my interview participants qualify their discussions of *St. Albert Alliance Church* as characterizing a specific time, acknowledging that the church’s vision probably has continued to evolve. During the time *Next Christian Community* was still a ministry, however, *St. Albert Alliance Church* was an Evangelical church community that strongly focused on church growth. Furthermore, Birgit’s description of *St. Albert Alliance Church*’s Sunday morning service, especially in comparison to the Sunday night service, suggests that the church may have adopted some of the customer-sensitive methods characteristic for seeker churches:

The Sunday morning service at that church [St. Albert Alliance Church] was

[designed to] bring people in. You had the band up there. It was a period of time even church used to be, I think, I don't know, that was very focused on professionalism and, the music had to be just so and everything kind of was going on at the front of the church, and as the congregation you almost felt like you were not a participant in worship but a member of the audience watching something happening. And, it was almost performance orientated, whereas the service Sunday evening which was Next [Christian Community] at that time was a different vibe (Birgit, Interview 2013: 50-51).

Günther further states:

It was very much programmed. So, everything had a program. There wasn't a lot of space for organic and that was kind of across the Evangelical church back in the '90s and that. There was sort of this everything had to be programmed, right? We're gonna build these small groups. Here is the program to make friends. Here is the program to do this. Here is the program to do that. There wasn't this organic side (Günther, Interview 2015: 9).

Günther's memory of *St. Albert Alliance Church's* extensive efforts to develop and provide various programs is a memory that other early members of the congregation share.

Furthermore, it is congruent with what Roberts and Yamane describe as the “‘side doors’ of recruitment” (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 211). While most churches have small groups and programs in place, seeker-sensitive churches develop these programs more focused and with the intention to provide a wide range of social and entertainment opportunities. These programs cater to persons' needs, allowing them to develop deep, intimate relationships that are “rare in a competitive capitalist society, and feelings of alienation from the structures and from other people are common” (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 211). Additionally, those programs help to keep persons attached to and embedded within the church. The college and career group that became *Next Christian Community* may have been created precisely for this reason: to keep a younger generation of persons connected to *St. Albert Alliance Church* by offering them an alternative church service that would/could fulfil their needs.

Interestingly, during our interview, the Lead Pastor confirms this thought. *St. Albert Alliance Church's* Senior Pastor at the time wanted to build a larger sanctuary that could seat more persons. He wanted the ministry to continue to be a part of the church. Essentially, he wanted to re-integrate this group into the main service in order to justify the need for a church

building program:

It [the church building program] never got off the ground. There just wasn't the will or the strength within the congregation for it to happen. But he wanted to build the 800 seat or 600 seat, or whatever it was, sanctuary. He wanted to do the next sort of phase. [...] I don't know what Next [Christian Community] was at the time. Let's say it was 80 or 90--a hundred people or 90 people or whatever it was. That still represented some giving units, right? And so that would be, theoretically, contributors to the sanctuary or whatever. And I said no, I don't wanna do that. I wanna take that group of people and I wanna start our own church (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 20).

As the Lead Pastor's quote shows, the church building program did not take place. The congregation was not interested in expanding further and carrying the cost for such an undertaking. In this quote, the Lead Pastor also reveals that the ministry's separation process from *St. Albert Alliance Church* started due to his strong desire to create his own church community. It is, however, reasonable to assume that a re-integration of the ministry into the main service would not have been successful, even without the Lead Pastor's motivation to start his own church, due to the fact that the persons who attended the Sunday night service were not satisfied with *St. Albert Alliance Church's* main service. Instead, they were longing for a divergent worship experience. Many of my interview participants share the same opinion: *Next Christian Community* had a different vision than *St. Albert Alliance Church*; *Next Christian Community* wanted to be different. According to the Lead Pastor, the ministry had adopted a postmodern mindset that especially attracted persons who were disenfranchised with the majority of Evangelical churches at the time:

When it started it was a Gen-X service for Gen-Xers. And then it morphed a few times. By the end it was a postmodern service. So it was really speaking to a postmodern mindset. So, initially it was a bunch of eighteen to twenty-four year olds. By the end it was a little bit more late 20s, more of a postmodern mindset. And then also, some grandmas, grandpas, people in maybe their late forties, early fifties that were more kinda ex-hippies or people that were sort of disenfranchised with [the] Evangelical church. We began to really separate ourselves out by doing things like practising Lent. So, I was trying to follow a liturgical calendar, incorporate some more ancient church traditions at that point (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 21).

In this quote, the Lead Pastor describes how the ministry continuously evolved. For example,

the ministry clearly distinguished itself from the main service by bringing back church traditions more reminiscent of churches that belong to the Christendom tradition such as following a liturgical calendar and practising Lent. The Lead Pastor's description shows similarities to Gibbs's and Bolger's research. In their monograph, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (2005), they explain that Western culture has changed from modernity to postmodernity and that churches are necessarily a part of that cultural shift (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 15-26). This shift has led church communities to develop and create new forms of churches that are significantly different from previous forms. Gibbs and Bolger further argue that churches have almost no other choice than to develop different forms and approaches if they want to remain a significant part of Western culture.

Gibbs and Bolger further state that persons who were born between 1946 and 1964, the Boomer generation, were responsible for removing symbols, rituals, and images from the churches (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 21). Some church communities even use/used shopping malls as their model to build their own facilities. Roberts and Yamane quote Sargeant (2000), who finds that “[e]very aspect of the church’s facilities emulates the best of corporate America in quality, design, and style” (Sargeant, quoted in Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 209). Some churches seek to actively dissolve the boundaries “between the religious realm and the working and shopping world of suburban middle-class Americans” (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 209). Sargeant (2000) further argues that the middle-class Boomer generation expects to have choices, whether it is in their workplaces, home places, shopping options, or their religious communities.

Evangelical churches’ willingness to embrace the culture that surrounds them provides one explanation why their emphases on their church spaces had shifted and broken with the Christendom tradition. They had adapted the cultural ethos of consumerism and became producers of a religious product that needed to appeal to a specific target audience in a

competitive market place. Evidently, specifically set-aside worship spaces that include religious accoutrements were not attractive to many religious persons, especially those who belong to the middle-class Boomer generation. The persons of this generation erected church buildings mostly in suburban areas. They created buildings that reflect functionality instead of allowing the creation of a devotional mood. That their meeting spaces do not feel like churches is intentional and speaks to the megachurch and/or seeker church mentality that these churches had adopted: the vision of serving masses in huge buildings and the idea to not expose their target audiences to religious symbolism because it might make them feel uncomfortable and prevents them from entering the churches' facilities. Megachurches' and/or seeker churches' sanctuaries often are plain and more reminiscent of an auditorium, a gym, or a concert hall/theatre equipped with a stage, a sound system, and other technologies that allow them to project the sermon content, show videos, etc.

Interestingly, during our interview, Günther describes *St. Albert Alliance Church's* visual appearance as follows:

Well, 'cause St. Albert Alliance [Church] was built at the same time that there [were] some stores being built in St. Albert. But they are all this sort of boxed structure, right? And the church very much replicated that. So, church is very much--I mean, most churches will replicate architectural style at some point, right? And so, it very much represented that. And it was like, so, you need to look like a store like, you know, kind of [?] anything. And then, you know, I shouldn't criticize too much, I wasn't there to like design it or with the budget or anything of--they were trying to build like a multi-purpose space and all that. But they ended up with a big box that didn't hold any visual appeal whatsoever, right? So I loved the fact that this service [the Sunday night service that became Next Christian Community] was starting . . . (Günther, Interview 2015, 7).

Günther's observation reveals that *St. Albert Alliance Church* was in accordance with the developments at the time. It is an Evangelical church that had adopted its surrounding culture following the model of a shopping mall. Many of my interview participants share this observation and further describe *St. Albert Alliance Church's* space as a fairly simple space that includes a rectangular sanctuary with a stage at the front, hardly containing any religious symbols. Helmut, for example, says that he found *St. Albert Alliance Church's* space

reminiscent of a high school:

So, that place [St. Albert Alliance Church] was not super decorated. The sanctuary itself was, again, it was shaped in a rectangle. So, it wasn't, it wasn't all--it had a stage set up in the front like a professional type of stage. You could--we did all kinds of things there. It looked more like walking into a high school here without the stage. And it's sort of just a big room with a stage. That's kind of what it reminded me of (Helmut, Interview 2014: 13).

As I mentioned above, *St. Albert Alliance Church's* main service was performance oriented.

Members/attendees needed to look up towards the stage. This pragmatic form of doing worship primarily attracted persons of a similar background, the Boomer generation of a suburban middle-class. Persons such as Günther or Helmut, who were born after the Boomer generation (generations X and Y), often were not satisfied with the linear, word based, and abstract services usually provided by churches with a megachurch and/or seeker church mentality and rather sought a more intimate approach to spirituality. As Gibbs and Bolger write:

Conversely, sociological insights concerning Gen-Xers reveal that when the mystery, the visual, the ritual, the touch, and the beauty are removed, little is left. Thus, the modern church of their Boomer parents does not satisfy the yearnings of the under-forties, and that is why Gen-Xers increasingly participate in churches with pre-Reformation histories. Moreover, new forms of churches have restored an atmosphere of mystery and awe enhanced by the use of incense, candles, and prayer rituals. Local church leaders must seek to communicate the Christian message using rituals and the five senses to lead effectively in the twenty-first century (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 22).

Birgit's description of the Sunday night service is similar to Gibbs's and Bolger's observation.

According to her, the ministry's service was more worshipful than *St. Albert Alliance Church's* service on Sunday morning (Birgit, Interview 2013: 51). The group often used candles, incense, and other religious symbolism, stimulating persons' senses such as touching, hearing, and smelling. As I mentioned above, the Lead Pastor incorporated traditions such as practising Lent and following a liturgical calendar more reminiscent of churches that belong to the Christendom tradition. While *St. Albert Alliance Church's* pastoral staff had created the college and career group to attract younger persons and to keep them within the church, the

group essentially developed a significantly different vision of doing church incompatible with *St. Albert Alliance Church's* main service.

During my analyzing process, I sensed that *Next Christian Community*, especially in its earlier stage as a ministry at *St. Albert Alliance Church*, had adopted some characteristics reminiscent of a form of church called emerging church. This form of church developed as a counter-cultural reaction towards megachurches and/or seeker churches and is difficult to describe because it tends to be improvisational and eclectic. Furthermore, it continuously changes (Kyle, 2006: 256-257). Different from the megachurches and/or seeker churches, however, emerging churches embrace religious symbolism and actively include them into their worship experiences. Instead of being located in suburban areas and primarily focusing on church growth by catering to the needs of specific target audiences, emerging churches do not care about the size of their congregations and prefer to be located within their surrounding communities. From 2000 to 2005, Gibbs and Bolger researched emerging churches. They identified, collected, and analyzed data and found nine patterns of practice that for them form the basic definition of the term emerging church:

Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 45).

The term, emerging church, does not accurately describe *Next Christian Community's* recent identity because the congregation continued to evolve and does not identify itself as an emerging church anymore.¹⁵ The emerging churches' mindset nonetheless shaped the congregation's developments significantly. By talking to my interview participants, I learned that the ministry had adopted some of the practices characteristic for the emerging churches such as identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming the secular realm, living high communal lives, welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, and taking part in spiritual

¹⁵ In "Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition," I will continue this discussion, further explaining why *Next Christian Community* cannot be described as an emerging church.

activities. Günther states that *Next Christian Community* “definitely started there. [...] The conception of Next [Christian Community] came out of the emerging church” (Günther, Interview 2015: 21).

In his monograph, Kyle explains that megachurches and/or seeker churches primarily attract the Boomer generation, while the emerging church tradition especially speaks to the mindset of Gen-Xers and Gen-Ys (Kyle, 2006: 258). As I mentioned above, the persons who went to the ministry’s service on Sunday night were primarily older Gen-Xers and younger Gen-Ys, persons who were disenfranchised with the main service’s pragmatic form of doing church, including its extensive use of church programs, its performance-oriented worship, and its lack of social justice. Those generational differences explain why the emerging church tradition spoke to *Next Christian Community*’s early members. According to the Lead Pastor, the lack of churches in St. Albert that could fulfil these generations’ needs was one of the reasons for founding *Next Christian Community* and the reason for becoming its own entity:

We also felt like, at least I felt like, there was kind of that niche in St. Albert that people that weren’t interested in going to church and those were postmodern thinkers, they were ageing Gen-Xers, they were younger Gen-Ys, they were people that weren’t attracted to church but were really attracted to social justice causes, to doing good in the community and that kinda thing. And, I felt like there wasn’t any church in St. Albert that met that specific group of people and so it wasn’t just based on a desire to be on our own, it was based on a desire to try something, to do something different (Lead Pastor, Focus Group Interview 2012: 7).

Next Christian Community’s separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church* was inevitable once the ministry’s vision became incompatible with the main service’s vision of doing church. Instead of being a church with a ministry, they essentially were two distinctly different churches, sharing one church space. *Next Christian Community* needed to leave in order to find its own church space that could support the congregation’s particular vision of doing church. The separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church*, however, required *Next Christian Community*’s early members to answer two significant questions: ‘Where do we go from here?’ and ‘What kind of church community do we want to be?’

During their time as a ministry, *Next Christian Community's* early members experienced *St. Albert Alliance Church* as a church community that highly emphasized the importance of its church space. In accordance with its seeker-sensitive mindset, *St. Albert Alliance Church* wanted to expand its facility in order to attract and to seat more persons. This desire has led *St. Albert Alliance Church* to consider a church building program. Although this church building program, which sought to expand the sanctuary, did not take place, *St. Albert Alliance Church's* attempt to pursue such an undertaking nonetheless had an impact on *Next Christian Community's* early members, influencing their decision-making process in selecting a suitable worship space.

Birgit, for example, describes that she had been with another church community that went through a church building program in order to build a bigger church space, before she attended *St. Albert Alliance Church*. In her experience, that was financially and spiritually exhausting. It is, however, important to note that church building programs are not intrinsically negative. In our interview, Käthe reveals that she experienced a church building program that was well planned and necessary. In this case, the church needed its own space. Furthermore, the way the pastoral staff implemented and justified the program made it successful (Käthe, Interview 2015: 3). Käthe, however, also experienced a church building program similar to the one Birgit describes. According to her, it was spiritually and financially draining, not well planned, and unnecessary. In the end, it led to the separation of the congregation.

During our interview, Birgit further shares her distaste for *St. Albert Alliance Church's* megachurch mentality. She explains:

So then when St. Albert Alliance [Church] started this vision of this big megachurch, personally, we just said we're not doing that anymore. We're--we are not financing that kind of a building. And I think part of it was because, it's--it was used for two hours on a Sunday morning and sat empty all week long (Birgit, Interview 2013: 47).

In this quote, Birgit reveals that she did not support *St. Albert Alliance Church's* vision of

building a bigger space. In addition to her negative experience with church building programs in general, she rejects the idea of building spaces that do not get used on a regular basis.

Margit agrees with Birgit and finds that “it’s ridiculous that churches [are] taking all this money for God and then they pay most of it for real estate because it doesn’t accomplish the kingdom purposes that I don’t think it would make Jesus very happy, you know? He wants us to help each other and not just pay for buildings” (Margit, First Interview 2013: 3). In her quote, Margit reveals a desire for social justice. As I mentioned above, *Next Christian Community’s* early members’ devotion to social justice was one of the reasons for founding the congregation. Similar to Margit, Birgit criticizes that “churches build a big space and then all their ministry efforts are bringing people into their space. We want to have a space that we go out from as opposed to bring people in and build within” (Birgit, Interview 2013: 49).

According to Birgit and Margit, such an emphasis on the importance of having one’s own particular physical church space prevents churches from fulfilling their actual goals/tasks. In their monograph, Roberts and Yamane also discuss this issue. They find that the survival of huge organizations requires a large amount of money. “Organizational maintenance of the huge financial enterprises may lead to goal displacement so that even the core beliefs of the group may be modified” (Roberts and Yamane, 2012: 210). *Next Christian Community’s* early members adopted a mindset different from those of seeker-sensitive churches. For them it was clear that “the one thing that, as a group of people, when we were moving out of there and looking for space, the one thing we did not want to do was spend--we were not going to do a church building program” (Birgit, Interview 2013: 47).

In addition to the financial commitment, building one’s own church facility often is accompanied by dislocating the church from its surrounding community due to the fact that such an undertaking requires a certain amount of space. Therefore, many seeker-sensitive churches have no other choice than to locate themselves on the outskirts of their towns. During our interview, Horst, for example, strongly criticizes this phenomenon:

If you look at churches now, which I think is a horrible thing in my parents' days and in towns, and you could still see [it] in various older areas of Edmonton, the church was the centre of the community. Like, churches were in the city and then we started--now, if you look at churches, they are always on the outskirts. They are on the outskirts of the city or they're in an area of the city that isn't surrounded by houses and isn't within the community. It really bothered me. So, what I loved about Next [Christian Community] is that, I don't know, there is--I can't think of one new church in St. Albert that is actually in St. Albert. They're all on the outskirts or in an industrial area. Or you have to leave community to go to church (Horst, Interview 2013: 28).

Birgit also addresses this aspect:

The philosophy of Next [Christian Community] is we want to be a church in our community. We want to be Christ in our community. We don't wanna be so much about a building in our community but about people in our community. We needed, I think, we look at the building as utilitarian. We need a building to be a base but we don't want the building to be the centre of the focus and the centre of who we are (Birgit, Interview 2013: 49).

Birgit's quote reveals that *Next Christian Community* seeks to 'be Christ in our community.'

Both Horst and Birgit suggest that *Next Christian Community's* desire to be located within its surrounding community is an important aspect of the congregation's identity and its vision of doing church. Furthermore, this desire is in accordance with the emerging church characteristics *Next Christian Community* had adopted. In this quote, Birgit also finds that the building itself is a secondary necessity and should not define the congregation, minimizing the importance of having one's own physical church space.

When analyzing my interview participants' narratives, however, I sensed a tension between the importance and unimportance of having one's own physical church space. I argue that this tension comes from *Next Christian Community's* early members' shared past at *St. Albert Alliance Church*, their experiences with other seeker-sensitive churches, and their Evangelical background.

By minimizing the importance of having one's own physical church space, *Next Christian Community* is able to set itself apart from *St. Albert Alliance Church* and other seeker-sensitive churches in and around St. Albert. Since its beginning as a ministry, *Next Christian Community* separated from seeker-sensitive churches' desire to grow numerically,

and thus rejected corresponding spatial features such as the need to build large, plain facilities on the outskirts of a town and to use valuable resources for the sole purpose of maintaining such as space.

During our interview, Birgit focuses on another important aspect of *Next Christian Community's* identity that corresponds with members' aversion to large, plain facilities:

When we're kind of looking for a space and even as the church itself was developing, we--part of what we were doing is looking back into church history and finding some symbols from the historical Christian church that we were using in worship, bringing some liturgy back (Birgit, Interview 2013: 3).

In this quote, Birgit reveals that in addition to wanting to 'be Christ in our community,' *Next Christian Community's* vision of doing church also includes a longing for Christendom's liturgical and spatial traditions. Although this notion sets *Next Christian Community* further apart from *St. Albert Alliance Church* and other seeker-sensitive churches, it nonetheless conflicts with *Next Christian Community's* Evangelical background. Similar to *St. Albert Alliance Church* and other seeker-sensitive churches, congregations that hold onto the spatial tradition of Christendom emphasize the importance of their worship facilities. Their emphasis on the importance of having one's own physical church space, however, differs significantly. Instead of wanting to build large, plain facilities, for such churches it is crucial to have a dedicated holy worship space adorned with religious accoutrements in order to gather for worship.

Many Evangelicals, including members of *Next Christian Community*, however, have separated from that notion and regard God's presence as universal, finding that church can take place anywhere. This notion refers to Evangelicalism's belief in the ultimate authority of the Bible. As I mentioned above, Harold Turner finds that the New Testament deliberately does not mention particular holy sites as places of worship for Christians and that, with Christianity, a new idea of a temple developed: Christ in community, an idea that significantly shaped Evangelicals' attitude towards their worship spaces (Turner, 1979: 129). Therefore,

many Evangelical congregations tend to view their meeting spaces as a secondary necessity and claim to be mostly concerned with the practicalities of their potential meeting spaces. According to them, the worship activity itself makes church a holy experience, and not the space. This attitude sets Evangelical congregations apart from congregations that hold on to the spatial tradition of Christendom. It indicates that Evangelicals do not rely on meeting in dedicated holy spaces and/or need religious symbolism.

During our interview, Margit reveals that the reluctance of meeting in dedicated holy worship spaces also is a part of *Next Christian Community's* identity. She states:

Well, that it's the activity that you pursue and not the space itself that makes it a holy experience. So, we could have church anywhere. You could have church service outside in a park or in your living room or anywhere. It's not dependent on the space the same way that say the Catholic church. You can only have some kinds of services in a dedicated holy space. We are different than that. So, it's not that much different for us to be in a space that didn't used to be a church (Margit, First Interview 2013: 5).

In her quote, Margit explains that *Next Christian Community* would be able to meet for church in any given place such as in a park or in someone's living room. Members' worship experiences do not depend on having a specifically set-aside worship space. Rather, it is the worship activity itself that allows them to have a holy experience. According to Margit, members of *Next Christian Community* do not even rely on having their own physical facility, thereby suggesting that church exists beyond church walls. Many of my interview participants agree with Margit's point of view, and thus further minimize the importance of having one's own physical church space.

Next Christian Community's physical church space, however, incorporates members' longing for Christendom's spatial tradition. It features a specifically set-aside sanctuary, a dedicated prayer area within the sanctuary (including two prayer benches), back-lit stained glass, a variety of crosses, and diverse paintings depicting religious themes. While Christendom's spatial tradition embraces conventional/cathedral-like/specifically set-aside worship spaces adorned with religious symbols, Evangelicalism has separated from those

notions. *Next Christian Community*, an Evangelical church that adopts elements from both traditions, thus needs to put a different emphasis on its church space.

Furthermore, during our interview, the Lead Pastor explains how the former Village Landing Movie Theatre became *Next Christian Community's* worship space. His narrative reveals that finding a suitable worship facility that could support *Next Christian Community's* members' vision of doing church was, indeed, a highly important process for the congregation:

And we watched *Walk The Line*. And, with Jo--the Johnny Cash movie. [...] And I rememb--like there was like four of us in the movie theatre and the place was empty and the theatre screens were really small and, you know? I was like, I said to my mom and dad, 'that place is gonna shut down in a year or less.' So I would drive by here every three weeks, couple of weeks, and just see if it was still going. [...] And so it was in August of 2006 that I drove by and there was a sign up on the door that said, 'closed for renovations.' Conveniently, there was another sign up, and in one of the other places showing that there was a commercial real estate agent that was trying to lease out another one of the spaces in this area. So, I called him. [...] He said, 'okay, closed for renovations actually means,' cause I said to him, 'is it actually closed for renovations or are they shut down?' And he called me back and he said, 'it's not closed for renovations. The guy is looking for some cash to keep it going.' [...] I said, 'okay, let me know when it's shut down. Let me know when he is done.' Cause, I said, 'he ain't--it ain't gonna re-open.' Like it was a buck a movie [...]. I knew it wasn't gonna happen. [...] So, he called me back a couple of month later and in between that I called him probably every two weeks, 'what's going on, what's going on, what's going on, what's going on?' And he called me back and, it must have been about November, and said, 'it's available. And, the landlord's really willing to look at this with you.' And so, I got a tour and I was pumped. And then I brought however many people from the congregation wanted to show up to have a tour. And we walked in here and in our sanctuary on the far wall, as we're getting a tour, and I remember saying, 'okay, these three theatres are gonna be our sanctuary,' and coming down the wall was sewage from the restaurant. It was the most wild, disgusting thing you have ever seen, while I'm touring people from the church around here to say this is what we're gonna do (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 35-36).

The Lead Pastor's narrative describes how the former Village Landing Movie Theatre became a significant part of *Next Christian Community*. Entering this empty, run-down, and unsuccessful business, he nonetheless saw the space's potential and was able to envision it as a suitable worship space for *Next Christian Community*. He took great efforts to observe the space regularly, hoping that it soon would be available. This narrative beautifully illustrates

his strong desire for moving into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. It, however, was not the only facility that members of *Next Christian Community* considered. The congregation had looked at and had discussed other potential worship spaces. The Lead Pastor also was not the sole decision-maker in selecting a suitable worship space. Most members of *Next Christian Community* strongly supported the idea of moving into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre once it became an available possibility to them. According to the Lead Pastor, the congregational vote passed with ninety-five percent (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 36).

My interview participants confirm that they felt enthusiastic about moving into this place. Birgit, for example, reveals her excitement about “reclaiming an old kind of useless space and putting a church in there” (Birgit, Interview 2013: 34). Many of my interview participants share Birgit’s excitement about having the possibility to re-purpose a place and to turn a dead and useless facility into a vibrant church. Similar to Birgit, they talk about their visions of doing “something totally different with it” (Birgit, Interview 2013: 34). Günther, for example, remembers “immediately, when we came in here we were like, ‘oh man, there is so much we could do that we can open up to the community and have community involved and coming down to use the space’” (Günther, Interview 2015: 16). *Next Christian Community’s* early members’ looked forward to redeem a space, to turn it into their church, and to create a space that would/could welcome their surrounding community.

My interview participants’ narratives reveal that the former Village Landing Movie Theatre is, indeed, a significant space for them because it is a space that has been a part of the St. Albert community since they were teenagers and/or young adults. It is a space that reminds them of their time growing up in St. Albert.¹⁶ In his theory on cultural memory, Jan Assmann

¹⁶ Most of my interview participants identify the former Village Landing Movie Theatre as a significant part of the St. Albert community. With the exception of Käthe and Bernhard, they have visited the former Village Landing Movie Theatre before it became *Next Christian Community’s* permanent worship facility and were able to remember how it looked before its transformation. During my interviews, many of my interview participants, such as Hilde, Birgit, Margit, Horst, Günther, Falk, Helmut, and the Lead Pastor, explain the former Village Landing Movie Theatre’s various stages from opening as a successful business to becoming a second-run movie theatre to closing. In addition to remembering the former Village Landing Movie Theatre’s story, Horst, Günther, Helmut, and Falk have a unique connection to and with the space because they were

addresses such places that can trigger persons' memories. In his interview with Caroline Gaudriault, he states that "cultural memory is manifested in communication and participation in living memory, in a process which takes different forms, encompassing rituals, meals, the landscape ... In other words, it manifests itself in 'places of memory', to use Pierre Nora's phrase" (Assmann, 2013).

Assmann's concept of cultural memory, however, refers to a mythical history and not to a recent past that contemporaries share with each other (Assmann, 2008: 112). Therefore, my interview participants' memory of their time growing up in St. Albert is by definition not a cultural memory but instead a communicative memory (memory that contemporaries share with each other). Consequently, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre does not have the prerequisite to be a 'place of memory' in the way Nora and Assmann understand and/or use the term. I, however, argue that 'places of memory' do not only depend on cultural memory but also on communicative memory. In other words, the memory that contemporaries share with each other enables places to essentially become 'places of memory.'¹⁷

For example, during our interview, Margit suggests that members' fond memories of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre initially made it possible for them to imagine the space's potential. She states:

When we went in to look at it [the former Village Landing Movie Theatre] with the possibility of renting, it hasn't been used in quite a while. So, it was really dirty just because it had sat empty for maybe more than a year. And it was cold because it hasn't been heated in that much time and, you know, sort of falling apart. So, it was just kinda depressing because unused space always is. But I think we were able to see the potential in it. And a lot of us, because we'd been to movies there at some point, anybody who'd lived in St. Albert more than a while had at some point been to a movie there. I think we remembered what it was like when it was cleaner and in better repair. So, it was easier to commit to it because it had been a functioning space in our memories (Margit, Second Interview 2013:

teenagers when it was still a new and successful business. Their narratives reveal that they spent most of their time at the former movie theatre growing up in St. Albert. When reconstructing the former Village Landing Movie Theatre's story, I especially draw on their memories of and attachments to the space.

¹⁷ In my chapter, "Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition," I further draw on Assmann's concept of cultural memory (memory that refers to a mythical past) and communicative memory (memory that refers to a recent past), challenging the distinction/separation between those two ways of remembering.

21).

Similar to the Lead Pastor's narrative, Margit's quote reveals that the former Village Landing Movie Theatre was not an appealing space when it first became available to the congregation. Members were nonetheless open to and excited about the idea to transform the former movie theatre into their worship space because they were able to recall the time during which the space was a functioning business. *Next Christian Community's* members' decision to move into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, however, not only provided/provides them with a suitable worship space, it also allowed/allows the former Village Landing Movie Theatre to become, once again, a significant part of the St. Albert community.

Birgit, who belongs to the St. Albert community since thirty years, even describes the former Village Landing Movie Theatre as "a bit of an icon in the community" (Birgit, Interview 2013: 40). In her article, "Identity, Memory and Place (2012)," Kelly Baker states that "[a]n individual's sense of belonging to a place is thus a process that, embedded in personal and place histories, is framed by both imaginative and material senses of place, which, providing an impetus for collective belonging, can extend to fellow inhabitants of place" (Baker, 2012: 27). As 'a bit of an icon in the community,' the former Village Landing Movie Theatre is a space that provides *Next Christian Community's* members with both a sense of belonging to the St. Albert community and a sense of being a significant part of the St. Albert community. Accordingly, *Next Christian Community's* members not only transformed the former movie theatre into a church space for a group of believers to gather for worship but also into a community space that its surrounding community can use on a regular basis, thereby revitalizing the space's former reputation.

The Village Tree Mall, including the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, opened in St. Albert in the late 1970s. According to my interview participants, this event had a positive impact on the St. Albert community. During our conversations, they reminisce how the area looked before the Village Tree Mall was built, how the Village Landing Movie Theatre looked

when it first opened, what it meant to them, and what it represented. Horst, for example, recalls that “when this opened up as a movie theatre, it was a big deal. You had to go to Edmonton to go to a movie. Like, it was astounding that you could walk to the movie theatres now” (Horst, Interview 2013: 5). Horst, Günther, Helmut, and Falk remember when the whole area was empty and unused. They have memories of it being a field or a swamp. “And then they built this. And we were so thrilled. It was called Village Tree Mall” (Falk, Interview 2015: 23). Being there when the space first opened, my interview participants are able to recollect the impact that this space had on the St. Albert community, especially on those persons who were teenagers at the time such as Horst, Günther, Helmut, and Falk.

Next door to the movie theatre, walking through a hallway, was an arcade. On the other side of the movie theatre was and still is a pub called Village Pub. Günther describes that the mall was a “kind of crazy place. So, there is a lot of stuff going on in and around it with having the arcade and then there is a pub upstairs and that’s been there freaking forever. We used to go drinking there and then go see a movie” (Günther, Interview 2015: 4). My interview participants’ narratives surrounding the Village Tree Mall and the former Village Landing Movie Theatre carry the sound of nostalgia. When they were teenagers, they spent a lot of time in this place, watching movies with their friends and playing video games at the arcade next door. Falk remembers “coming up to the, you know, always meet my friends, we’d hang out here. Sometimes we’d get here early and play in the arcades. And then we buy our tickets and we go down there . . . ” (Falk, Interview 2015: 24). The mall including the former movie theatre, the pub, and the arcade brought excitement into the community. It provided a possibility for persons of the community to spend their leisure time.

When my interview participants talk about this space, they especially remember its glorious days. Horst recalls a time during which “it was packed. And people really liked coming here” (Horst, Interview 2013: 21). Helmut has a similar memory. He states that “it was busy. It was always full of kids. Mainly ‘cause it was, you know, the whole

neighbourhood would come here” (Helmut, Interview 2014: 2). Günther remembers that there “used to be cheap Tuesdays. So we double up. Come see a cheap movie and have cheap drinks. So, it’s been interesting to see what’s changed and the fact that that pub is still there, you know? The whole mall is gone” (Günther, Interview 2015: 5). Essentially, the entire area changed: the indoor mall closed and the space turned into a strip mall and is now called Village Landing. The Village Pub and the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, however, remained to be a part of St. Albert’s community. While the former still serves beer to regulars, the latter became *Next Christian Community*’s worship space.

Once other movie theatres opened in and around St. Albert, the reputation of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre started to shift. It became a grungy hang-out spot for teenagers. Horst states that “it was essentially just a bunch of young kids that were doing it as a party thing. I remember people drinking in the theatres themselves, right? Like that says something about this space that it became. Like you’re not gonna see kids be doing that at City Centre or anything” (Horst, Interview 2013: 20). The former Village Landing Movie Theatre turned into a second-run movie theatre with out-dated technology, twelve tiny screening rooms that were not soundproof, and a bad reputation. By the end, it was a space that had even sewage running down its walls. It was, however, the space that members of *Next Christian Community* envisioned. For them, it was/is the space that suited their congregation’s collective identity, a space of importance, a space that once used to be a significant part of the St. Albert community. As I mentioned above, by being in this particular space, members of *Next Christian Community* are not only able to ensure the space’s survival and to revitalize its positive reputation, they also are able to ensure their connection to and embeddedness within their surrounding community.

During my interviews, it also became clear that having enough parking possibilities, enough space for children’s ministry, and enough space to seat the members of the congregation are, indeed, important elements that influence a congregation’s decision-making

process in selecting a suitable worship space. The former Village Landing Movie Theatre is a facility that comes with sufficient parking possibilities. It also is a facility that has enough space. It allows *Next Christian Community* to have a nursery, several rooms for children's ministry, and space for a youth group. Furthermore, *Next Christian Community's* members were able to transform the space according to their needs. Therefore, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre satisfies *Next Christian Community's* practical necessities.

In addition to those practical elements, both *Next Christian Community's* members' strong desire to move into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre and their attachment to this particular space suggest that it was important for *Next Christian Community's* members to find a worship facility that would fit to the congregation's particular identity. During our interview, the Lead Pastor confirms that he intentionally looked for "a space that already--that fit our community. And then second of all would fit and then also emphasize or help us become what we wanted it to be" (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 35).

Before *Next Christian Community* moved into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, they rented spaces from two other churches in St. Albert. Margit describes this period:

We did move in and out of rented spaces for a couple of years. We were meeting at first at *Grace Family Church* and then at the *Salvation Army Church*. We had to do the kind of thing were you bring in music--musical instruments that we bring in. All the stuff for the kids: we had to bring in our own art supplies and craft supplies and toys and bins and stuff and we had to, you know, the chairs and tables and things were already there but everything else we were carrying up and you still make it work. So it's just more freeing to have a pla—it's like living in your own house instead of a hotel room. (Margit, First Interview 2013: 11).

In this quote, Margit addresses both the importance and the unimportance of having one's own physical church space. She describes how it was exhausting to not have a space, yet the members of the congregation still made church possible, suggesting that church community exists beyond church walls. As I discussed above, this attitude is in accordance with *Next Christian Community's* Evangelical background. Her comparison at the end of the quote,

however, shows the importance for *Next Christian Community's* members of having their own permanent physical church space because church space can support a congregation's vision of doing church, precisely because it allows security, flexibility, freedom, and the feeling of home. The German philosopher Otto Friedrich Bollnow draws on Gerardus van der Leeuw, a Dutch phenomenologist, and describes the importance of building a house/home in his monograph, *Human Space* (1963).

Van der Leeuw argues that the house of an individual is “in its origin a sanctified area” (Bollnow, 1963: 134). Van der Leeuw considers both houses and temples as sacred spaces. Bollnow elaborates on that argument and argues that buildings not only function as a point of rest in the mid of chaos but also mirror the outside world from inside (Bollnow, 1963: 137). “The world as a whole is mirrored in the house. And for this reason every house that is built, and even more so every temple that is built, is a repetition of the creation of the world, a reconstruction of the work done by the gods at the beginning of time” (Bollnow, 1963: 137). Bollnow describes the process of building a house as an activity that is in its roots “world-creating and world-sustaining, which is only possible with the use of sanctified rituals” (Bollnow, 1963: 138). If the house of an individual is, in its origin, a sacred space, then a church space, in its function as a home for a church community, naturally should be a sacred space.

For Evangelical churches like *Next Christian Community*, worship is possible in any given spaces because God is universal. I, however, argue that a significant difference exists between worship in any given space and calling a space a home. By performing extensive physical and spiritual renovations, *Next Christian Community* transformed the former Village Landing Movie Theatre into a space they call home. Margit further describes the process of how the former movie theatre became *Next Christian Community's* home:

It's like moving into a house for a family, you know. If, say, people who had lived there before you had a very different life than you, you move in and you make it your house. And it's your life and the way you do things and there might be traces

of them and the old paint or whatever, you know? Until you change it and make it yours. But we moved into a house, you know? As a church we moved into a new house and we've made it our house by living in it. We've had a lot of people come at different times who've remember it being movie theatres and they kinda have to figure out: this used to be this way and that used to be that way. So there [are] some things that happened in actual physical transformation, a physical change from what it was (Margit, First Interview 2013: 6).

Margit describes a process that is similar to the activities that Bollnow describes as world-creating and world-sustaining. Rachel Hurdley, a scholar who also has researched the meaning of homes, states that “the house and the individual interact in an ongoing construction of meaning. Homes are also a setting for the enactment of self, where the ‘otherness’ of previous owners and potential visitors must be managed – even exorcized” (Hurdley, 2006: 718). By actively transforming their church space through spiritual dedication and physical renovation and by calling their church space a home, *Next Christian Community's* members indicate that the physical church space is a space they create and a space which, in turn, sustains them.

As my discussion revealed, *Next Christian Community's* members minimize the importance of having one's own physical church space within their narratives when they seek to set themselves apart from seeker-sensitive churches and their corresponding spatial concepts. In accordance with the emerging church characteristics they had adopted, *Next Christian Community's* members want to be a smaller, more intimate church that is located within their surrounding community. As my discussion showed, these aspects of *Next Christian Community's* identity developed due to early members' shared past at *St. Albert Alliance Church* and their experiences with other seeker-sensitive churches in and around St. Albert. It led *Next Christian Community's* members to separate themselves from the notion of spending valuable financial resources on a newly-built church facility.

Next Christian Community's members also minimize the importance of having one's own physical church space, when they seek to set themselves apart from certain aspects of Christendom's spatial tradition. *Next Christian Community's* members proved that they do not rely on dedicated holy worship spaces in order to gather for worship by making church possible renting spaces from different churches in St. Albert. Furthermore, *Next Christian Community's* ability to re-purpose the former Village Landing Movie Theatre shows that sacred activities can, in fact, take place anywhere and that any given space has the potential to become a suitable worship facility for a church community.

Next Christian Community's members, however, also highlight the importance of having one's own physical worship space within their narratives. While the members of the congregation were successful in making church possible without having their own physical church space, their narratives reveal that having one's own physical church space helps a congregation to truly become what it desires to be because it allows security, flexibility, freedom, and the feeling of home. Additionally, having one's own physical church space provided/provides *Next Christian Community's* members with the opportunity to create a worship space that reflects their congregation's identity.

Accordingly, *Next Christian Community's* narrative indicates that the process of selecting and finding a suitable worship space is in itself a highly important process. For *Next Christian Community's* members, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre was/is the space that fits best to the mind-set of the congregation. It is a space that allowed/allows them to dissolve various boundaries: the boundaries between *Next Christian Community* as an Evangelical church and other Christian denominations (mixing Evangelical and Christendom traditions) and between *Next Christian Community* as a church community and its surrounding area, the St. Albert community at large ('being Christ in our community,' meeting in a space that is 'a bit of an icon in the community').

Consequently, the tension between the importance and unimportance of having one's

own physical church space is a necessary concomitant that enables *Next Christian Community's* members to separate themselves from those spatial concepts that conflict with the congregation's particular identity and its form of doing church, while simultaneously allowing them to highlight those that fit. In the following chapter, "Act II: Producing our own Space," I particularly focus on members' transformation of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, introducing *Next Christian Community's* spatial hybrid that combines the profane elements of a space of entertainment with the sacred elements of a conventional/cathedral-like/specifically set-aside worship space.

Act II: Producing our own Space

“What is sacred space?” (Wilcox, 2011: 141). Helen Wilcox begins her article, “Early Modern Sacred Space: Writing the Temple,” in the monograph, *Sacred Text, Sacred Space: Architectural, Spiritual and Literary Convergence in England and Wales* (2011), with this particular question. “The simple answer, given a context in which the idea of the sacred is generally accepted, is – everywhere. The entire creation, being a divine work, is inherently holy and thus everything that exists in the spatial dimension may be claimed as sacred” (Wilcox, 2011: 141). Wilcox, however, acknowledges that a variety of complex ideas exist that contradict/contrast this inclusive understanding of sacredness. The most significant idea suggests that particularity can mark out and mark off an ordinary space, turning it into a sacred site. Wilcox further states:

The definition of this kind of sacred space, in contrast to the inclusive vision of the divinity of ‘the earth . . . and all that therein is’, is predicated on difference and exclusivity, identifying particular locations as holy and thus, logically, holier than those that are not so perceived. These sacred spaces are set apart from ordinary or profane life, and frequently exist in opposition to it; they are perceived as other than the everyday places we inhabit. They offer the potential of safety or immunity from the world and its dangers or temptations; they promise security derived from the experience of closeness to God in an intensely sacred setting. But how is such an impression of sacredness created? What makes ground holy? (Wilcox, 2011:141-142).

According to Wilcox, sacred spaces represent separateness by being specifically set-aside. Persons experience the sacredness of these locations precisely because they signify otherness, creating a contrast to the regularity and ordinariness of other spaces persons frequent during their everyday lives.

Wilcox further discusses how an ordinary space can become a sacred space. Historically, three main procedures exist that can turn/transform a profane/ordinary space into a sacred/particular space. One way of transforming an ordinary location into a sacred site is by intervention or decree. For example, priests, ministers, and/or pastors can announce a site

such as a newly-built church space as holy by consecrating and sanctifying it. Through religious rites and ceremonies, the previously profane place becomes a holy site in which God now dwells (Wilcox, 2011: 142).

Historical events that are perceived as miracles and/or martyrdoms also can transform profane locations into sacred spaces. This transformation, however, is usually accompanied by believing that God itself appointed these locations in which the miracles and/or martyrdoms took place. Wilcox further acknowledges that the event alone is not enough for the transformation of a profane space into a holy space. The tradition of pilgrimage (continuously visiting the site and blessing it) adds to the sacredness of these locations. Another way for a profane space to become a sacred space is by association, especially then when the site addresses the borders of life and death. For example, persons perceive graveyards and shrines often as sacred because earth meets heaven here immediately and directly.

Wilcox further asks “[w]hat characterises a sacred space, then, whether created by decree, event or association?” (Wilcox, 2011: 143). Often, persons perceive sacred spaces as empty, quiet, silent, peaceful, and enclosed spaces. Wilcox, however, argues that sacred spaces are not just simply empty, quiet, peaceful, and silent. In other words, they are not static. Instead, sacred spaces are complex, living entities that respond to and rely on those who enter them and bring them to life (Wilcox, 2011: 143).

Wilcox’s discussion surrounding the creation of sacred spaces and their characteristics, including how persons perceive them, shares aspects of both Durkheim’s theory and Bollnow’s and Hasse’s phenomenological perspective. Similar to Durkheim, she discusses sacred spaces as spaces that represent otherness, an otherness that needs to be maintained. Furthermore, she finds that one way of developing sacred spaces takes place through rites and ceremonies that only specific persons can perform. In addition to Wilcox, Durkheim suggests that the development of sacredness is based on a group’s shared understanding of sacredness, including their knowledge of the according rites and ceremonies. This aspect is important

because it legitimizes the spatial transformation. Similar to Bollnow's and Hasse's phenomenological perspective, she explains how persons perceive sacred spaces, describing their atmospheres as quiet, silent, peaceful, etc. Furthermore, she acknowledges that sacred spaces as much as other spaces are never static but instead active, depending on those who produce them (*Akteur*) and those who use them (*Patheur*).

Interestingly, Wilcox's concept of sacred spaces as complex, living entities comes from her interpretation of R. S. Thomas's poem "The Church." In this poem, Thomas, a Welsh priest-poet from the late twentieth century, describes his experiences of being in a conventional/cathedral-like/specifically set-aside church building. According to him, it is a space that creates awe, peacefulness, and mystery but also doubt and discomfort. According to Wilcox, Thomas's "troubled poem of sacred space turns on the matter of where 'faith' is to be found and reasserted" (Wilcox, 2011: 145). Furthermore, it brings "to the surface some of the many issues concerning the complex subject of sacred space" (Wilcox, 2011: 145).

For Wilcox, Thomas's poem was most likely a response to George Herbert's collection of lyric poems called *The Temple* (published in 1633). Herbert, a Welsh-born poet and Anglican priest, especially worked on this poem collection after he entered priesthood in 1629, focusing on the spatial features of church spaces and their effects. During this time, however, the emphasis on sacred spaces had shifted as a consequence of the Reformation. As a result of the Reformation, particular sacred spaces such as church buildings lost their significance. Instead, many Protestants emphasized the sacredness of the biblical text itself. Wilcox suggests that it is possible to see the doctrinal controversies, especially in early modern England, as "the rivalry between sacred text and sacred space, or Calvinist word versus Catholic sacramental presence" (Wilcox, 2011: 147).

Wilcox uses Herbert's poem collection in order to argue that the relationship between these two opposing traditions was not nearly as polarized and/or as simple as some scholars may suggest. According to her, his poem collection can be understood as a creative dialogue

between sacred space and sacred text, a dialogue that seeks to reconcile the two opposing traditions. After analyzing and discussing the content of Herbert's poem collection, she concludes the following:

In this poetic setting, the sacred text functions as space and the sacred space is given textual form; the two principles at the heart of this essay collection are here mirrors and metaphors of each other. In the Christian tradition, this reconciling of spatial and textual experience, the material and the verbal, draws its inspiration from Christ himself, whose incarnate body is referred to in the Bible as the new 'temple' and whose being is understood as the Word. In the context of seventeenth-century England, this poetic merging of the opposing traditions of the Reformation – *The Temple* as both sacred space of worship and sacred text of the Word – confirms the radical and reconciliatory achievement of George Herbert (Wilcox, 2011: 162).

While Herbert's poem collection may have been an attempt to show that sacred space and sacred text are strongly intertwined and hardly are separable, Thomas's poem still captures the uncertainty about the value/necessity of sacred spaces, an uncertainty that possibly developed as a result of the Reformation. Furthermore, this uncertainty still is prevalent. I begin this chapter on the transformation of *Next Christian Community's* church space by introducing Wilcox's interpretation of Thomas's and Herbert's poems because their contents, despite being written centuries ago, capture an ambivalence surrounding sacred spaces that is also embedded within *Next Christian Community's* members' narratives, and thus is reflected within their church space.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, *Next Christian Community* is an Evangelical congregation. Therefore, its members believe in the authority of the Bible, rejecting in many ways the idea/necessity to meet in such particular sacred spaces. Due to the fact that the Reformation gave birth to Evangelicalism and shaped this movement, Evangelicals, such as members of *Next Christian Community*, often resemble a similar attitude towards Catholicism's liturgical and spatial practices as did the Reformists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite the efforts of the Reformists, the longing for sacred spaces, however, never vanished and further shaped the facilities Christians use in order to gather for

worship (Turner, 1979: 205).

From the 1960s onwards, new paradigm churches, including seeker churches and megachurches, started another attempt to remove any form of religious symbolism from their worship facilities. Interestingly, for some scholars, new paradigm churches represent a second reformation. Kyle, however, rejects this idea, arguing that “[t]he contemporary reform of evangelicalism focuses on priorities and methods of delivery, not doctrine” (Kyle, 2006: 223). According to him, “[t]he changes brought by the new paradigm churches do not run nearly as deep as those wrought by Luther, Calvin, and others” (Kyle, 2006: 223). New paradigm churches were/are nonetheless extremely successful in building facilities that neither look nor feel like cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church spaces despite the fact that their motivation primarily came/comes from a desire to grow numerically and not from a desire to challenge religious traditions.

Next Christian Community’s narrative, however, is another example that proves that there still is a longing for sacred spaces even in contemporary Canadian society. The narratives of my interview participants reveal, like Thomas’s poem, both a fascination with and a disregard for cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside worship spaces. With the survival of sacred spaces, the uncertainty that surrounds them seems to survive as well. Accordingly, the church space *Next Christian Community’s* members created seeks to be both a specifically set-aside sacred space that encourages worship activities and a profane space that encourages leisure activities. In other words, *Next Christian Community* created a spatial hybrid that seems to reconcile the inclusive understanding of sacredness with its contrasting idea – the development of a particular set-aside sacred space that represents otherness. Therefore, *Next Christian Community’s* spatial creation may be an attempt to reconcile aspects of Evangelicalism’s spatial tradition with Christendom’s spatial traditions, an attempt that shares similarities with Wilcox’s interpretation of Herbert’s poem collection.

In this chapter, I particularly focus on *Next Christian Community’s* transformation

process of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, providing a description of the space's outside and its inside. Furthermore, I introduce and discuss three particular decorative objects: two mural pieces that belong together, the stained glass, and the handprint painting. According to my interview participants, these are the decorative objects that are highly important to *Next Christian Community* and to most of its members. I argue that these three pieces add to both the sacredness of *Next Christian Community's* church space by being overtly Christian artifacts but also to its homey atmosphere by being decorative items that capture aspects unique to *Next Christian Community's* own history.

In this chapter, I primarily draw on Durkheim's theory and on Bollnow's and Hasse's phenomenological perspective in order to argue that *Next Christian Community's* members' spatial arrangements, including its decorative objects, produced a combination of church space, home space, and community space in which the sacred and the profane can coexist, in which the two opposing spatial traditions can come together. While this argument challenges certain aspects of Durkheim's theory (the theory that the sacred and the profane need to maintain a distance), I nonetheless agree with him when he highlights the importance of the collective and when he understands religion as a social phenomenon.

Bollnow's and Hasse's phenomenological perspective makes it possible to interpret *Next Christian Community's* spatial features and arrangements, including how congregation members and non-congregation members perceive the space's atmosphere. Furthermore, the phenomenological perspective allows me to compare the perceived atmosphere of *Next Christian Community's* worship space to cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church spaces and other spaces such as movie theatres. By doing so, I argue that *Next Christian Community's* church space lacks clarity and occasionally confuses and/or challenges congregation members as well as non-congregation members.

Superliminare
George Herbert

Thou, whom the former precepts have
Sprinkled and taught, how to behave
Thyself in Church; approach, and taste
The Church's mystical repast.

Avoid profaneness; come not here :
Nothing but holy, pure, and clear,
Or that which groaneth to be so,
May at his peril further go.

Bus number 201 brings me from downtown Edmonton to the Village Transit Station, the main park-and-ride lot for St. Albert Transit commuters, into the midst of the Village Landing strip mall. By regularly joining *Next Christian Community* for its Sunday services, the Village Landing strip mall became a familiar place to me.

Its front area includes businesses such as Rickey's, Save-On-Food, Dollarama, and Shoppers Drug Mart. In the back, where I get off the bus, is a large parking lot and also *Next Christian Community's* entrance. Next to the Village Pub, a marquee is the only evidence that a movie theatre once operated in this space. Instead of advertising the latest movies, it now reads 'Church Service Sundays at 10:00am.'¹⁸ As the picture below illustrates, the marquee that announces *Next Christian Community's* Sunday service and the congregation's sign above the marquee are the only indicators that this space now is a church.

¹⁸ On the 15th of September, 2013, I regularly joined *Next Christian Community's* Sunday services as a participant observer. Back then, *Next Christian Community's* worship service started at 10:30am. On the 20th of October, 2013, *Next Christian Community* changed the start of its service from 10:30am to 10:00am. Furthermore, the marquee and the sign in the picture got replaced by *Next Christian Community's* new sign in November 2014.



Photograph 1 by Janine Muster, taken on the 20th of July 2014

In his monograph, *Was Räume mit uns machen – und wir mit ihnen: Kritische Phänomenologie des Raumes* (2014), Jürgen Hasse argues that church buildings' significant exterior design ensures Christianity's visibility within a city. Church buildings' particular visual appearances include symbols such as angels and crosses that often are attached to their outside walls (Hasse, 2014: 297). It instantly sets them apart from other buildings that also belong to a Western city's landscape such as condominiums, banks, schools, shopping malls, and movie theatres (Hasse, 2014: 298).

Hasse further finds that the outside and the inside of a space often correspond with each other, highlighting the importance of spatial arrangements. For example, church spaces suggest, already from their outside, that they seek to bring Christian mythologies to life. Thereby, they indicate a particular atmosphere that surrounds them. The display of religious objects inside these spaces further help persons to immerse themselves in the atmosphere that these spaces seek to provoke (Hasse, 2014: 298). Hasse also highlights the effectualness of non-tangible impressions. According to him, a space's size (its height and width), the play of

light and shadow within a space, its acoustics, and its colours further influence its atmosphere. In other words, non-tangible impressions provoke a sensuous world of experiences that is noticeable within one's body (bodily communication through spatial arrangements). They have the actual *raumschaffende Macht* (space-creating power), directly communicating a space's atmosphere in such a way that persons can actually perceive it, feel it (Hasse, 2014: 298). The particular spatial arrangements within a church space often include a high ceiling, wide openness, wooden pews, stained glass windows, and religious objects. Those spatial features, including the non-tangible impressions they create, provoke an atmosphere within the space that persons often describe as empty, quiet, peaceful, silent, and occasionally as uncomfortable, characteristics that are associated with a devotional mood/sacredness.

Due to their particular spatial arrangements and what they provoke, Hasse finds that church buildings are, in fact, heterotopian spaces, referring here to Michel Foucault (Hasse, 2014: 298). According to Foucault, heterotopian spaces are real places and "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, 1967: 3). Heterotopian spaces are real spaces that are different from all the other sites that they address or reflect. They represent otherness. For example, the sublime stillness that persons can experience when they enter a church building creates a strong contrast to the noisy city outside (Hasse, 2014: 300). Furthermore, due to their specific architectural arrangements and their goal to bring Christian mythologies to life, church buildings can become places that effectively dissolve the conflict between societal realities and Christian virtues, 'a kind of effectively enacted utopia.'

Hasse's interpretation of church buildings' visual appearance, the atmosphere they seek to provoke, and their purpose is congruent with my own understanding of church buildings. It explains my emotions/assumptions/confusions, when I first visited *Next Christian Community*. I got off the bus, walked across the parking lot, and then stood in front

of *Next Christian Community's* physical church space. It instantly revealed itself as a space that lacks the visual features of those church buildings I grew up with in Germany. Rather, *Next Christian Community's* church space blends into the strip mall's architecture. It hardly identifies itself as a particular religious space. Built as a movie theatre, I assumed that the outside of the space would correspond with its inside. I expected odd rectangular rooms, movie theatre seats, popcorn machines, and silver screens. Due to the fact that movie theatres' spatial arrangements differ significantly from those of particular religious spaces, I assumed that the former Village Landing Movie Theatre would not provoke the same sensuous world of experiences that a walk through a cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church space could provoke. The unconventional location, however, corresponds to *Next Christian Community's* Evangelical background.

Entering *Next Christian Community's* church space, it became clear that my assumptions were neither correct nor incorrect. Instead, the ambiguous nature of *Next Christian Community's* church space unfolded itself while I walked through the space. Inside, the box office has become a small kitchen, and where persons once waited in line, there are now several couches. On the left side (having the entrance door in the back), a large corner sofa sits alongside a bookshelf that primarily features Christian based literature. In front of the couch is a small couch table. Between the couch and the bookshelf is a candleholder. On the right side (having the entrance door still in the back), is another corner sofa that provides more seating possibilities. Above the entrance door, painted in large, black letters, it reads 'Go and Be the Church.'

Religious artefacts decorate *Next Christian Community's* entrance area, replacing the movie posters that once hung on those walls. Behind the couch on the left side, attached to the wall, is a large wooden cross. On the wall above the couch on the right side, is a painting with no obvious religious connection depicting a sun or a moon framed on either side by two ornamental metal crosses. As I descend the large, steep stairs, I see two pieces that belong

together, depicting Old and New Testament narratives. On the left side, along the stairs, is an escalator that also leads down to the main area. It has stopped working before *Next Christian Community* moved into this space.

At the bottom of the stairs is the large main room, with a central counter. Once a concession stand, it still hosts a popcorn and a pop machine. Furthermore, the space behind the counter now functions as a kitchen. It includes a fridge, a sink, an oven, a coffee machine, a water cooker, and a microwave. Pots, pans, plates, cups, cutlery, etc. fill the pantry units. Above the microwave, a screen is attached to the wall that circles through *Next Christian Community's* advertisements such as upcoming events, volunteer possibilities, Sunday service hours, etc. Above the counter top, hanging from the ceiling, is a blue sign that reads, printed in white letters, 'Sanctuary/Washrooms.' Underneath the writing is an arrow that indicates the location of these facilities. On Sundays, *Next Christian Community's* members use the counter area to serve coffee, tea, and juice before and after worship, socializing and interacting with each other. On other days, they use this space to cook meals for the Snug program.

Several smaller renovated rooms are off of the main one. A youth room hosts a video game console and an air hockey table. The nursery room is next to a newly renovated studio with grey parquet floor and mirrors along the main wall. *Next Christian Community* rents out the studio for various fitness courses. A single theatre remains, including the original theatre seats and the original silver screen. *Next Christian Community* rents it out for birthday parties or business presentations. The rooms set aside for kids' church feature couches, biblical paintings, kids' paintings, toys, and art supplies. Another room hosts a large, colourful play structure with little trace of religious influence. It also is particularly popular for birthday party rental.

Similar to the individual rooms, *Next Christian Community's* main social area (the large main room with the counter) is not bare. Instead, it features chairs and tables for persons to sit on and mingle. Further absorbing the details of the main social area, I see framed

prayers and crosses that hang alongside advertisements for social justice organizations. Some of the paintings that decorate the main area's walls, depict houses that are about to collapse. Evidently, they are built on crumbling foundations. Other paintings depict conventional looking church buildings or capture themes/items that I am unable to identify. A new addition to *Next Christian Community's* main social area is the large poster depicting a mural mosaic called 'King of Kings.' The artist painted small panels that depict important/famous/well-known kings, queens, and leaders throughout centuries such as Cleopatra, Bismarck, Hitler, etc. Put together, those panels form the face of Jesus. Standing closely in front of the mural mosaic poster, I can clearly identify the individual panels, each of them depicting a different leader. Stepping further away from the mural, the content of the individual panels and the boundaries between them begin to dissolve, forming the face of Jesus.

The sanctuary is the space within *Next Christian Community's* facility that is specifically set-aside for religious worship. Once three separate cinemas, the sanctuary was the first room to be renovated. The floor slants forward, and several rows of seating face downward to a stage area, where the worship band performs and the Lead Pastor delivers sermons. Above the stage is a stained glass cross, framed on either side by two stained glass pictures. The pictures depict various churches – some of which are *Next Christian Community's* former worship spaces – and other landmarks in its city. Film reel runs through two of the four pictures, referring to the former use of *Next Christian Community's* church space. The front of the stage is adorned with electric candles and artificial flowers, and to the left side of the stage is a large baptismal tank. The walls of the sanctuary feature several paintings, one of which depicts three crosses at sunrise. Congregation members produced this painting by putting their coloured hands onto the canvas. In the back left corner, dividers section off a small space for private prayer. This space includes a large wooden cross, tables with candles, and two prayer benches.

The decoration of *Next Christian Community's* physical church space suggests that the

congregation highly values and embraces aspects of Christendom's spatial tradition. Furthermore, during my interviews, it became clear that *Next Christian Community's* members are attached to and fascinated with the particular spaces Christendom tradition produced/produces, those spaces that provoke, according to Hasse, a particular atmosphere different from most other spaces within a city. Helmut's description corresponds with Hasse's discussion. During our interview, he states:

So, I think there is a lot of--I think there is something to be said about going into an old church that was built as just a church. There is something unique about that look inside that sort of gives a focus, I think, you know? If you go in some of the older Catholic churches or the older (?) churches where they have stained glass and they have wood pews and they have that sort of feeling of being old, right? It does bring on a different kind of sensation. I don't know if I would do a wedding here [at Next Christian Community's church space], you know? (Helmut, Interview 2014: 7).

In this quote, Helmut addresses the specific architectural elements that clearly identify certain spaces as church buildings such as wooden pews and stained glass windows. For him, buildings that are specifically built for a community of believers to gather for worship are unique because their spatial arrangements create a particular atmosphere. Helmut's thought not only is congruent with Hasse's discussion, it also captures an aspect of Turner's findings. In his monograph, *From Temple to Meeting House*, he acknowledges "the hunger of the human spirit for a sacred place instinct with the Divine Presence" (Turner, 1979: 258). According to him, this longing for sacred places has been responsible for the repeated revival of the *domus dei* in Christian history, a longing that is still prevalent.

In my previous chapter, I argued that *Next Christian Community* adopted aspects of the emerging church tradition, a tradition that intentionally brought back some of Christendom's liturgical traditions such as the use of incense, incorporating religious symbols into the worship experience, and/or following a liturgical calendar. The emerging churches, however, did not necessarily also bring back Christendom's spatial tradition. Instead, emerging churches seek to overcome the opposition between secular and sacred by "making all of life

sacred, [representing] the interaction of kingdom and culture” (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 66).

Therefore, many emerging churches choose to meet in coffee shops, bars, and clubs, intending to bring the church to the persons that surround them. This attitude towards sacredness fits to an Evangelical background. Furthermore, it is similar to Wilcox’s discussion on the inclusive understanding of sacredness. Christendom’s spatial tradition, however, relies on the maintenance of a distance between the sacred and the profane; its particular religious spaces keep this distance alive.

While *Next Christian Community*’s members argue towards the inclusiveness of sacredness, they also are fascinated with the spaces that Christendom’s traditions produced. Accordingly, *Next Christian Community*’s physical church space is a former movie theatre that nonetheless includes aspects of the *domus dei*. Due to the fact that *Next Christian Community*’s form of doing church not only includes a fascination with Christendom’s spaces but also seeks to dissolve the boundaries between the congregation and its surrounding community, *Next Christian Community*’s members needed to develop a spatial combination that would allow them to create a sense of congregational inclusion as well as welcome new potential members. In other words, the members of the community needed to create a space that would allow them to balance both the sacred and the profane. This spatial combination, however, requires compromises and occasionally jeopardizes the clarity of *Next Christian Community*’s church space.

My descriptions of the space’s outside and its inside reveal that the outside of *Next Christian Community*’s church space does not accurately reflect its inside. Although one can get an idea of the space’s character/purpose/intention by entering it, its inside remains challenging. While the space features a variety of objects that are connected to Christianity, it also has the casual warmth of a profane space. Furthermore, the space still includes items that are reminders of its former use as a movie theatre such as the popcorn machine, the pop machine, and the one room that remained to be a functioning movie theatre. Due to those

spatial elements, *Next Christian Community's* church space is an unclear space, at times even for its own members.

One example comes from my interview situation with Helmut. I interviewed Helmut on the last Sunday in November 2014, a time during which members of the community get together after the service to share a meal. They call this event Soup/Snack Sunday. While we were talking in the entrance area, we could hear *Next Christian Community's* members laughing and having conversations downstairs in the main social area. Kids were screaming and running through the entire facility. One of the kids even hid underneath the couch that we were using. Persons continued to come up in order to leave, interrupting our interview in order to say goodbye. Helmut's thoughts surrounding the particular atmosphere of specifically set-aside church buildings emerged out of this interview situation. At that moment, neither Helmut nor I felt that our interview took place in a space that, despite its welcoming atmosphere, also intends to develop and to transmit sacredness.

Helmut finds, in accordance with his Evangelical background, that "church by definition [...] doesn't have to be a physical space. It's the physical space is where you go but it isn't about the physical space that creates the church dynamic" (Helmut, Interview 2014: 7). He nonetheless understands the particular atmosphere that cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings provoke. Most importantly, Helmut's quote reveals that the intention of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings is clear. According to him, they allow and encourage visitors to focus on the presence of the Divine. According to him, *Next Christian Community's* church space, however, lacks that clear intention. In his quote, Helmut indicates that there is a difference between *Next Christian Community's* church space and those church buildings that are specifically designed for a church community to gather for worship. He states:

I mean, but I also know that's the purpose that I am going there for, that I'm coming here for [to Next Christian Community's church space]. So, for me, yeah, for somebody walking in from the outside of the world, they might walk in and

go, ‘oh, this looks like a movie theatre,’ and then maybe wouldn’t even understand until they got downstairs and saw some literature about our church that this was a church. It’s quite possible they would just mistake it for any other, you know? Because of the fact that it’s not stained glassed and, you know, that kind of thing. It’s not super obvious (Helmut, Interview 2014: 17).

In this quote, Helmut suggests that outsiders who walk into *Next Christian Community’s* church space may not understand the space’s intention, challenging their perception of the space. During our interview, Marianne also refers to cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. Furthermore, she shares Helmut’s experiences. After I ask her what she likes about *Next Christian Community’s* church space, she provides the following answer:

I like that it’s a re-purposed space. Yeah, that it’s a bit different, I guess. I think it helps people maybe that are new to the faith not maybe feel the oppression that they might in a more traditional building or the discomfort or the distrust of a traditional kind of, type of religious setting. So, I think it might kind of help open people’s mind to look at Christianity in a fresh way. And so, I like that about it that it’s non-conventional, I guess. And then, I guess what something that did take me a little bit of getting used to is that I do love older architecture. And I do really love the look of old churches and kind of that sense of awe. So, for me initially the same thing I liked about it was also very close to the same thing that I didn’t like about it. That it didn’t really feel to me like a church initially because it was so different. And I miss kinda, you know, just the architecture of a traditionally built church. But I also see the benefit of having this unconventional space (Marianne, Interview 2015: 1).

In this quote, Marianne compares *Next Christian Community’s* physical church space directly with cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. Similar to Helmut, she addresses the atmosphere of these traditional church buildings and the sensuous world of experiences that their specific architectural arrangements provoke. Similar to Helmut, she does not find the same sensation within *Next Christian Community’s* church space. According to her, the community’s space is an unconventional space different from other church buildings.

In her quote, Marianne also discusses the negative and the positive aspects of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. According to her, these spaces simultaneously provoke the feeling of discomfort and the feeling of awe. In her

experience, the feeling of discomfort discourages persons from entering cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. The feeling of awe, however, draws persons into these buildings. Marianne's uncertainty about the existence/use/necessity of sacred spaces is reminiscent of Thomas's experiences captured in his poem "The Church." Similar to him, Marianne suggests that the feeling of discomfort and the feeling of awe are both aspects that belong to the particular atmosphere of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. As I mentioned above, this uncertainty might come from the Reformation that challenged Catholicism's attitude towards particular religious spaces. Furthermore, such a negative perception of specifically set-aside church buildings was one of the reasons why Reformists and then later new paradigm churches removed religious symbolism from their facilities. While the first created the 'Protestant Plain Style,' the later erected worship facilities that share more similarities with auditoriums, gyms, and concert halls than with traditional church buildings.

In contrast to their Evangelical background, members of *Next Christian Community* do not want to remove religious symbols and objects unique to Christianity from their church space. It belongs to their form of doing church and therefore to their identity as a church community. Creating and/or meeting in a discomforting environment, however, also would disagree with the community's form of doing church. *Next Christian Community's* ideal church space therefore seeks to provoke the feeling of awe, while removing the discomforting aspects that persons often experience when they enter cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. During our interview, the Lead Pastor states:

I mean there needs to be sense of awe in who God is. But in the physical environment I want you to feel tranq--peace, tranquillity, shalom, warmth, wellness, safe. I don't want you to walk into a place and go, 'this place makes me uncomfortable.' I want you to walk in and go, 'this place makes me feel safe' (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 40-41).

In this quote, the Lead Pastor reveals that he wants persons to feel safe, warm, comfortable, and at ease when they enter *Next Christian Community's* church space. Interestingly, the

feelings of warmth, comfort, security, and ease are the hallmarks of homeyness.

In his monograph, *Human Space*, Bollnow argues that the main characteristic of a home is its homeyness (*Heimlichkeit*), its ability to create the feelings of warmth, comfort, security, and ease. As I mentioned in my previous chapter, Bollnow finds that homes are in their roots sacred. He, however, also argues that church spaces, buildings that were erected as designated temples, are in their roots not homey, “since it is intended to put us in a devotional mood” (Bollnow, 1963: 142). According to him, a homey atmosphere would interfere with and/or discourage the development of a devotional mood. My description of *Next Christian Community*’s church space, however, reveals that the congregation’s space features religious symbols (helpful to put persons into a devotional mood) in a warm, inviting environment (helpful to create feelings of warmth, comfort, security, and ease). While *Next Christian Community*’s spatial arrangements compromise Bollnow’s finding, they also contribute to the ambiguity of *Next Christian Community*’s church space. I further draw on Bollnow’s definition of homeyness in order to show that members of *Next Christian Community* created a homey, inviting, and welcoming but nonetheless challenging space.

As part of his definition of homeyness, Bollnow finds that “one must be able to see that the room has been lovingly cared for” (Bollnow, 1963: 144). Although disorder and neglect often are unsettling, an extreme orderliness also feels uncomfortable because visitors may be afraid to disturb the order of the space’s particular set-up. Therefore, the space should feel like a space that is lived in, providing certain signs of life. *Next Christian Community*’s church space balances disorder and orderliness. While the entire space is clean and cared for, the rooms set aside for kids’ church openly display toys and art supplies, indicating that persons use and play in these rooms.

For Bollnow, another indicator of homeyness is that “the furniture in the room must also show that it has been lovingly chosen and cared for” (Bollnow, 1963: 144). He describes that large bare spaces appear unfriendly and uninviting. “The furniture must fill the space in

such a way that the impression is neither of emptiness nor of overcrowding” (Bollnow, 1963: 144). He describes how seating possibilities where persons are able to stretch out are important in order to develop a comfortable atmosphere. Bollnow further suggests that spaces also need to transmit warmth in order to feel homey (Bollnow, 1963: 144). As my description of *Next Christian Community’s* space reveals, the members of the community have carefully chosen their interior. The walls of their entire church space are not bare but decorated with a variety of colourful paintings. The colour of their walls transmits warmth and comfortableness. Attached to the walls throughout the entire facility are small lamps. Their light contributes to the warmth of *Next Christian Community’s* church space. Furthermore, the size of the building is small compared to many other churches, creating opportunities for close conversation. Members of the community also have incorporated many seating possibilities such as padded chairs and comfortable couches in the entrance area, the main social area, and in the individual rooms as well as rows of padded chairs in the sanctuary. These seating possibilities further contribute to the warmth of *Next Christian Community’s* church space, provoking a comfortable environment that allows/invites/welcomes persons to mingle. Consequently, *Next Christian Community’s* members not only socialize and interact with each other in the main social area, in the entrance area, and in the individual rooms but also in the sanctuary before and after service, feeling warm, comfortable, and at ease in the various areas of their church space.

Horst, for example, addresses *Next Christian Community’s* comfortable seats in the sanctuary. Furthermore, he compares them to the wooden pews that often belong to the interior of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. During a social justice conference, it took place in a conventional church building in Edmonton; Horst experienced the sensation of sitting in wooden pews. He remembers: “So you couldn’t--if you went on the edge, it’s, like, ‘oh, look, I’m sitting on the edge of a knife’” (Host, Interview 2013: 13). He further states that he has a friend who “loves Next [Christian Community]. But

he is like, ‘the only thing I don’t like it’s, like, the seats are too comfy. You have to be uncomfortable in the presence of God.’ I’m like, ‘oh man, he would have liked [that church]’” (Horst, Interview 2013: 14).

In this quote, Horst confirms that *Next Christian Community’s* seating possibilities enable persons to feel comfortable in the sanctuary. His quote, however, also reveals that not everybody appreciates the sanctuary’s homey environment. Horst’s friend’s distaste for *Next Christian Community’s* comfortable seats in the sanctuary is congruent with Bollnow’s finding: a homey atmosphere discourages the development of a devotional mood. As Horst’s quote shows, the feeling of being uncomfortable still belongs to some persons’ religious experiences. In other words, some religious persons not only rely on but also value the discomfoting aspects of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. It helps them to focus on the presence of the Divine. As I mentioned above, *Next Christian Community’s* members do not rely on and/or value the discomfoting aspects of cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings. For them, it is possible to worship in a comfortable environment. A comfortable environment, however, may not necessarily appeal to all religious persons, occasionally preventing them from joining the congregation.

During our interview, Helmut also addresses the sanctuary’s homeyness, including further spatial challenges that its homey atmosphere provokes. He explains that “over the years a lot of us just sort of hang out here [in the sanctuary]. Afterwards [after the service], if we don’t feel like being part of the mass group and getting a coffee but talking about something a little more private, they’ll hang out in here” (Helmut, Interview 2014: 62). During our conversation, Helmut, however, also acknowledges the sanctuary’s particularity. For him, it is a specifically set-aside space within *Next Christian Community’s* facility, allowing persons to focus on their faith (Helmut, Interview 2014: 45). Accordingly, the sanctuary features a variety of religious objects (prayer benches, stained glass, crosses in various forms, the baptismal tank), indeed, helpful to put persons into a devotional mood.

Other spatial arrangements in the sanctuary (comfortable seats, small size, colourful pictures, warm lighting), however, provoke a homey atmosphere that encourages persons to simply ‘hang out.’ Although members value the comfortableness of their sanctuary, socializing in this particular space after service may distract persons from pursuing religious activities such as praying privately, sharing personal issues with the pastoral staff, etc. Thus the Lead Pastor occasionally asks members to leave the sanctuary and to socialize in other areas of *Next Christian Community’s* church space after service. By doing so, he does not only prevent casual mingling in the sanctuary after service, he also reasserts the sanctuary’s main purpose, resolving the challenge that *Next Christian Community’s* spatial combination provokes.

By regularly attending *Next Christian Community’s* Sunday service and other congregational events, I was able to further observe how its members interact in their church space, feeling comfortable, secure, and at ease. This observation became especially apparent during my interview situations. One example was my interview with Helmut during which members shared a pleasant meal with each other in *Next Christian Community’s* church space. Persons talked and laughed loudly. Nobody prevented their kids from running through the space, screaming, and playing hide and seek. My interview with Horst provides another example. He placed himself on top of the coffee counter and invited me to join him. Most of our conversation took place sitting on top of the coffee counter. By doing so, Horst expressed that he feels comfortable at *Next Christian Community’s* church space, treating the space as if it was his home. Günther addresses this thought in our interview, explaining *Next Christian Community’s* members’ behaviour, including his own, as follows:

The other thing, like, I really love the space [the former Village Landing Movie Theatre]. I love--it’s a very relaxed space. Like I feel, like, when I walk down into it, I don’t need to change who I am or behave differently. Like there is a place just to be. And so, that’s something has always drawn me into the space is that’s--it doesn’t got that sense of rigidness to it that I’ve experienced at some churches where you walk in and know that you have to sort of change behaviour, right? Like this is how--when I come down here, you feel free just to be you. And I see it in people come to our church, especially those who call it their church home, who have gotten used to the space. They’re very relaxed in it. And there is not that

sense of here is my sort of pre-church person and my post-church person. I can just show up and be. And so, it's a very open space that way (Günther, Interview 2015: 2).

In this quote, Günther suggests that persons feel obligated to change their behaviour such as wearing a head cover, speaking quietly, walking slowly, and avoiding certain vocabulary when they enter certain church buildings. *Next Christian Community's* church space, however, allows members to come as they are. The space's character suggests that they are not inclined to change their behaviour but instead allows them to feel comfortable, to feel at home.

Helmut agrees with Günther when he compares *Next Christian Community's* worship activities to other churches. He finds that "most churches want to fit the sanctuary, I've noticed. You may get shushed a little bit, you know? Like, you are being too loud kind of a thing. Here, you'll hear tons of interaction and laughter and stuff" (Helmut, Interview 2014: 62). Helmut's quote reveals that *Next Christian Community's* members often do not even feel obligated to change their behaviour inside the sanctuary during their worship activities. In this quote, he further confirms that the homey atmosphere in *Next Christian Community's* church space is not necessarily restricted to a specific area and occasionally not even to a specific time. Rather, it is an integral part of *Next Christian Community's* particular form of doing church manifested in the congregation's particular form of church space.

Bollnow also states that "the dwelling becomes the expression of the individual who dwells in it, a piece of this individual which has become a space" (Bollnow, 1963: 145). Bollnow finds that the objects in a space "must be melted into the life of the dweller by the practice of being looked after" (Bollnow, 1963: 145). The space shifts from being cold and foreign to becoming warm and familiar, once persons live in the space and use its objects. "One cannot therefore buy a ready-made room setting, and what couples acquire at the beginning of a marriage does not have to be tasteless in all cases, but it remains strange and cold until, after long use, by gradual acquisition of new objects and abandonment of old ones, or even through simple wear and tear, it slowly becomes assimilated" (Bollnow, 1963: 145).

During our interview, Birgit captures this essence of Bollnow's definition of homeyness:

It's [Next Christian Community's church space] home. It feels comfortable. You kinda walk in and you feel: this is my home. You've grown into it. Like when you move into a new home it takes a while for the house to become your home and I think that's--the space has done that too. It's taken a while for it to kind of morph from being the movie theatre that we rent to this is home. It feels comfortable coming here. It doesn't feel like, 'oh, I'm walking into an old movie theatre.' It does feel like home. And we've got to know the space too. You know where everything is. We move things around as you do in a home. Sometimes you'll move a room around two or three times until it becomes, yes, this is the space, you know? This space feels comfortable as we've done here. We've moved things around. We've adjusted things. We've we painted a few walls. We've re-purposed spaces into being, you know, a little bit different. And, yeah, it's, it just--it's got a feel of home about it that it--it's a part of who we are and what . . . (Birgit, Interview 2013: 43).

In this quote, Birgit reveals how *Next Christian Community's* church space changed from being an old movie theatre that members of the community use in order to gather for worship into a space that they now call home. For Birgit, entering *Next Christian Community's* church space feels familiar and comfortable.

Birgit's quote also reveals that this transformation from being a foreign space to becoming a home space is accompanied by actively living in the space and by continuously changing and working on it. *Next Christian Community's* members moved and adjusted items, painted walls, and renovated the individual rooms according to their needs. During my time at *Next Christian Community*, I witnessed several spatial changes. For example, *Next Christian Community's* entrance area continuously changed from different couch settings to building an office for counselling services. A new sign replaced both the marquee and *Next Christian Community's* old sign. Occasionally new pictures appeared on the walls or decorative items that correspond to a specific worship cycle or a specific season. Only through those acts, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre could become a significant part of *Next Christian Community*. In other words, only through those acts, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre could become a home space for the members of *Next Christian Community*.

Bollnow further suggests that the creation of a home is not something that can happen

artificially. He states:

Thus the dwelling must not only express an individual, but at the same time reflect a long past, if it is to give us a feeling of security and stability in life. This includes everything in it that has a 'history'. Even traces of wear and slight damage acquire a positive value in this context. In such a dwelling, gradual building is an expression of a life story; every object in it is a reminder of something, images, and keepsakes, often inscrutably to strangers, keep a piece of the past alive. So the true dwelling is not artificially created, but gradually grows and takes part in the reliable security of slow growth (Bollnow, 1963: 145).

In this quote, Bollnow describes that building a home is a continuous process and needs to include artefacts that capture and express the life stories of the persons who live in it.

Therefore, homeyness also is a way of remembering and commemorating home owners' narratives and histories, kept alive in images, keepsakes, etc.

Much of *Next Christian Community's* decoration of its physical church space commemorates the Christian past in general. While some of them are a part of the Christendom tradition (prayer benches, crosses, stained glass), some are indicators of an Evangelical background (baptismal tank). *Next Christian Community's* church space also shows decorative objects that are unique to its own past such as the two mural pieces that are placed above the stairs at *Next Christian Community's* entrance area. Falk, a member of the congregation, painted these pieces for *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Later, they travelled with the community from *St. Albert Alliance Church* to the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. While the mural pieces are objects that indicate *Next Christian Community's* connection to Christianity, they also remind members of the congregation's beginning as a ministry.

During our interview, Falk photographs these two mural pieces and talks about their creation. He explains that his photo seeks to capture the change of the space from being a movie theatre to becoming *Next Christian Community's* church space (Falk, Interview 2015: 28-31). As he takes the photograph, he remembers the visual appearance of the movie theatre as well as the time he spent in the space when he was a young adult, meeting his friends,

watching movies, and playing video games at the arcade.



Photograph 2 by Falk, taken on the 24th of January 2015

By further discussing his reasons for taking this particular photo, he reveals that the two mural pieces stand for *Next Christian Community's* relationship with *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Falk explains that these two pieces belonged to a larger mural. According to him, *St. Albert Alliances Church's* leadership wanted him to paint a large piece that they could attach to one of the outside walls of their church building. Falk remembers that members of *St. Albert Alliance Church* posed for him when he painted the piece. They became an integral part of the painting, further highlighting the relationship between these two churches. He describes the content of the entire mural as following:

So it was supposed to be these two little children lying on the, on a--there was a series of stairs and they're lying on these stairs and they're reading these books and these books are everywhere. And if you look closely, they're like the--there is sixty-six books in the Bible. So, one of the books would say 'Ecclesiastes' and another one would say 'The Book of Jeremiah' and stuff like that, right? And so behind the kids [are] all the stories from the Bible. And so this [the two pieces

attached to Next Christian Community's wall] is just a portion of it. So, these are like the angels. The seven trumpets of the book of Revelation. And then down below you have Jeremiah, whatever, praying up. And then you have the Arc of the Covenant and then off to the side you have two guys carrying the Arc of the Covenant. And then there is a tree and you can kinda make out the serpent coming down from the tree. [...] Everything is there. Like, well, not everything. Most everything, like most big Bible stories are kinda portrayed in it. And it was a large mural. It was about forty feet long by twenty-five feet high (Falk, Interview 2015: 25).

Falk's explanation confirms that he intended to capture Christianity's mythology in the mural, focusing on the sixty-six books of the Bible. The two pieces in *Next Christian Community's* entrance area depict angels playing the seven trumpets, the Arc of Covenant, the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the serpent, and Jeremiah, 'the weeping prophet.'

Additionally, Falk remembers *St. Albert Alliance Church's* reason for taking down the mural and how the two pieces became a part of *Next Christian Community's* physical church space:

So, it was facing the south side and the sun shines on that mural and it sort of faded and cracked, and it pulled off, all the paints flaked off. And so the church says, 'we gotta get rid of this mural. It's all damaged.' And so I thought, if we get rid of it now, you know, donate a piece of it to this building here [the former Village Landing Movie Theatre]. And it will be kind of a nice reflection like knowing this was at [St. Albert] Alliance Church, you know, twenty years ago. And now it's here part of Next [Christian Community]. So it's kinda like we brought a little piece of it over (Falk, Interview 2015: 26).

Due to the weather, the mural lost its visual appeal and *St. Albert Alliance Church* wanted to discard the entire piece. Falk chose the mural pieces that survived the weather best and donated them to *Next Christian Community*. According to him, their display in *Next Christian Community's* church space actively commemorates the connection between *Next Christian Community* and *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Hilde's interpretation of the two mural pieces is congruent with the one Falk provides. She recalls:

I think it [to bring these pieces to Next Christian Community] was very important. I think that because it was our birthplace, you know, we're taking part of our where we were birthed from so to speak. That's how I look at it. So, having a piece of that here [at Next Christian Community's entrance area] and the fact that [Falk] comes to this church now, you know, he came with us, you know, signifies that these are--this is part of our roots and, you know, we are proud of that, you

know, for better or for worse. You can't choose your parents (Hilde, quoted in Helmut Interview 2014: 28).

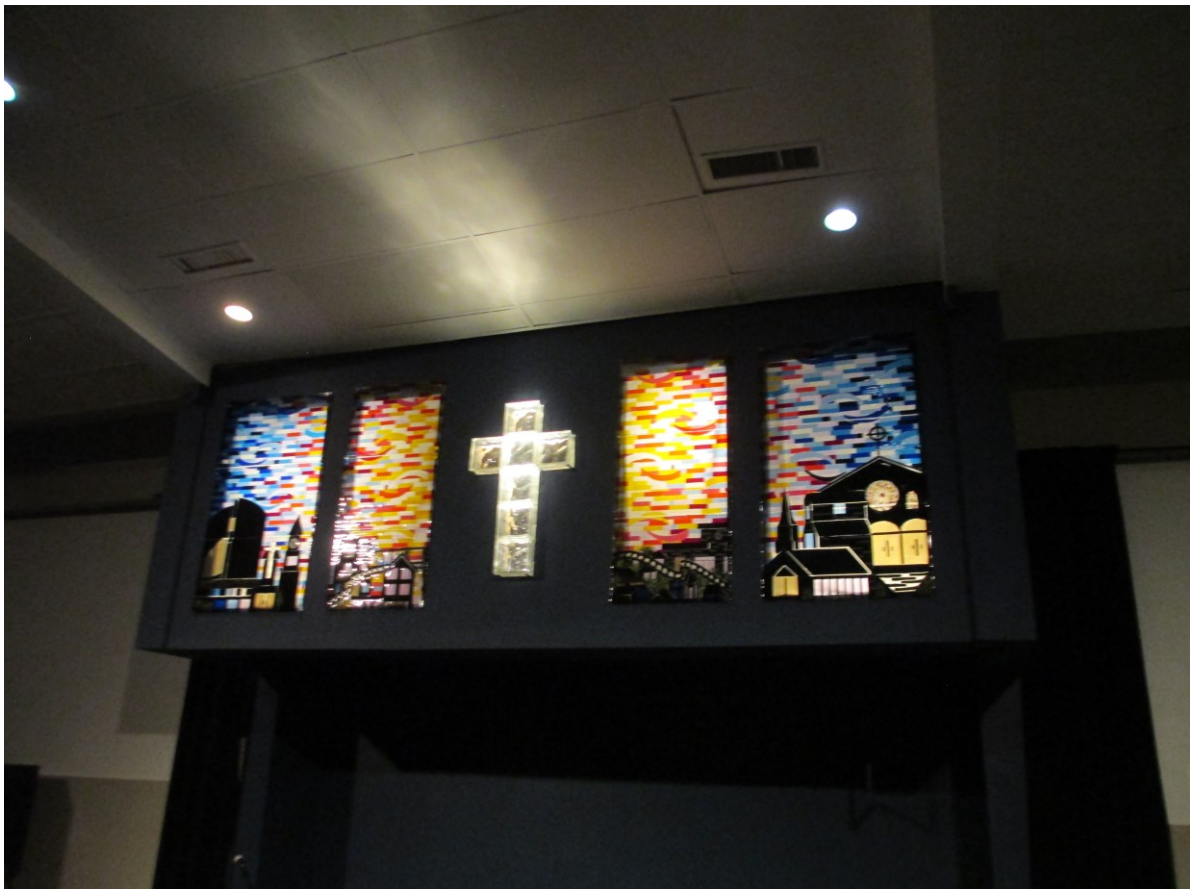
Both Hilde and Falk suggest that these two mural pieces symbolize *Next Christian Community's* birth out of *St. Albert Alliance Church*, keeping *Next Christian Community's* past alive. Despite the fact that "there is a source of conflict between the two church[es]" (Falk, Interview 2015: 31), *Next Christian Community's* particular identity emerged out of its connection to and its experiences with *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Hilde even indicates that the congregation is proud of its heritage. This aspect of *Next Christian Community's* history, however, is not as applicable to newer members and/or to persons who have no affiliation with the congregation. While only early members of the community are able to understand the two mural pieces' full symbolism, other persons still can appreciate the painting as a decorative object and/or acknowledge its connection to Christianity's mythology.

Another object that accomplishes a similar task is *Next Christian Community's* stained glass displayed in the congregation's sanctuary. Two members of the congregation (they are no longer a part of the community) designed and created this piece. While the stained glass cross is an overtly Christian artefact, four more stained glass pictures frame the stained glass cross, commemorating *Next Christian Community's* specific journey.

Most of my interview participants emphasize the importance of the stained glass, expressing their attachment to this particular piece. Käthe, for example, is one of the members who talks about the stained glass and takes its photograph. She states:

The thing that I like most, well, there is two things actually I like a lot about [Next Christian Community's church space]. The one that I'll always catch is the stained glass. And I just love what the stained glass represents. I don't know how I'm gonna take a picture of that to make it work. You can't really--I wonder if I go closer if you can tell. [B]ecause the stained glass, like, unfortunately the two ladies who did it don't go to our church anymore. But I mean they used to go to our church. [Käthe takes a picture of the stained glass while she continues talking.] And they designed it and it reflects the history of the church, right? So, like, the places in St. Albert that are significant. Like, there is city hall. There is the clock tower. There [are] the churches that we used to meet in. And then they wove the movie strip through it 'cause we were moving into the theatre. Starbucks is on there somewhere because [the Lead Pastor] works at Starbucks (Käthe, Interview

2015: 52).



Photograph 3 by Käthe, taken on the 25th of March 2015

Birgit's interpretation of the stained glass is similar to the one Käthe provides. She explains:

I don't know that the darkness to light is so much the church journey. It's probably more individual journey of moving from darkness to light. The church journey is depicted more in the bottom in just the pictures of St. Albert background and some of the pictures are of our own personal journey from, you know, moving out as a small church plant that some of the influences of people from around St. Albert that have helped us out and supported us and background of where we come from. Yeah, kind of all speaks through the other buildings in the picture (Birgit, Interview 2013: 10).

Both Käthe and Birgit suggest that this particular piece illustrates *Next Christian Community's* whole story. It depicts *St. Albert Alliance Church*, commemorating *Next Christian Community's* birth and its time as a ministry. It also depicts *Grace Family Baptist Church* and *Salvation Army Church and Community Centre*. These two churches accommodated *Next Christian Community* after its separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church*. By depicting these two churches, members of *Next Christian Community* acknowledge and remember those who

supported them. Furthermore, it commemorates the community's ability to make church work without having its own physical church space. The film reel that runs through the pictures refers to *Next Christian Community's* recent church space, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, and represents another phase of *Next Christian Community's* story. The film reel marks the period during which the congregation moved into its own space, commemorating the space's former use as a movie theatre, the congregation's intensive transformation of the space, and the congregation's development as its own independent entity. In addition to the spaces that *Next Christian Community* has a direct connection with, the stained glass also features other landmarks significant for St. Albert such as the clock tower, the grain elevator, the train trestle, and "the big Catholic church on the hill" (Birgit, Interview 2013: 9).

Interestingly, Birgit suggests that the upper half of the piece that moves from darker to brighter colours and essentially leads to the cross in the middle, stands for an individual journey of finding one's way to Christianity/Jesus, while the buildings at the bottom refer to the congregation's specific journey. By doing so, Birgit suggests that the stained glass not only keeps the distinct past of *Next Christian Community* alive, but also includes a broader religious message, connecting the content of the surrounding panels with the cross in the middle. Günther provides another possible interpretation of the piece. He states:

I like to say, you know, to get kind of symbolic here, is when we did that top part [the stained glass above the stage in the sanctuary], right? It was around the community. It was around how does this church care for this community, integrated into this community, support the community, be involved in the community, right? And so, the ladies did the stained glass of pictures of this community. So, I think that was our focus. We were really trying to focus on this community and say how do we live out our faith with our neighbours, with those who are struggling, you know, with all the different pieces of what makes a community. And not that--we're not out there to necessarily, you know, to convert them all, but how do we care for them? How do we work with the food bank to make sure that those who are hungry are getting food? How do we work with safe--stop abusing families? How do we work with them to make sure that there is resources for those that leave an abusive situation and stuff like that? So, it was really looking into the community to say how do we, as a church, impact this community (Günther, Interview 2015: 36)?

For Günther, the stained glass reflects *Next Christian Community's* embeddedness within its

surrounding community. Günther expresses the congregation's desire for social justice, helping those persons who are in need. According to him, the agenda of the community is not primarily to convert persons but instead to support individuals and other social justice organizations in and around St. Albert. Günther's interpretation of the stained glass reflects *Next Christian Community's* vision of wanting to have a positive impact on the community at large.

Similar to the two mural pieces, the full intention of the stained glass remains hidden to those who are unfamiliar with *Next Christian Community's* particular journey. While persons still may be able to identify the buildings depicted in the stained glass, they may not necessarily connect them to *Next Christian Community's* history. For example, Bernhard, who only joined the congregation recently, expresses his unfamiliarity with the piece's creation and content during our interview. He nonetheless "love[s] looking at the stained glass that we put up top there" (Bernhard, Interview 2015: 43). For him, the stained glass is primarily a decorative piece that he enjoys.

Throughout my analyzing process, it became clear that that the stained glass further provides evidence for *Next Christian Community's* unique form of doing church manifested in its unique form of church space, reflecting the congregation's spatial combination of community space, church space, and home space. Both the content of the piece and Günther's interpretation reveal the congregation's desire to dissolve the boundaries between the church community and its surrounding community. By being stained glass and by having the cross in the middle, the piece helps persons to identify *Next Christian Community's* space as a church space. Furthermore, it indicates that the sanctuary is a specifically set-aside room within *Next Christian Community's* facility that encourages the development of a devotional mood. Due to the fact that the piece commemorates and remembers *Next Christian Community's* unique story, it also is an artefact that helps to further establish the homey atmosphere within the congregation's sanctuary.

During my interviews, it became apparent that *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary displays another highly important object, the handprint painting. The handprint painting is an artefact that also functions as a reminder of both the biblical past as well as a celebration – inscrutable to strangers – of *Next Christian Community's* own past. Similar to the stained glass, the handprint painting not only adds to *Next Christian Community's* homey atmosphere, but also to the development of sacredness within the congregation's sanctuary.

For most of my interview participants, the handprint painting is as important as the stained glass. During our walking tours, they talk about this painting and take its photograph. A significant difference between the handprint painting and the other two objects that I introduced and discussed (the mural pieces and the stained glass), however, is that many members of *Next Christian Community* were actively involved in creating this piece. Members, who came to this particular service and took part in the painting's creation, find it to be one of the most memorable services. Margit, for example, remembers:

One really special service we had, that huge painting that's on the left side of the sanctuary was done during a church service in our space. Because we have some flexibility in how we use things, we all made handprints that are part of the sun rise in there and use that as part of saying that we're connected to the story of the picture, the story of the Resurrection. So that was a very cool service (Margit, First Interview 2013: 10).

Margit reveals that the particular service during which this painting came to life (it was during an Easter service) was a special service for her. She explains that the handprint painting depicts the story of the Resurrection. In this quote, Margit suggests that members' handprints on the canvas connect them to this particular biblical story.

As I mentioned in my previous chapter, two important characteristics of Evangelicalism are biblicism and crucicentricism. Evangelicals have a particular regard for the Bible. Furthermore, they emphasize the death of Jesus Christ and view it as the only means of salvation. For Evangelicals in particular, choosing, believing in, and following Jesus Christ represent a new birth. Both Margit's interpretation of the painting and her remark about

the congregation's 'flexibility in how we use things' provide evidence for *Next Christian Community's* Evangelical background. Most Christian traditions consider Easter to be the central Christian feast because "without Easter – without the Resurrection of Christ – there would be no Christian faith. Christ's Resurrection is the proof of His divinity" (Richert, 2016). Many churches that hold on to Christendom's liturgical traditions such as Catholic churches, Anglican churches, and Lutheran churches, however, follow a particular worship order when they celebrate Christ's Resurrection. The Easter Vigil is a service that often includes the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion) and the Sacraments of Confession. According to Helmut, *Next Christian Community's* service "was just a nice non-traditional way to talk about Easter and to throw a very fun positive light on the Resurrection of Christ" (Helmut, Interview 2014: 38).

According to my interview participants, it was the Lead Pastor's idea to celebrate this particular Christian festival in a non-traditional way and to include a unique and interactive element. My interview participants also reveal that both adults and kids participated in the service and in the creation of the painting. This aspect suggests that the service was not only unusual compared to a traditional Easter celebration but also unusual for *Next Christian Community*. During a regular worship service at *Next Christian Community*, kids first listen to a little story in the sanctuary and then go into their separate classrooms for kids' church. During my interviews, I learned that Falk orchestrated the creation of this painting. After asking Falk to talk about this piece, he describes the process, the intention, and the content of the painting:

So, we did it on the stage here. And then every--I had people put the hand in some paint and, you know, whatever, cover it with paints and this is all hand-pressed. So, these are--everybody in the church was doing this and I would tell them where, like, put your yellow one here. Put the red one here. Put some blue ones there and that. So, as they're doing it, we're trying to find the right places for it. It was completely black. Like, the canvas was black. [...] And so you do it, and so, your own way of doing it, some people would go like this. Some people would go like this and some people would rub their hands back and forth. That's why you get a lot of smudges and that. And that's kind of what we wanted. We wanted

people to--we wanted this to be covered in the members' DNA. Kinda fingerprints, if you could think of it. So, during that day everybody had to paint. Everybody had to stick their hand in. [...] They, well, they didn't have to, if they didn't want to. But everybody wanted to. [...] So, anyways, it was kind of fun and this was [the Lead Pastor's] idea to do a group painting with everyone using their hands to do it. And it's--and to show a community in this painting somehow like this many hands makes work light or something. [...] It's like the morning after, like, the sun's just rising up, the morning of Christmas, or not Chris--Easter, right? And so the Resurrection probably just happened but this is the site where the Crucifixion took place and that. So, I just, when the thing was done, I just dipped my finger in black and I went like this [he put the three crosses on the hill in the painting] just to kinda make it fast. And that's all it was. So, it just looked like a sky with the sun set and at the very end I did that thing there and just kind of gave it a little bit of context. So, I didn't know what it was gonna look like. It was, like, very spontaneous, very--so, I love this little painting for that reason. So, should I take a picture of it? (Falk, Interview 2015: 57-58).



Photograph 4 by Falk, taken on the 24th of January 2015

Falk's description of the painting is in accordance with Margit's understanding of it. It, indeed, depicts the site of the crucifixion and the rising sun, a time during which Christ's Resurrection supposedly took place. While Margit finds that the handprints connect members

of *Next Christian Community* to the biblical story itself, Falk finds that the handprints transmit members' DNA onto the canvas. He suggests that the painting not only depicts the biblical story and members' connection to it, it also depicts the community itself.

Similar to Falk, Helmut describes the creation of the handprint painting as "a very community up-lifting kind of experience" (Helmut, Interview 2014: 38). During our walking tour, he takes two photographs of the painting. While one photo features the entire piece, the other photo is a close shot that captures the individual handprints. By doing so, he emphasizes the active involvement of the community that created this piece.

Interestingly, the process of creating this painting is reminiscent of what Émile Durkheim describes in his monograph *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). According to him, the development of sacredness takes place through religious ceremonies or positive rites. As my interview participants reveal, worshipping through creating a joint painting connects them to both God and to each other. By creating the handprint painting together, members of the congregation were able to acknowledge that they share similar values and beliefs (Durkheim, 1912: 347-348).

Howsoever little importance the religious ceremonies may have, they put the group into action; the groups assemble to celebrate them. So their first affect is to bring individuals together, to multiply the relations between them and to make them more intimate with one another. By this very fact, the contents of their consciousness is changed (Durkheim, 1912: 348).

Creating this painting was a part of the community's worship. Its creation was a religious ceremony. As such it was an action, a positive rite, which brought individuals together, strengthened the relationship between them, and changed their consciousness. Such positive rites are important because they help to create sacredness and form the basis for Durkheim's definition of religion: "It is the positive rites [...] that provide the setting for the most essential element of religious phenomena, according to Durkheim. This is the sentiment of collective effervescence that is generated in those moments of ritual worship of the sacred" (Riley, 2013: 276).

Due to the fact that the painting is displayed in *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary, members, who were part of this particular service, are able to recall this memory continuously. By looking at the painting, members are able to relive the collective effervescence that this particular moment generated. Helmut addresses this aspect in the following quote:

I think that it's [the sanctuary] a place of focus. So, I definitely find myself, when I'm in here, more focused on my faith, you know? It's just something about having the cross, about the memories of like that painting [the handprint painting]. I find myself more focused on God in this room than I would in the foyer (Helmut, Interview 2014: 45).

According to Helmut, *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary allows persons to focus on their faith. In comparison to other rooms in *Next Christian Community's* church space and despite the homey atmosphere that the sanctuary also provokes, Helmut finds that the presence of the Divine is here especially apparent. *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary is a space within the congregation's facility that is specifically set-aside for worship. Every Sunday, the congregation worships in the sanctuary. Therefore, the room's specific purpose is clear. In addition to this clear purpose, Helmut finds that the decorative objects in the sanctuary further strengthen his ability to focus on God. Most importantly, he acknowledges the display of the handprint painting and the particular memories that emerge when he looks at it. As I mentioned above, both the handprint painting and the stained glass add to the sacredness of *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary. While the creation of the handprint painting was a positive rite, the stained glass is an overtly Christian object. Both items help to provoke a particular atmosphere within *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary that members describe as sacred. Günther, for example, states:

I think a big one is, you know, the woman who did the stained glass work up top has created a very different feel, like, it's a--when we come in, there is a focus and you look up and you see this beautiful stained glass work that's up there. And it kinda is--let's you know that you're entering a different space that is not--you don't see it like, you know, when we first moved in, you still had like almost a movie screen back there and all of that. One thing is, we slowly eliminated any of the symbols of a movie theatre out of the space. It really helped. Like even taking-

-for the first couple of years we actually had the old movie chairs. And so we had the fold-down seats with the cup holder which is great if you have your coffee. But, once again, it was just--when we moved those, it changed the space a little bit more. And when we put in just nice chairs, it, once again, distanced itself from just being in a place of entertainment. And so I think the lighting, even the stage set up, the stained glass helped create a sacred space in there that you know you're entering into when you walk into it. It's different than outside of the sanctuary. So, you don't know all the other rooms here and you don't get that sense. But you walk in there and there is this sense of sacred space. It can be through the candles being lit. It can be, you know, the low lighting. Just what we've done to it has really created a sense there. So, I think it's, yeah, I really like it as a sanctuary (Günther, Interview 2015: 3).

Similar to Helmut, Günther finds that the sanctuary is a place that encourages persons to focus on the presence of the Divine. In his quote, Günther also describes the effect of the stained glass. For him, this artefact is important because it instantly signifies that this room is different than any other room within *Next Christian Community's* facility.

Furthermore, he focuses on the transformation of the room, describing the physical removal of the movie theatre symbols. Günther's quote indicates that the physical removal of the movie theatre symbols and their replacement with religious symbols is, in fact, a symbolic transformation. It slowly turned the sanctuary into a space in which persons are now able to perceive the presence of the Divine. According to Günther, elements such as lit candles and/or low lighting further help to develop this particular atmosphere unique to the sanctuary. He refers here to the non-tangible impressions that, according to Hasse, provoke a sensuous world of experiences that is noticeable within one's body. Günther further states:

You know what? I think that's why I like the separation of the space. Like, from when you walk out this door [the sanctuary's door] it's a different space, right? This is an intentional sacred space. There is intentionality in all that's in here. So, that is what I like about the sanctuary. Where out here, you can have sacred space with community out here but it's a different--the intentionality isn't there. It's a welcoming space. It's a space to have, you know, it's a space to have bond, like you said, do the movies, for the kids, for all sorts of stuff can happen out there. But when we step into here, then there is an intentional space created here. And to that it speaks to me. Very similar to, you know, you--when I was in Europe, I've been going to some of the old churches. I mean, just their intentionality around space and around what it was for was very noticeable. Like, you knew you were entering into something of a sacred space. Whether or not you, you know, agreed with the religion didn't matter. You knew that you're entering into a space that was created for sacredness. And that's what I like about our sanctuary is I think

we're doing a good job of creating that. When you enter in here there is an intentional space (Günther, Interview 2015: 37-38).

In this quote, Günther reveals that the sanctuary is an intentional sacred space. He suggests that *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary's intention and otherness is noticeable. He even compares the atmosphere within *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary to the atmosphere that persons are able to experience when they walk through a cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church building. Günther finds that the space outside the sanctuary differs because it welcomes worldly activities such as socializing, watching movies, and playing. For him, the space outside the sanctuary has a different intention/focus.

Although the space outside the sanctuary is not necessarily intended for worship activities, it still encourages the development of sacredness due to the fact that members of *Next Christian Community* not only physically transformed parts of their church space. They also changed the aura of the entire space through a spiritual transformation. During our walking tour, Birgit addresses *Next Christian Community's* spiritual transformation of the entire space:

I should talk about that because these are on the walls too. [She points at a picture frame that is hanging next to the sanctuary.] The Sunday that we kind of dedicated the space, the Lead Pastor had asked numerous members of the congregation to pray. He gave us each an area of the church and as a part of that service that morning we prayed for every area of the church. Just dedicating it to God's glory and God's use. And so, in the different areas you'll find a framed prayer. And I believe that's, yeah, this is for the lobby [the main social area with the coffee counter], and they were written by different members of the congregation (Birgit, Interview 2013: 15-16).

Birgit's description of dedicating the former Village Landing Movie Theatre to God's glory and use is similar to the congregation's practice of worshipping through art. According to Durkheim's concept of positive rites and religious ceremonies, *Next Christian Community's* members' spiritual transformation of their church space also is a sacred element. Durkheim further argues that "there are words, expressions and formulae which can be pronounced only by the mouths of consecrated persons; there are gestures and movements which everybody

cannot perform” (Durkheim, 1912: 37).

Durkheim’s use of the term, ‘consecrated persons,’ primarily refers to the authorities of religious communities such as pastors, priests, ministers, etc. As a consequence of the Reformation, however, many Protestant congregations (including Evangelicals) removed the distinction between the clergy and laity, and thus expanded the term, ‘consecrated persons,’ to their members. Similar to many Evangelical congregations, *Next Christian Community* also removed the distinction between the clergy and laity. During our interview, Margit, for example, addresses this particular aspect of *Next Christian Community*’s identity:

For other church traditions, the buildings matter in a different way. But we’re not like some church traditions. Like, if you’re in an Anglican church only certain people can go behind the altar rail. If you’re in a Catholic church that’s even more limited, I think. If you’re in an Orthodox church, part of it is closed off with a screening. You can’t even see it. Only the Priest is allowed back there, you know? We don’t have Holy Water and we don’t even have church rights that only the Pastor could do. [...] We don’t have a limitation on that. Anyone who is a baptized believer could baptize someone else in our church tradition. If, for some reason, somebody wanted someone who is not a Pastor to baptize them and have a reason they wanted that, they could have that. They could do that. Anyone in our church could perform a funeral if, somebody who wanted at their funeral to have--if somebody wanted me to give their funeral sermon, I could give it. Anyone can preach. So, we’re not as limited in a lot of those things. The only thing where there would actually be a limit is marriages and that’s not a church rule, it’s a government rule. You have to have a certain certification to perform a marriage (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 26).

In her quote, Margit explains that *Next Christian Community*’s form of doing church is different from those church communities’ form of doing church that hold on to the distinction between the clergy and laity. In addition to participating in positive rites and religious ceremonies, *Next Christian Community*’s members also have the possibility and the right to perform and/or to execute them, whether or not they belong to the pastoral staff.

During my interview with Margit, however, I also sensed that there is a difference between participating in positive rites and religious ceremonies and being able to perform and/or to execute them. Despite the fact that all persons, whether or not they share the community’s spiritual beliefs, are welcome to participate in *Next Christian Community*’s

worship activities (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 11), only baptized believers are able to hold sermons, perform baptisms, execute funerals, etc. *Next Christian Community* certainly expands Durkheim's use of the term, 'consecrated persons.' His concept nonetheless remains to be relevant. Both members who belong to the pastoral staff and those who do not belong to the pastoral staff were able to dedicate the former Village Landing Movie Theatre to God's glory and use. Outsiders, non-religious persons, and/or non-baptized persons, however, would not have been able to perform such a spiritual act. During our interview, Horst states that "it's definitive a spiritual gift" (Horst, Interview 2013: 29) when he describes the process of praying over the former Village Landing Movie Theatre.

Consequently, *Next Christian Community's* spiritual transformation of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre is an act that shares similarities with the process that Wilcox describes as the transformation from a profane/ordinary space to a sacred space by decree and/or intervention. Through *Next Christian Community's* members' dedication of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, the previously profane place became a holy site in which God now dwells. Additionally, the framed prayers on the wall of each room preserve and reembody *Next Christian Community's* spiritual transformation. They function as a reminder for both members of the congregation and outsiders: this building now is a sacred space. It is a space different from its former use as a movie theatre. As such it is a space that signifies otherness, creating a contrast to the regularity and ordinariness of other spaces persons frequent during their everyday lives.

During our interview, the Lead Pastor further provides evidence for *Next Christian Community's* church space's particular atmosphere that indicates the space's sacredness and otherness. He states:

I think when you walk into this space, the presence of God is very apparent. And that is--I'm saying that based on what people tell me when they come down the stairs. [...] So, our prayer service, you know, we did that prayer service for Constable Wynn [after the deadly shooting in St. Albert in January 2015]. Lady is here and she walks out and she says hey, 'I'm so and so.' I say hey, 'I'm [the Lead

Pastor].’ She said, ‘I’m from Beulah Alliance.’ And I went, ‘oh, okay.’ I said, ‘thanks for coming.’ And she said, ‘the minute I walked down those stairs,’ she said, ‘the peace in this place is amazing.’ Now, that’s a church going woman. Another lady we rent out to, for boot camp, not a church going person. And she said, ‘there was just a peace in this place.’ There is a warmth here, you know? And so when--I--when people--and I have that happen, you know, reasonably frequently. Not just members of the congregation but people, well, people that are now members but when they--first time they came here, they’d be like, you know, there is just, they use words like there is a peace, there is a vibe, there is a, you know--the presence of God is, you know, thick. It’s not like that. It’s--they’ll use other words to describe what it is they’re feeling. I’m going ‘okay, well, that’s part of that sacredness.’ ‘Cause I don’t create that (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 39-40).

According to the Lead Pastor, the presence of God is apparent in *Next Christian Community’s* entire church space. Different persons (those with a religious background and those without) who entered *Next Christian Community’s* church space were able to sense a particular atmosphere/feeling/vibe. Occasionally persons are able to experience *Next Christian Community’s* church space as a space that represents otherness even without entering the sanctuary or specifically coming to participate in the community’s worship activities.

At the end of his quote, the Lead Pastor mentions that he does not create this particular atmosphere/feeling/vibe when he refers to the sacredness of *Next Christian Community’s* church space. According to him, “God creates it” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 40), thereby suggesting that there is an element of mystery to the creation of sacredness. Although the Lead Pastor believes that sacredness is accompanied by mystery, he nonetheless acknowledges the importance of spatial arrangements, finding that “there are some things you can do” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 40). During our interview, Käthe, for example, mentions two decorational objects that, according to her, influence the atmosphere of *Next Christian Community’s* social areas: the two mural pieces in the entrance area and the large mural mosaic poster, featuring the face of Jesus, in the main social area. She states:

They’ll never be able to use this space as anything but a church at this point without doing a whole bunch of work, right? Like, because it, we made it look like a church, right? We made it feel like a church. But we also wanted to feel, like, so I think, like, we wanted to look a little bit like a church. But we also wanted to feel like a community centre, right? And so, that’s--I mean we get a lot

of revenue from like from birthday parties and things like that, right? So, we can't--so partly it's not that we can't 'cause we could for sure, but we choose to just leave it with the feel of a community centre. And then do stuff in the sanctuary that makes the sanctuary feel more like a church, I guess in the traditional sense of the word for when we worship on Sunday mornings. And the rest of the space is kinda multipurpose, multiuse, whatever, you know? But we have things out that show that we are still a church, right? Like, I mean there is the painting [the two mural pieces], as you walk down the stairs, shows that this is still a church, you know? And then, now that we added this one of Jesus [the mural mosaic called 'King of Kings.'], like, that one to me really shows this is a church. The other art we had before could hint at that but it wasn't as obvious as that picture of Jesus there. So, you know, I think that's very intentional (Käthe, Interview 2015: 6-7).

Similar to Helmut and Günther, Käthe finds that the sanctuary is the space within *Next Christian Community's* facility that is specifically set-aside for religious worship. Most of *Next Christian Community's* positive rites and religious ceremonies take place in the sanctuary. As such it is a space that intentionally seeks to put persons into a devotional mood, enabling them to focus on their faith. In her quote, Käthe, however, also finds that *Next Christian Community's* spatial arrangements made the entire former Village Landing Movie Theatre not only 'look like a church' but also 'feel like a church.'

Consequently, *Next Christian Community's* spatial arrangements not only encourage the development of a homey atmosphere inside the sanctuary, the congregation's spatial arrangements also encourage the development of a sacred atmosphere outside the sanctuary. Furthermore, the Lead Pastor's quote confirms that the sacredness of *Next Christian Community's* church space (similar to its homeyness) is not restricted to a specific area and does not necessarily depend on *Next Christian Community's* worship activities. The longing for a sacred space, similar to the desire of meeting in a warm and comfortable environment, belongs to *Next Christian Community's* congregational identity. It influences the congregation's spatial production and therefore the atmosphere that persons are able to perceive in *Next Christian Community's* church space.

In her quote, Käthe further suggests that *Next Christian Community's* social areas not only 'feel like a church,' they also have 'the feel of a community centre.' Profane objects mix

here with religious symbols more immediately and directly than in the sanctuary. For example, *Next Christian Community's* main social area displays a pop machine, a popcorn machine, and a large, colourful play structure next to an image of Jesus, a variety of crosses, and various copies of the New Testament. Furthermore, by being a former movie theatre, *Next Christian Community's* church space still includes a room that features the original movie theatre seats and the original silver screen. It is particularly popular for birthday party rental. Due to the fact that many of my interviews took place at *Next Christian Community's* church space after Sunday service, I was able to observe a variety of children's birthday parties. During those occasions, I witnessed the change of the former Village Landing Movie Theatre from being a church space where believers gather for worship to becoming a community space where children meet to celebrate their birthdays. On Sunday morning, persons would listen to the Lead Pastor's sermon, pray, and seek the presence of the Divine. On Sunday afternoon, kids would run through the facility, watch movies, and slide down the play structure.

The studio is another room within *Next Christian Community's* facility that encourages worldly activities such as exercising, dancing, etc. Visiting *Next Christian Community's* church space on a Wednesday afternoon, I was not only able to practice yoga in a church space. I also was able to observe congregation members and non-congregation members simultaneously using *Next Christian Community's* church space:

Observation notes from the 1st of October 2014: This Wednesday afternoon, I visit Next Christian Community's church space in order to practice yoga and to help members cook for Snug. This yoga course is part of the community's attempt to offer unconventional Bible study groups. It takes place in Next Christian Community's studio. A member of the community, who is a certified yoga teacher, will teach us. [...] Everybody interested in this yoga course arrives and places their mats on the grey parquet floor in the studio. We are only a small group of five persons. [...] Soon after yoga, a boot camp group (this group has no affiliation with Next Christian Community) arrives. This group uses the studio on a regular basis in order to exercise. Some members of Next Christian Community leave while others arrive in order to cook for Snug. I change from my exercise clothes into my normal street attire and join them behind the coffee counter. Today, the boot camp group decides to exercise in the main social area instead of in the

studio. While Next Christian Community's members and I cut vegetables, cook stew, and bake cookies, apple crisps, and biscuits behind the coffee counter, they run up and down the stairs. Exercise music and other exercise sounds fill now the space. They mix with our cooking sounds and smells. Eventually, the boot camp group leaves and another group arrives, using one of the individual rooms (the rooms that the kids usually use for kids' church). According to a member of Next Christian Community, these persons belong to an AA-group that also meets here.

On this particular Wednesday afternoon, the former movie theatre was more reminiscent of a community space than of a church space. Non-tangible impressions that do not necessarily belong to *Next Christian Community's* worship activities temporarily became a part of the space such as the boot camp group's work-out music, the sounds of persons exercising, and the smells of preparing food. Similar to the children's birthday parties, these non-tangible impressions changed the character of *Next Christian Community's* facility from being a church space to becoming a community space. Visiting *Next Christian Community's* facility on a weekday showed the various activities that simultaneously can take place at *Next Christian Community's* space. Furthermore, my observation notes reveal that *Next Christian Community* is, indeed, successful in welcoming and accommodating both congregation members and outsiders.

Outsiders are able to rent the movie theatre, the studio, other individual rooms, and the main social area. Furthermore, they are able to rent *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary for music recitals and community meetings (Next Christian Community, 2016). Inviting the surrounding community and encouraging worldly activities in its physical church space belongs to *Next Christian Community's* particular identity. It, however, also challenges and/or jeopardizes the space's sacredness. According to Durkheim, religion is a practice that needs to mark off and maintain distance between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim, 1912: 37).

Depending on the activities and the rooms in which these activities take place, the sacred and the profane predominate interchangeably – the opposed groups are in a dynamic balance with each other in *Next Christian Community's* church space. This finding, however, contradicts Durkheim, who argues that space is divided and differentiated. If space is divided

and differentiated, then there should be a clear distinction between sacred space and profane space. Durkheim further argues that “spatial representation consists essentially in a primary co-ordination of the data of sensuous experience. But this co-ordination would be impossible if the parts of space were qualitatively equivalent and if they were really interchangeable” (Durkheim, 1912: 11).

Next Christian Community's church space, however, does not provide a clear distinction between sacred space and profane space. In other words, *Next Christian Community's* members do not mark off and maintain a distance between the sacred and the profane. Rather, their space provokes a sacred atmosphere, a homey atmosphere, and an atmosphere reminiscent of a community centre within the same building. Although my interview participants identify the sanctuary as a specifically set-aside space for religious activities within *Next Christian Community's* facility, their narratives nonetheless reveal that the sanctuary also is a homey space that encourages persons to mingle, to socialize, and to converse. Furthermore, while the areas outside the sanctuary intentionally seek to invite congregation members as well as non-congregation members to socialize, they nonetheless encourage the development of a sacred atmosphere. In *Next Christian Community's* facility, sacred space can become profane and profane space can become sacred. Thus the opposed groups are in a dynamic balance with each other in *Next Christian Community's* church space.

While members of the congregation often understand the sacredness of their space, outsiders may not necessarily acknowledge the decorative objects in *Next Christian Community's* church space such as the framed prayers and the two mural pieces. They may not understand what the space means to the congregation. While the presence of the profane elements, including the space's general homey atmosphere, makes *Next Christian Community's* facility particularly welcoming to both congregation members and outsiders, it also makes the space more misinterpretable than does a cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church building. Making their space inviting to

outsiders provides *Next Christian Community* with rental income, helping them to pay their own rental costs. Beyond this practical aspect, such usage actualizes one of the key elements of *Next Christian Community's* vision: church should be a part of an already existing community and not separate from the community.

Although *Next Christian Community* invites and welcomes the surrounding community, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre is nonetheless a space that has boundaries. During our interview, Horst and I talk discuss this particular issue. He states:

I would be surprised if there would be [limits/boundaries]. Like, I think we would allow --I'm even trying to think. The only groups I could see us saying not to would be groups that anybody would say no to. While we're not gonna--well, no, I guess there are some spaces. I would be surprised if we--we would not allow people to have a party here [at Next Christian Community's church space] that was--like we have birthday parties here but if some young kids said, 'yeah, we wanna come and have our after grad in your church and we're gonna have booze all over the place and it's gonna be'--I'd be surprised if we'd say yes to that. [...] If we let a group of people down here, 20, 30 people to have a good party, who is to say there isn't gonna be fights? Who is to say someone isn't going to be abused. Who is to say there isn't going to be literal violence. Brought on by the alcohol. Which would be unglorifying to God. I don't think we can take that chance with this space. It's not the drinking. It's what drinking can--even the Bible does not say drinking is bad. It just says that over consumption leads to debauchery which leads to violence which leads to--and all of the sudden they're fighting and sex in the corners and who knows, right? We can't take that chance with this space. Because I believe this, it comes down to a question of stewardship, I believe God, good Christianese term, I believe God gave us this space as a blessing. It has done amazing things for us. So, what are we do? We have to steward it correctly. We have to give it the respect it deserves. Though, you can look at this section, I'm sure a lot of people would simply see it as a business. I think it's much more than that. Because this whole building was a gift from God. Like we couldn't believe it when we got it, how well it fit us. How well it even fits our personality. And to just sort of throw it out there to get a little bit more extra money without thinking of the ramifications would be unwise and not right (Horst, Interview 2013: 38-40).

Birgit finds:

No, when we originally dedicated the building we dedicated the sanctuary as being a sacred space. [...] And the rest of the building, because we wanted to open it to the community, we have very few rules and, you know, that go with it. My husband used the theatre for a long time. He had a number of guys and they get together and watch James Bond or, you know, that kind of thing. So, and nobody really had an issue or problem with that. So, we try to keep it to a minimum, you know, as far as any rules and that. The rental rules and I--they and it--this is probably more a liability thing, I think there are some for bringing alcohol in for a party, you know, a family party or something like that would probably be the

only--and they not gonna bring x-rated movies or, you know, something that would be really offensive would not be--something that would be very much against who we are as a community (Birgit, Interview 2013: 21).

According to Birgit and Horst, *Next Christian Community* has very few rules within its church space, due to the fact that the congregation wants to open its space to the surrounding community. Both Birgit and Horst, however, find that the consumption of alcohol is forbidden in *Next Christian Community's* church space. For Birgit, the consumption of alcohol is a liability issue. For Horst, drinking may be accompanied by negative behaviour such as violence, abuse, and destruction, a behaviour that would jeopardize the sacredness of the space. Horst would not want to encourage such behaviour in *Next Christian Community's* church space because he finds it unglorifying to God. In her quote, Birgit further indicates that she would feel uncomfortable if outsiders would screen x-rated movies, or movies that would attack the congregation's identity as a religious group. Despite the fact that most of these activities would not take place in the sanctuary, both Birgit and Horst nonetheless indicate that there are certain activities, they would not want to see happening in any of the areas of *Next Christian Community's* facility. Outsiders, who rent *Next Christian Community's* space, however, may not be familiar with these boundaries.

The act of balancing these two opposing groups, the sacred and the profane, was/is, indeed, a spatial challenge. Both Durkheim and Bollnow suggest that religion is a practice that needs to mark off and maintain distance between the sacred and the profane, a temple and a home. Hasse also draws on this concept when he describes the particular atmosphere that cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church buildings provoke. According to him, church buildings' spatial arrangements are intentional and seek to communicate that particular atmosphere in such a way that it is noticeable. Quietness, peacefulness, awe, and discomfort

are the hallmarks of this atmosphere that helps to put persons into a devotional mood. For some persons, this atmosphere represents the presence of the Divine. Other persons may not believe in the presence of the Divine but are nonetheless aware of the otherness of these spaces because of their distinct spatial features. Most importantly, the spatial arrangements within these spaces usually do not make persons feel homey, relaxed, and comfortable.

As my discussion, however, reveals, persons feel homey, relaxed, and comfortable in *Next Christian Community's* church space because of some of its spatial arrangements. Furthermore, my interview participants also describe the former movie theatre as a space that effectively can put persons into a devotional mood due to other aspects of the space's features. Therefore, I suggest that *Next Christian Community's* facility is both a church space and a home space. Furthermore, by being an affordable but also a homey and comfortable space, the St. Albert community utilizes the former Village Landing Movie Theatre on a regular basis. By not simply being a church space but also by being a homey space, *Next Christian Community's* facility becomes a community space.

As a re-purposed movie theatre that includes religious symbolism, *Next Christian Community's* church space, however, is neither a typical Evangelical church space nor a typical cathedral-like/conventional/specifically set-aside church space. Rather, it is a space that can create confusion/ambiguity/ambivalence to both congregation members and outsiders. Furthermore, it is a space that not only combines church space, home space, and community space in which the sacred and the profane can coexist, it also is a space that reconciles Evangelicalism's spatial tradition (the inclusiveness of sacredness/God's universality) with Christendom's spatial tradition (religious persons' longing for the *domus dei*). In my following chapter, "Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition," I further focus on *Next Christian Community's* approach to reconcile/mix various Christian traditions not only within their church space but also within their worship activities. By drawing on Assmann's theory on communicative and cultural memory, I argue that it is necessary for *Next Christian*

Community's early members to communicate their form of doing church manifested in a corresponding church space to newer members in order to strengthen the congregation's collective identity.

Act III: Strengthening our own Tradition

“Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level” (Assmann, 2008: 109). Memory on the inner/personal level (as a matter of the neuro-mental system) was, until the 1920s, the only form of memory that scientists recognized. The French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, however, found that memory does not only exist on an inner/personal level but also on a social level, depending on socialization and communication. Memory on the social level is a form of memory that “enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build memory” (Assmann, 2008: 109). In other words, this form of memory reflects the social self of persons, recognizing them as carriers of social roles. Instead of referring to an inner, subjective time, it refers to the social time, the time persons spend with others. Halbwachs calls this form of memory collective memory.

Assmann’s theory builds on Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory, arguing towards a connection “between time, identity, and memory in their three dimensions of the personal, the social, and the cultural” (Assmann, 2008: 110). While Halbwachs keeps a separation between the concept of collective memory and the realm of transferences, transmissions, and traditions, Assmann finds that it is important to include the cultural sphere. In his study of memory, he breaks up Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory into communicative memory and cultural memory. “We are, therefore, not arguing for replacing his idea of ‘collective memory’; rather, we distinguish between both forms as two different *modi memorandi*, ways of remembering” (Assmann, 2008: 110).

Assmann’s concept of cultural memory recognizes persons’ cultural identities and refers to a historical/mystical/cultural time. It is cultivated by specialists, celebrated on special occasions, formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization, and supported by institutions of transmission, learning, and interpretation (Assmann, 2008: 111). In cultural

memory “the past is not preserved as such but is cast in symbols as they are represented in oral myths or in writings, performed in feasts, and as they are continually illuminating a changing present. In the context of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history vanishes” (Assmann, 2008: 113).

Different from cultural memory, communicative memory refers to a recent past, to memories that individuals share with their contemporaries. Unlike cultural memory, communicative memory does not require institutions of preservation and reembodyment. It does not rely on specialists who need to formalize, stabilize, and support it. Instead, it lives in everyday interaction and communication, and thus has only a limited time depth. Normally, it does not last longer than eighty years, “the time span of three interacting generations” (Assmann, 2008: 111).

Assmann acknowledges that “the distinction of different forms of memory looks like a structure but it works more as a dynamic, creating tension and transition between the various poles. There is also much overlapping” (Assmann, 2008: 113). Due to the fact that persons possess a variety of different identities, depending on the groups to which they belong such as various communities, belief systems, political systems, etc, their communicative and cultural memories are equally diverse. While memory is a system that is open on all its different levels (inner/personal, social, and cultural), it is not completely open and diffuse in its relation “to specific horizons of time and identity on the individual, generational, political, cultural levels. Where this relation is absent, we are not dealing with memory but with knowledge. Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one’s own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition” (Assmann, 2008: 113-114).

Both Assmann and Halbwachs find that groups form on a basis of affection which is accompanied by a dynamic of association and dissociation. “These ‘affective ties’ lend memories their special intensity. Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social

obligation. One has to remember in order to belong” (Assmann, 2008: 114). Human beings are equipped with the ability to remember, to generate memory. Memory, however, not only exists in constant interaction with other human beings but also in constant interaction with ‘things’ such as artefacts, objects, icons, symbols, landscapes, etc. Furthermore, memory is “based on material contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object” (Assmann, 2008: 111). Although these ‘things’ do not have a memory of their own, they remind/trigger persons’ memories precisely because they carry individuals’ memories. “On the social level, with respect to groups and societies, the role of external symbols becomes even more important, because groups which, of course, do not ‘have’ a memory tend to ‘make’ themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions” (Assmann, 2008: 111).

Next Christian Community, as a newly-formed group, needed to make a memory for itself, allowing its members to generate recognition and belonging on its basis. *Next Christian Community* is an Evangelical congregation, and thus can draw on Evangelicalism’s cultural memory and its manifestation in symbols and rites. For example, Evangelicalism’s way of performing baptism differs from other Christian faiths’ (Catholicism, Protestantism, etc.) way of performing baptism. Accordingly, *Next Christian Community*’s church space features a baptismal tank, manifesting Evangelicalism’s observation of this particular Christian practice in physical form. The baptismal tank’s presence in *Next Christian Community*’s sanctuary reminds congregation members of going through their own baptisms, thereby ensuring their common identities as Evangelical Christians. In other words, by identifying as an Evangelical congregation and by drawing on practices in which Evangelicalism’s cultural memory exists, *Next Christian Community*’s members have feelings of community, unity, and connection based on a common belief system.

As I have shown above, *Next Christian Community* deviates in some regards from Evangelicalism. Many Evangelical congregations have separated themselves from traditions

that belong to other Christian denominations such as Catholic, Orthodox, and/or Mainline Protestant denominations, forming ‘affective ties’ amongst its members by dissociating from those traditions. *Next Christian Community*, however, has developed its own form of doing church. This form of doing church includes using a variety of external symbols in which Christendom’s cultural memory exists. Christendom’s cultural memory is, for example, preserved and reembodyed in the use of particular symbols such as the cross, the stained glass, and/or paintings/figures of Jesus and in building conventional/cathedral-like/specifically set-aside worship spaces (cultural formation). Furthermore, specialists maintain Christendom’s cultural memory through particular worship practices such as doing the confession, lighting candles, praying on knees, sermons, and the formalized observation of Christian rites (institutional communication).

In this chapter, I introduce a variety of objects and sermons that demonstrate *Next Christian Community*’s hybridity. I argue that *Next Christian Community*’s reconciliation of Evangelicalism’s traditions and Christendom’s traditions allows the community to separate itself from *St. Albert Alliance Church* and from other local Evangelical congregations. By introducing a variety of Christian traditions into its worship space and worship practice, *Next Christian Community* is able to concretize its own identity. Such an approach, however, may confuse newer members, and thus needs to be continuously addressed, explained, and communicated. By being a church that surpasses its common identity as an Evangelical congregation, it was/is necessary for *Next Christian Community* to generate recognition and belonging beyond members’ shared identities as Evangelical Christians. By drawing on Assmann’s concepts of cultural memory and communicative memory (in short: collective memory), I am able to show how *Next Christian Community* was/is able to strengthen its own identity as an Evangelical congregation that not only challenges certain aspects of Evangelicalism but ultimately seeks to create its own form of doing church.

“The future will remember us” (Sappho, quoted in Jong, 2003: XV).

My previous analysis revealed that *Next Christian Community*'s early members have a shared understanding of a particular form of doing church. Their shared understanding developed due to their shared past at *St. Albert Alliance Church* and is manifested in a corresponding form of church space. As I explained above, early members were unsatisfied with *St. Albert Alliance Church*'s pragmatic form of doing church and the importance the congregation placed on extending its physical church space. It led *Next Christian Community*'s early members to take a different approach in worship space and worship practice, one that would set them apart from their mother church. Due to their shared background at *St. Albert Alliance Church*, *Next Christian Community*'s early members' have a shared memory of past events. The common memory of these shared past events influenced the congregation and created bonds between its early members. Furthermore, early members' shared memory is informed by both ways of remembering, by communicative memory as well as by cultural memory. In this chapter, I argue that communicative memory and cultural memory blend together in *Next Christian Community*'s narrative.

The cultural memory (a memory that refers to a mythical history) that informs *Next Christian Community*'s culture is Christianity in its Evangelical formation. According to Assmann, cultural memory “ensures the members of a given society (group) have feelings of community, unity, and connections based on a common past. Its goal is the transfer of selected content and interpretation of the past so that members of a given society can create common memory and common identity on its basis” (Karkowska, 2013: 370). Different from communicative memory, cultural memory “is based on institutionalized mnemotechniques created ‘from above’ by means of institutions supervised by authorities” (Karkowska, 2013:

370). It is a living memory which is based on recognition and belonging and it depends on certain objects that carry that memory with them (Assmann, 2013).

Both *St. Albert Alliance Church's* and *Next Christian Community's* members have a common identity as Evangelical Christians. Different from *St. Albert Alliance Church*, however, *Next Christian Community* has a variety of objects in its church space that carry, and thus transfer, Christendom's cultural memory. For example, the two ornamental metal crosses that hang in *Next Christian Community's* entrance area connect the congregation to a Christian heritage that was significant prior to Evangelicalism, prior to the Reformation. Birgit mentions these two ornamental metal crosses during our interview. She explains:

When we're kind of looking for a space and even as the church itself was developing, we--part of what we were doing is looking back into church history and finding some symbols from the historical Christian church that we were using in worship, bringing some liturgy back. And I think when [a member of the congregation] found those two, they were wrought iron with crosses in them, they kind of speak a little bit to history, just the shape of them. They look a bit like stained glass window shapes with the crosses in and they're kind of an old fashioned, more a decorative cross. And I--they just kind of spoke to what we saw as what we wanted the culture of the church develop within worship and things like that. We wanted to tie back to a more historical, orthodox celebration of faith. They [the two ornamental metal crosses] kind of spoke to that (Birgit, Interview 2013: 5-6).

In this quote, Birgit reveals that these two ornamental metal crosses remind her of a 'more historical, orthodox celebration of faith.' By displaying symbols and objects in its church space that do not belong and occasionally even contradict Evangelicalism's formation, *Next Christian Community* requires its members to establish a common identity that exceeds their identities as Evangelical Christians. Furthermore, such "objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ('We are this') or in a negative ('That's our opposite') sense" (Assmann, 1988: 130). By displaying objects in its church space that do not belong and/or contradict Evangelicalism, *Next Christian Community* is able to concretize its identity, further separating itself from *St. Albert Alliance Church* and/or other local Evangelical congregations.

Another example that connects *Next Christian Community's* members to a Christian heritage that Evangelicalism has separated from is the stained glass in the sanctuary. As I discussed in my previous chapter, many of my interview participants identify stained glass as an element that belongs to Christendom's spatial tradition rather than to Evangelicalism's spatial tradition. According to them, stained glass is a common architectural feature of conventional/cathedral-like/set-aside church buildings. Many of my interview participants, however, also acknowledge a difference between *Next Christian Community's* stained glass and the stained glass that typically belongs to the architecture of conventional/cathedral-like/set-aside church buildings. Margit, for example, uses the word, contemporary, when she describes *Next Christian Community's* stained glass (Margit, First Interview 2013: 5). Different from conventional/cathedral-like/set-aside church buildings' stained glass windows, *Next Christian Community's* piece is custom-made. It does not tell a familiar biblical narrative or features angels, saints, etc. Instead, it depicts *Next Christian Community's* own journey of becoming an independent congregation. Therefore, the piece not only transfers Christendom's cultural memory by being stained glass, it also transfers *Next Christian Community's* own particular memory by depicting the congregation's unique journey, thereby carrying and archiving its narrative.

Next Christian Community's narrative, however, belongs to a recent past contemporaries share with each other, resembling similarities with Assmann's concept of communicative memory rather than with his concept of cultural memory. According to Assmann's concept of communicative memory, *Next Christian Community's* own history does not require such a form of material symbolization. In other words, the process of formation, "the objectivation or crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge" (Assmann, 1988: 130), is a prerequisite for cultural memory rather than for communicative memory. The existence of an object that captures *Next Christian Community's* narrative therefore surpasses the informal character of an

autobiographical/communicative memory. It functions as a reminding object, and thus, displayed in *Next Christian Community's* sanctuary, ensures that early members have feelings of community, unity, and connections to this particular congregation based on their shared past.

Interestingly, the stained glass captures and transfers an incomplete version of *Next Christian Community's* narrative. While it indicates *Next Christian Community's* connection to *St. Albert Alliance Church* and the congregation's journey of renting spaces from different churches in St. Albert to settling into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, it does not capture any of the struggles that also were a part of that journey. As I mentioned above, only early members have a complete understanding of *Next Christian Community's* narrative. They are able to recall positive as well as negative experiences of *Next Christian Community's* past by looking at this piece because they were actively involved in the congregation's beginning. In reference to *Next Christian Community's* history, early members are, in fact, specialists who have the power to select which aspects of the congregation's narrative they would like to pass on to newer members. The existence of specialists, who are the bearers of *Next Christian Community's* history, is another aspect that is more reminiscent of cultural rather than of communicative memory.

Bernhard is *Next Christian Community's* Associate Pastor and the only member I interviewed who was not a part of *Next Christian Community's* early developments. As an Associate Pastor, he is considered to be a specialist in the cultivation of Christian knowledge (cultural memory). He, however, is not a specialist in *Next Christian Community's* history (communicative memory). During our interview, he admits that his knowledge of *Next Christian Community's* beginning is limited. He states:

My knowledge of it [Next Christian Community's] history is limited. So, I know that we were--came out of a church plant of St. Albert Alliance [Church]. So, [the Lead Pastor] was at St. Albert Alliance [Church]. And then a lot of people were at St. Albert Alliance [Church] and then they formed Next [Christian Community] through St. Albert Alliance [Church] (Bernhard, Interview 2015: 45).

This quote shows that Bernhard is aware of the fact that *Next Christian Community* developed out of *St. Albert Alliance Church*. His description of *Next Christian Community's* past, however, lacks the concrete details that led to *Next Christian Community's* separation from *St. Albert Alliance Church* and to the particular form of doing church *Next Christian Community* has developed. For example, Bernhard does not seem to know that *Next Christian Community's* early members developed the desire of being a smaller, more intimate, and more worshipful group of believers due to their shared experiences at *St. Albert Alliance Church*. Furthermore, Bernhard does not seem to be aware of the fact that this experience led early members to reject the idea of financing a newly-built, large worship facility located on the outskirts of their town, and instead motivated them to move into the former Village Landing Movie Theatre, a space that not only allowed them to establish a connection to their surrounding community but also provided them with the opportunity to create a space that satisfies their longing for Christendom's spatial traditions. During our interview, Birgit, for example, explains:

I think they've [St. Albert Alliance Church] changed over the years too. I think they've--their philosophy has changed. But there were great big--that megachurch mentality was certainly a part of say the church ten years ago, the Evangelical church ten years ago, was building great big churches on the periphery of the city. [...] St. Albert Alliance [Church] wanted to be a big megachurch, And I think those of us that became Next [Christian Community], we didn't want that. We wanted something that was smaller. That was more community-based, more authentic (Birgit, Interview 2013: 51-52).

In contrast to Bernhard, Birgit, who was a part of the congregation's beginning, is a specialist of *Next Christian Community's* history. In this quote, Birgit confirms that *Next Christian Community's* early members' desire to be a smaller and more intimate congregation comes from their shared experiences with and their negative perception of *St. Albert Alliance Church's* megachurch mentality. Furthermore, she notes that *St. Albert Alliance Church's* philosophy most likely has changed during the past ten years and continued to evolve.

According to Assmann, "memory goes hand-in-hand with forgetting" (Assmann,

2013) and it “involves a process of forgetting, moments of rupture and rebirth. We have to accept that. So in order to survive, cultural memory depends on two different mechanisms: canonisation or, in other words, the selection of what must be taught to the younger generations; and the archive, which enables us to retrieve memories” (Assmann, 2013).

According to Assmann’s concept of collective memory, Bernhard’s incomplete knowledge of *Next Christian Community*’s beginning is not necessarily problematic. Assmann further argues that the process of forgetting and the moments of rupture and rebirth are, in fact, helpful mechanisms that allow groups to select and to pass on the constructive aspects of their past, while simultaneously eliminating the destructive aspects of their past. Doing so ensures their survival and their stability (Assmann, 2013).

Since *Next Christian Community*’s early members’ negative perception of *St. Albert Alliance Church*’s megachurch mentality refers to a specific time in the past, both church communities have changed and evolved since their separation, it would not be beneficial to pass on a negative image of *St. Albert Alliance Church* to newer members. By communicating a positive image of *St. Albert Alliance Church*, *Next Christian Community* is able to continue to have a healthy relationship with its mother church. Therefore, I agree with Assmann and argue that the content of what should be taught to a newer generation needs to be selected and carefully chosen. While I find that it is unnecessary for every member to be familiar with *Next Christian Community*’s entire creation process, I nonetheless find that it is inevitable for newer members to be aware of the particular form of doing church the congregation has developed.

Next Christian Community’s reconciliation of various Christian traditions in worship space and worship practice is an aspect of the congregation’s form of doing church that needs to be communicated. In addition to the ornamental metal crosses, the paintings of Jesus, and the stained glass, newer members may not expect to find a separate prayer area with two prayer benches in an Evangelical worship space and/or do not expect to pray on their knees

during an Evangelical worship service. While the prayer benches, including the form of prayer they require, add to the atmosphere of *Next Christian Community's* church space, creating sacredness and ensuring the development of a devotional mood, they also add to *Next Christian Community's* ambiguity, and thus may confuse newer members and/or make them feel uncomfortable. During our interview, Margit, for example, states:

Yeah, they [the prayer benches] are not unique to Next [Christian Community], but they are not very typical in an Evangelical church either. So, a little different then the way a lot of Evangelical churches do church in having that. Sometimes Evangelicals have tried so hard to cast off conventional church practices that we kinda threw the baby out with the bathwater. Do you know what that means? (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 2-3).

Margit's quote confirms that the prayer benches belong to a conventional church practice, a church practice that most Evangelical churches, such as *St. Albert Alliance Church*, have separated from.

After admitting that I am unfamiliar with the term, 'to throw out the baby with the bathwater,' Margit further explains:

It means that you sometimes when you're getting rid of something that you think isn't useful anymore; you let it take the useful part with it. So, that you don't just give up the tradition but you forget about the thing, the need that underlies the tradition. So, I think like traditional churches, Catholic churches, Anglican churches have kneelers in their pews, right, and a lot of cooperate kneeling during worship and that kind of thing. They kneel for communion. We don't do tha-- Evangelicals stepped away from that but then we forgot that we ever needed to kneel. So, and to recognize that when we approach God, we are coming to Him very much in position of something much lesser approaching something much greater. So, I think bringing in the kneelers [prayer benches] is our recognition of that, that we come to God to appeal for help and mercy, comfort (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 3).

In her quote, Margit acknowledges that the tradition of praying on knees does not belong to Evangelicalism's cultural memory. Furthermore, she criticizes Evangelicalism's separation from certain worship traditions such as praying on knees, indicating that some traditions are valuable and meaningful. According to her, the activity of praying on knees is a tradition that can help believers to establish a humbled mindset. Interestingly, Margit does not "make use of [the prayer area] very often. So, I don't really have much of a feeling about it. It's cool that

it's there but it's like the nursery. I never actually used it, you know?" (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 2).

Although Margit does not use the prayer area herself, she nonetheless values it. Due to the fact that Margit has been a part of *Next Christian Community* since its beginning, and thus is familiar with the congregation's longing for Christendom's liturgical and spatial traditions, she can make sense of the prayer area's existence within *Next Christian Community's* worship space. Newer members, however, also need to make sense of the existence of the prayer area and its use within an Evangelical worship facility. In order to familiarize newer members and/or remind long-term members of the existence of the prayer area, the Lead Pastor often ends his sermons by inviting congregation members to utilize this space for individual prayer practices after service.

As I mentioned above, Bernhard is a newer member who is not familiar with all of the details that led to *Next Christian Community's* creation. He, however, is familiar with the prayer area, its use, and its purpose as a place that allows persons to pray privately and to experience a different, possibly unfamiliar, prayer posture. Accordingly, during our interview, he describes the prayer area as "a space that we just made purposefully for certain--for a certain reason, right? We wanted to create a space where people could get away and have maybe a private moment. And then, you know, I think there is something to be said about posture even. So, to have something where you can kneel, it's kinda like, you know, you posture yourself for different things" (Bernhard, Interview, 2015: 42). Despite being a newer member himself, Bernhard, as *Next Christian Community's* Associate Pastor, is similar to the Lead Pastor, an authority that needs to continuously strengthen the congregation's particular form of worship space and worship practice. The way in which Bernhard talks about the space ('we just made,' 'we wanted to create') suggests that he not only accepted but also internalized its existence within *Next Christian Community's* worship facility, allowing him to authentically communicate the prayer area's use and purpose to newer members.

During my time at *Next Christian Community*, I observed that many congregation members indeed use the prayer area, including the prayer benches, incorporating this form of prayer into their individual prayer practices. During our interview, Günther, for example, takes a picture of this space. While he takes the photograph, I ask him whether or not he uses this space on a regular basis. He provides following answer:

I have. Yeah. I've done it kinda on my own. Not sort of necessarily attached to like ... you know how [the Lead Pastor] invites people to the back for a prayer? Just on my own. I like this space. It does ... I like the prayer ... prayer altars are fine, very ... they're very comforting. Like, it's to kneel on and just kinda rest your head on that or your arms. Just the posture is very nice, just a nice posture. 'Cause there is very few places where we kneel or get on knees just to be humble, just to breath. I guess if you do yoga, you do it but ... you know, doing like downward dog or some crazy position. But I find the prayer altars quite nice to just think and relax. Especially when there is nothing else going on in here, is actually ... I find it quite peaceful (Günther, Interview 2015: 35).



Photograph 5 by Günther, taken on the 8th of February 2015

Similar to Margit, he finds that praying on knees enables believers to develop humbleness. In

contrast to Margit, however, Günther actively uses the prayer area. Furthermore, he describes it as a space that “creates a sense of sacredness” and allows him to “enter into a relationship with God there and just meet the Divine” (Günther, Interview 2015: 3).

Many members such as Margit value and understand the existence of the prayer area within *Next Christian Community's* church space. Some members such as Günther and Bernhard even use the space regularly and incorporate it into their personal/individual prayer practices. The activity of praying on knees, however, is not an integral part of *Next Christian Community's* Sunday services. The Lead Pastor only occasionally incorporates the use of the prayer area and/or the activity of praying on knees directly into his sermons. During these occasions, he usually explains his decision-making process, helpful for congregation members to understand the incorporation of a traditional prayer practice into an Evangelical worship service.

One example is the sermon that took place on the 21st of September 2014. During this service, the Lead Pastor encouraged congregation members to pray on their knees while observing the Holy Communion, a Christian rite that celebrates Christ's sacrifice by consuming bread (representation of Christ's body) and wine/grape juice (representation of Christ's blood).

Observation notes from the 21st of September 2014: For Holy Communion today, the Lead Pastor wants persons to kneel down in order to get spiritual. He acknowledges that some persons might feel uncomfortable doing so because it is public, exposing them to vulnerability. He, however, believes that it is time for the congregation members to get on their knees, to put their baggage down, and to stop believing lies. Before the start of this service, the Lead Pastor placed trays of communion cups and a variety of pillows at three different places within the sanctuary: one tray is placed on the right side of the stage, one tray is placed on the left side of the stage, and one tray is placed on top of the baptismal tank. While the band is playing, persons are supposed to go to one of these places, kneel down on one of the pillows, and take communion (drink the small cup of grape juice while praying). I am surprised to see that a lot of persons (almost the entire congregation, including some of the older kids) come to the front, kneel down, and take the communion while praying on their knees. It again is a very emotional service.

During this sermon, the Lead Pastor not only explains the value of this prayer practice, he also

acknowledges that praying on knees in such an open and public way may be uncomfortable for some persons, especially for those who never have experienced this prayer posture before. Although congregation members generally have a choice whether or not they would like to participate in *Next Christian Community's* worship activities, during this particular service almost the entire congregation participated and prayed on their knees while they consumed the Communion items.

During our interview, Margit indicates that *Next Christian Community's* particular way of observing Communion differs from *St. Albert Alliance Church's* and other Evangelical churches' way of observing Communion:

You create your own traditions, you know? You get used to this is the way Next [Christian Community] does things and if you change that up then people wonder. So, one of the things that we did--that Next [Christian Community] has done differently from the start is the way they serve Communion. That in most Evangelical--at St. Albert Alliance [Church] and in a lot of Evangelical churches, Communion is passed. So, it's--the plates are passed down the aisle whereas we switched to a tradition where you get up and go to the front when you choose to. So, that shifted from a meal that you are served to a meal you go to partake in and it does represent a meal in some ways. And, now that's become, you know, the "next/Next" (her pronunciation of the word suggest quotation marks, indicating that this is a play on words) tradition and if we ever did Communion and had everybody sit and passed plates that would make us think about it differently again. 'Cause one of the problems people have is once you've done something a certain way it just becomes the way we do it. And it doesn't become a thing that has meaning (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 7).

In this quote Margit explains that many Evangelical congregations distribute trays of small cups of grape juice and plates of broken bread to the seated congregation in order to observe Communion. According to Margit and my own observations, *Next Christian Community's* Holy Communion celebration includes getting up and walking to the front of the sanctuary, and thus shares similarities with the worship practices of conventional/traditional churches. Similar to many Evangelical churches, however, *Next Christian Community* does not celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday. Instead, *Next Christian Community* observes this particular rite only four or five times a year (Lead Pastor, Observation Notes 2014).

Next Christian Community's form of celebrating this particular Christian rite brings

together Evangelicalism's practice (observing Communion only four times a year) and Christendom's practice (receiving Communion at the front of the church). By talking to various congregation members before and after *Next Christian Community's* Sunday services, however, I learned that *Next Christian Community's* Holy Communion celebration often includes an active/participatory element in addition to consuming grape juice and bread. For example, a congregation member shared an experience during which *Next Christian Community's* members celebrated the Holy Communion by writing their sins on a small piece of paper. After writing down their sins, congregation members walked to the front of the sanctuary, consumed the Communion items, and nailed their piece of paper to a wooden cross. Therefore, *Next Christian Community's* members not only bring together various Christian traditions when celebrating particular Christian rites but also add to them in a unique way.

Another important service that demonstrates *Next Christian Community's* hybridity took place on the 13th of October 2013. The Lead Pastor performed an infant baptism, an act that is different from most Evangelical baptismal practices. Before the Lead Pastor baptized the infant, he explained that infant baptism is an act that belongs to more conventional church traditions. Evangelicals do not baptize infants but dedicate them. When they are "old enough to make the choice for their self" (Lead Pastor, Observation Notes 2013), they will be emergent baptized which includes wading into the baptismal tank. For the Pastor, baptizing an infant was a way of respecting the wishes of the infant's parents and celebrating "the Christian traditions beyond our little niche" (Lead Pastor, Observation Notes 2013). Margit mentions this specific service during our interview and describes that it is unique and unusual for a church community that belongs to Christian and Missionary Alliance to have an infant baptism in their church space:

That is the first infant baptism I've ever seen in an Alliance church. So, that's a very unusual thing to have done but to respect the families convictions and background and, say that this is something we can do that would not happen in a

lot of Alliance churches and just be told well, we don't do that. We have, to become a member at Next [Christian Community] you have to have been baptized and infant baptism would not be sufficient in our tradition (Margit, Second Interview 2013: 8-9).

On the following Sunday, the 20th of October 2013, I had the opportunity to witness a baby dedication. Different from the infant baptism, the baby dedication does not include the act of pouring or sprinkling holy water onto the infant. Before the Lead Pastor dedicated the baby, he explained again the differences between an infant baptism and a baby dedication:

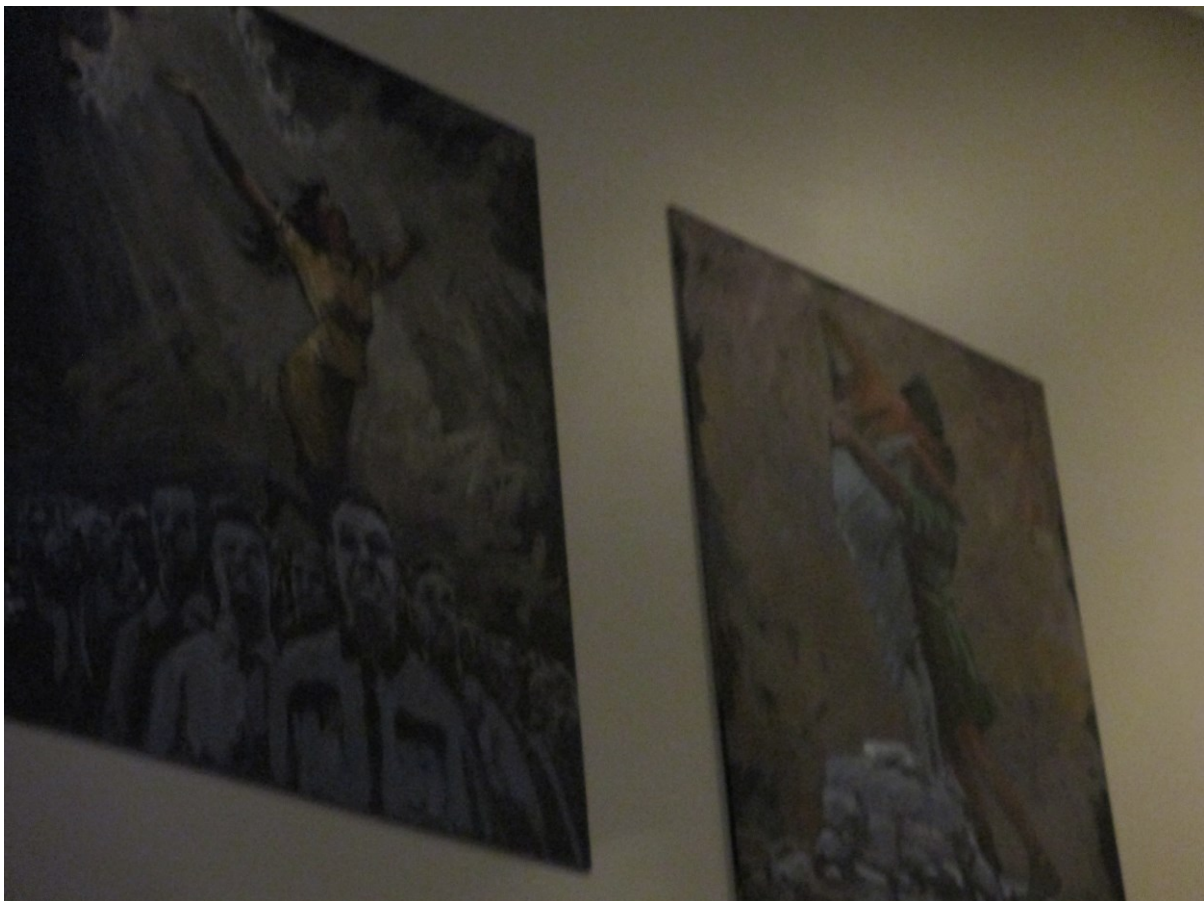
Observation notes from the 20st of October 2013: Before the Lead Pastor dedicates the baby, he explains to the congregation that the churches that baptize believe that God has chosen all of us. Their tradition first includes an infant baptism and then later, during early adolescence, the children have a Confirmation celebration. The Lead Pastor further tells us that Evangelicals have reversed the order: first they dedicate the baby and when the children are old enough to make their own decision, they get emergent baptized (wading into the baptismal tank). The Lead Pastor explains that he wanted to address these differences again in order for persons to understand what has happened last week and what will happen today.

These two particular Sunday services (the one on the 13th of October 2013 and the one on the 20th of October 2013) further provide evidence for *Next Christian Community's* openness to incorporate traditions into its worship service that are not typical for an Evangelical congregation.

In addition to celebrating Christian rites in a way that shares similarities with traditional/conventional worship practices, *Next Christian Community* is open to experiment with artistic elements. For example, I have been able to participate in Sunday services at *Next Christian Community* that include poetry slams, live-cooking, and/or live-painting. In my previous chapter, I introduced the communal production of the handprint painting as one example during which the congregation incorporated the production of an art piece into its worship practice. The Easter service on the 20th of April 2014 provides another example. Unlike the creation of the handprint painting, however, the painting that developed during this particular Easter service was not a communal activity. Instead, Falk painted the picture by himself, standing on top of the baptismal tank, while the Lead Pastor talked about the

meaning of Easter (Observation Notes 2014):

Observation notes from the 20th of April 2014: Today is Easter Sunday. Last Sunday, I learned that Falk would do a live-painting during the Lead Pastor's sermon on Easter Sunday. It seems to be a Next Christian Community Easter tradition. [...] While the Lead Pastor talks, Falk paints two figures. One figure seems to be a statue made out of stone, while the other figure seems to be a human being. After Falk finished the painting, he tells the congregation that the Lead Pastor wanted him to paint something about Jesus being in us. Following the Lead Pastor's request, Falk's painting depicts how a stone figure becomes flesh, representing how the Resurrection made church come to live. After the service, I further learn that this painting is a reproduction of a French artist's painting. Although this painting depicts a Greek story/myth, Falk nonetheless saw a connection to Christianity in it. He explains that this particular story/myth inspired him to recreate this painting during the Lead Pastor's Easter sermon.



Photograph 6 by Falk, taken on the 24th of January 2015

During our interview, Falk takes this photograph. It not only depicts the piece that he painted during the Easter service on the 20th of April 2014. The photograph features another one of Falk's pieces that he also painted during a worship service. Falk reveals that the Lead Pastor's "sermon was about waking up to the spirit" (Falk, Interview 2015: 70). Therefore, he painted

a woman who “is awakened to the spirit of God” (Falk, Interview 2015: 70), breaks out of, and rises above “a bunch of zombies” (Falk, Interview 2015: 66). Falk acknowledges that “most churches wouldn’t hang a zombie picture in their church” (Falk, Interview 2015: 71), indicating *Next Christian Community’s* openness and its appreciation for art.

Similar to the stained glass and the handprint painting, Falk’s two paintings carry and archive *Next Christian Community’s* own particular memory. Different from the stained glass that depicts *Next Christian Community’s* narrative, however, the handprint painting’s creation and Falk’s two live-paintings took place during *Next Christian Community’s* Sunday services and were directly included into its worship practices. According to Assmann’s concept of cultural memory, these three paintings are, in fact, a pictorial formation of *Next Christian Community’s* form of doing church which again suggests an overlap of the characteristics of communicative and cultural memory within *Next Christian Community’s* narrative. Although these pieces carry a recent memory, their display in the sanctuary nonetheless can trigger members’ memories, thereby reminding them of a shared worship experience. Furthermore, in his sermons, the Lead Pastor cultivates and legitimizes *Next Christian Community’s* form of doing church, including its use of traditional worship practices and its use of unique/participatory elements. By doing so, the Lead Pastor not only ensures that newer members can make sense of *Next Christian Community’s* decoration but also can become a part of further developments.

Interestingly, *Next Christian Community’s* experimentation with Christianity’s cultural heritage in worship space and worship practice (whether it is by drawing on Evangelicalism or on Christendom’s tradition) is characteristic for cultural memory. Assmann states that “no memory can preserve the past. What remains is only that ‘which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference.’ Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates to knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation” (Assmann, 1988: 130). While memory is fixed in its “immovable figures of memory and

stores of knowledge” (Assmann, 1988: 130), the contemporary context relates to those differently either by appropriation, criticism, preservation, or transformation. According to Assmann, cultural memory exists therefore in two modes: in the mode of potentiality and in the mode of actuality. Due to their shared past with *St. Albert Alliance Church, Next Christian Community*’s members criticiz(ed) and transform(ed) certain aspects of Evangelicalism’s store of knowledge, while reviving and, therefore, preserving certain aspects of Christendom’s store of knowledge. *Next Christian Community*’s way of relating to Christianity in a contemporary context through criticism, transformation, and preservation, including adding its own unique and creative elements, shares similarities with the emerging churches’ reconstruction of Christianity’s cultural heritage.

During our interview, Günther, for example, states that *Next Christian Community*’s “openness to the whole idea of being ecumenical in nature, is a strong piece of the emerging church” (Günther, Interview 2015: 21). Günther further explains that being ecumenical means to be “open to all denominations, Protestant, Catholic, recognizing that we’re all sort of moving in the same direction and pursuing the same thing with different practices and traditions all mixed in, right? (Günther, Interview 2015: 21). Günther’s statement is congruent with Gibbs’s and Bolger’s findings. According to them, emerging churches engage in spiritual activities that are reminiscent of Christendom’s liturgical traditions and/or other ancient Christian traditions. Emerging churches do not only welcome various rituals but also liturgies, if they are culturally accessible, stimulating, and nourishing. Different from churches that emphasize a performance-oriented worship practice, emerging churches find it relevant to reconnect with liturgies and rituals because they come from a church tradition that not only “inspired past generations but also sustained the church across centuries” (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 224).

In their monograph, Gibbs and Bolger introduce and describe a variety of emerging churches that incorporate traditional practices into their Sunday services such as lighting

candles and incense, doing confessions, and celebrating the Holy Communion. Furthermore, Gibbs and Bolger state that emerging churches do not simply adopt/apply these traditional worship practices. “Instead, they select highly participative practices that integrate body and spirit” (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 220). Accordingly, many emerging churches not only draw from a variety of traditions but develop their own mix by including creative and artistic elements/activities (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 222-223).

In addition to *Next Christian Community*’s development of its own creative worship approach, *Next Christian Community* has adopted a variety of other emerging church characteristics. Similar to many emerging churches, *Next Christian Community* seeks to be a smaller, more intimate group of believers, has a desire to be located within its surrounding community, and wants to be strongly connected to it. All of these aspects not only belong to *Next Christian Community*’s common identity but also are manifested in the congregation’s physical church space. While the Lead Pastor regularly addresses *Next Christian Community*’s use of traditional worship practices, the congregation’s connection to art and its surrounding community, and the congregation’s focus on social justice, he does not refer to *Next Christian Community* as an emerging church.

During our interview, I address the emerging church tradition and ask the Lead Pastor whether or not *Next Christian Community* identifies with it. He reveals that when *Next Christian Community* “started ten years ago, we used the word emergent a lot. We don’t--I don’t use it anymore, the emergent church. [...] I didn’t know what I was identifying with anymore. So, therefore I went ‘if you guys aren’t gonna ever declare anything, then how do I know if I’m in or I’m not?’” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 32). The Lead Pastor discontinued calling *Next Christian Community* an emerging church because it became unclear to him what the tradition actually entails.

In his monograph, *The Emerging Church: Religion at the Margins* (2012), Josh Packard finds that it is, indeed, challenging to generalize the emerging church tradition. The

worship style of emerging churches is one example that reflects this challenge:

The worship style of the congregations in this study are difficult to generalize, and no individual congregation stands out because of a particular distinctive liturgy. Every congregation in this study utilized different worship styles including elements of traditional and mainstream liturgies which had the effect of connecting the congregation to a larger, already legitimated, faith tradition. The worship service on a given week at any of the Emerging Churches in this study might not be all that different from mainstream worship services. However, from week to week the service is likely to change substantially (Packard, 2012: 14-16).

Similar to Gibbs and Bolger, Packard's study on emerging churches reveals that they incorporate various Christian traditions into their worship practices. He, however, also finds that emerging churches' services differ substantially from week to week. According to him, emerging churches "intentionally resist institutionalized organizational procedures of all kinds, whether dominant or alternative, bureaucratic and hierarchical or democratic and consensual (Packard, 2012: 13).

During my time as an ethnographer, I became familiar with the structure of *Next Christian Community's* Sunday services. While the Lead Pastor often includes creative/participatory/unique elements into his sermons, the structure of the services mostly remains the same. *Next Christian Community's* worship services start with one or two songs the worship band plays. After singing along to the band, the Pastor responsible for kids' church holds a short sermon for the children before they go into their separate classrooms. After the kids have left, the Associate Pastor makes announcements, leads the prayer of confession, and asks the persons on the end of each seating row to pass around the offering baskets. After collecting the offerings, congregation members greet each other by saying: "Peace be with you." The service continues with a congregation member reading a scripture passage on stage. The sermon of the Lead Pastor follows. Afterwards, the band plays again. Service ends with a blessing provided by a member of the congregation and closes with the line "In the name of the Father who created you, the Son who redeemed you, and the Holy Spirit who sanctified you, go and be who Jesus wants you to be."

Interestingly, during our interview, the Lead Pastor reveals that *Next Christian Community* started to follow such a consistent worship routine only four years ago. Before the congregation developed a consistent worship style, “every Sunday was different. [...] We would, we--every Sunday would be different than the Sunday before. And we changed that in order to develop some sort of rhythm” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 33). According to the Lead Pastor, practical reasons motivated him to establish such a routine. He explains that when the worship Pastor left *Next Christian Community*’s staff, “I no longer had anybody in that position formally paid to look after things. So it was just easier for everybody if it was just always the same from an organizational standpoint. [...] And I didn’t have to worry about creating something on my own each and every week by myself” (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 34). While the emerging church tradition rejects routines and organizational structures, *Next Christian Community*’s recent Sunday services rely on following a routine, contradicting the worship style of emerging churches.

Despite *Next Christian Community*’s change in worship style, the congregation’s form of doing church shares many similarities with the emerging church tradition. The fact that the emerging church tradition influenced *Next Christian Community*’s form of doing church, however, will essentially disappear from the congregation’s memory. During our interview, the Lead Pastor explains that he intentionally eliminated any vocabulary that belongs to the emerging church tradition from his sermons:

For me at this point it represents ambiguity. Yeah. So, I don’t, yeah, I don’t use the language at all. I don’t use the--like ten years ago when we started we used the word emergent and postmodern all the time. I dropped that from my vocabulary probably about five six years ago. Don’t use it (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 34).

In this quote, the Lead Pastor admits that, for him, the emerging church tradition represents ambiguity. He further states:

I just don’t know what it is I’m identifying with. So, therefore, I prefer, like you, not to be part of something that I don’t even know what it is. You know? It’s not that I’m anti-label. It’s just that I don’t like choosing to be part of ambiguity (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 34).

Due to the fact that the Lead Pastor does not cultivate this aspect of *Next Christian Community's* memory, it will go through the process of forgetting, the moments of rupture and rebirth. Essentially, newer members will not be able to know that *Next Christian Community's* form of doing church was, in fact, inspired by the emerging church tradition.

Instead of calling *Next Christian Community* an emerging church, the Lead Pastor uses the word, niche church, in order to describe *Next Christian Community's* culture. By doing so, he suggests that *Next Christian Community's* form of doing church is, indeed, different and unique. He states:

So, the culture of Next [Christian Community], from my end as Pastor, is that it is a church that is, again, it's about its community. It's about serving. It's about justice. It's about, certainly being together or having fun together, playing together, that kind of thing. So, if you walk around here, you know, there is a studio, a movie theatre, a play centre. So, I mean, that sense of recreation and having fun together is actually in the physical space. There is a game's room for Pete's sake, you know? There is a counter top that's nice and long that you can serve food off of, you know? And so, there is all these things that are about kind of that sort of meeting together. The art that is hanging around here is, I've been to churches with some either no art or really really bad art. We have so many artists in the church and it's an artistic church. Well, that's reflected on the walls. The physical space shows that, reflects that. So, again, I've said like we're a bit of a niche church. You know, that progressive Evangelical thing is a bit of a niche thing (Lead Pastor, Interview 2015: 30).

In this quote, the Lead Pastor summarizes the particular aspects that belong to *Next Christian Community's* identity. Furthermore, he suggests that *Next Christian Community's* church space captures these aspects of the congregation's identity. The homeyness of the church space and the fact that it includes a studio, a functioning movie theatre, and a play structure not only allows the congregation to create a sense of togetherness amongst its members, it also helps the congregation to be a part to its surrounding community. Yet the space also is a living archive of *Next Christian Community's* history. With each renovation, members commemorate their collective memory and transmit their particular form of doing church to newer members.

By drawing on Assmann's concepts of cultural memory and communicative memory, it becomes clear that the emerging church tradition, a movement that highly influenced *Next Christian Community's* from of doing church, is by definition not a cultural memory. For the emerging church tradition to become a lasting component of Christianity's cultural heritage, it would need to survive longer than three interacting generations. Due to the fact that the development of the emerging church tradition, as a response to the seeker-sensitive church tradition in the late 20th century, took place fairly recently, it is not a part of Christianity's cultural memory yet. Instead, it is a memory that is in its transitioning phase from being a communicative memory to possibly becoming a cultural memory.

As I mentioned above, transitioning from communicative to cultural memory depends on cultivation by specialists and formalization and stabilization by any forms of material symbolization. In other words, cultural memory "requires institutions of preservation and reembodiment" (Assmann, 2008: 111). The emerging churches, however, are "loosely coupled organization[s] with no distinct leader[s], vision[s], or mission[s]" (Packard, 2012: 7), rejecting institutionalization "at the very core of their conception of church" (Packard, 2012: 6). By resisting institutionalization, emerging churches simultaneously resist the prerequisite for cultural memory. Furthermore, by being open to continuous change, emerging churches resist generalization, making it hard for contemporary congregations to understand what it entails to be an emerging church. *Next Christian Community* is an example of a contemporary congregation that could have been an emerging church but instead separated from this tradition, criticizing its ambiguity. Such a reaction challenges the emerging church tradition's survival, making it challenging for it to continue to be a significant part of Christianity's cultural heritage.

Instead of calling itself an emerging church, *Next Christian Community* identifies itself

as a niche church. While *Next Christian Community* internalized some of the emerging church characteristics, it eliminated other aspects, and thus created its own form of doing church manifested in a corresponding form of church space. Furthermore, the church space that *Next Christian Community* has created, archives *Next Christian Community's* own symbolism. By creating its own material symbolization and by having specialists who cultivate the congregation's history and its own form of doing church, *Next Christian Community's* narrative challenges Assmann's structure of communicative and cultural memory. In this chapter, I have shown that the mechanisms of communicative and cultural memory often overlap within *Next Christian Community's* narrative. Although Assmann acknowledges that there is a dynamic between these two ways of remembering, suggesting transition and transformation processes, I argue towards developing a third concept in addition to communicative and cultural memory. A third concept that functions as an overlapping memory between communicative and cultural memory may be beneficial in order to gain a deeper understanding in what ways groups, communities, etc. strengthen and communicate their particular identities in a postmodern society.

Curtain Fall: Providing a Conclusion

Next Christian Community's journey provides one example of a church split. Through *Next Christian Community's* narrative, I was able to address some of the reasons for a church split and to reconstruct the process of a splinter group to establish itself, to form and to strengthen its own identity. In *Next Christian Community's* case, a group of members within a congregation developed an opposing idea of how a church community should/could be, and thus challenged the mother church's idea of church. Due to generational differences and motivated by existing church traditions that corresponded better with this generation, the ministry that later became *Next Christian Community* developed a form of doing church that was significantly different from *St. Albert Alliance Church's* form of doing church. Consequently, *Next Christian Community* needed to leave *St. Albert Alliance Church* in order to further develop its own identity and to become the congregation it desired to be.

By using space as a lens through which I encountered, analyzed, and interpreted *Next Christian Community's* narrative, it became clear that a particular form of doing church relies on a corresponding form of church space. In other words, the identity production of a church community cannot be separated from its production of space. Instead, these two processes are in a dynamic balance with each other. Despite the fact that the New Testament deliberately does not mention particular holy sites as places of worship for Christians and that, with Christianity, a new idea of a temple developed (Christ in community), a church community nonetheless needs a place where it can come together on a regular basis. Whether it is in a coffee shop, in someone's living room, in a specifically set-aside worship space, or in a virtual space, the particular space a community chooses to meet in and/or produces depends on how the congregation imagines itself to be. Throughout my work, I was able to show that *Next Christian Community* selected and created a worship space that fit to the congregation's identity, its form of doing church. Furthermore, I showed that *Next Christian Community's*

selection and production of a suitable worship space enabled the congregation to set itself apart from its mother church and its local contemporaries, creating a niche church in St. Albert.

I introduced *Next Christian Community*'s journey from being a ministry that developed a form of doing church that was incompatible with its mother church's form of doing church to separating from its mother church to establishing its own particular identity in three main chapters. Through the titles of my chapters (naming them Act I, Act II, and Act III), I made a reference to the three-act structure of movies/plays/stories. Nash and Oakey first introduced the three-act structure in 1978. Field built upon their work and further developed this particular structure in his monograph, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979), establishing it as a paradigm in order to analyze and to interpret screenwriting. In his article, "The three-act structure: Myth or magical formulae? (2015)," Matthias Brütsch, however, argues that the key terms and concepts of Field's paradigm are imprecise and vague. In his article, he challenges the three-act paradigm and its universality. For example, each act has, according to Field, a particular function: "'set-up' or 'exposition' for act one, 'confrontation' for act two, and 'resolution' for act three" (Brütsch, 2015: 317). After examining a variety of different authors who analyzed the same movies, Brütsch finds that the different studies hardly agree with each other on the beginning or the end of the different acts. Instead, he acknowledges that it is not always possible to separate the three functions systematically "since confrontations usually set in before the set-up is concluded, and a resolution often is within reach during the final confrontation. In other words, the model's three functions overlap and therefore are not a criterion for distinguishing the three acts" (Brütsch, 2015: 317).

Other scholars assume that the turning points of the plots, rather than the functions of the acts, indicate the actual act breaks. Brütsch, however, finds that the paradigm does not provide a clear concept of how to identify the important turning points (the ones that indicate

the transition from one act into another) and to distinguish them from those that are less important. He argues that the drama structure is more complex than Field's paradigm suggests. Furthermore, Brütsch compares Field's use of the term, 'paradigm,' with Thomas Kuhn's use of the term, 'paradigm,' in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962). "For Field and many of his followers, the three-act paradigm is a timeless universal of dramatic structure while Kuhn emphasizes the historical and cultural contingency of scientific paradigms" (Brütsch, 2015: 321). By drawing on Kuhn, Brütsch suggests that the three-act model is "nothing more than a conceptual framework adopted by a certain discursive community which achieved dominance during a certain period (1980s till today)" (Brütsch, 2015: 321). By challenging the universality of the three-act structure, Brütsch is able to argue that movies/plays/stories consist "of a flexible number of phases blending into each other rather than of three (or four) acts divided by plot points; and to assume a variable set of turning points rather than a fixed one with prescribed distributions" (Brütsch, 2015: 321).

In my work, I referenced the three-act structure of movies/plays/stories for two reasons. First, the names of my chapter titles connect *Next Christian Community's* narrative to the particular space the congregation utilized and transformed into its worship facility, the former Village Landing Movie Theatre. Second, I used the three-act structure as a way to provide a chronological sequence, which enabled me to conceptualize a group's process from being a splinter group to separating from its main group to establishing its own identity. Throughout my work, I introduced three main steps. I captured them in my three main chapters: the motivation of a group to separate from its main group because of opposing ideas (Act I: Separating from our Mother Church), the need for the separating group to develop its own identity, a process that cannot be distinguished from the group's production of space (Act II: Transforming a Space of Entertainment), and the group's necessity to strengthen its collective identity through various forms of communication such as through material symbolization and through cultivation by specialists (Act III: Strengthening our own

Tradition).

Although I reconstructed *Next Christian Community's* narrative similar to the act development used in dramatic structures (set-up, confrontation, and resolution) and primarily relied on a chronological order, I nonetheless found, in accordance with Brüttsch, that it was/is not possible to draw a clear distinction between these individual steps. Similar to Brüttsch, I find that the steps from being a separating group to establishing an own identity are flexible, often happen simultaneously, overlap, and blend into each other. In other words, it is important for scholars, despite the need for and value of conceptual frameworks, to acknowledge the fluidity and simultaneousness when examining a group's identity production.

Inspired by the American writer Henry Miller (1891-1980), I originally wanted to emphasize the fluidity and simultaneousness of *Next Christian Community's* identity production and its production of space through the written text itself. In his monograph, *The World of Sex* (1941), Henry Miller states:

I am not following a strict chronological sequence but have chosen to adopt a circular or spiral form of time development which enables me to expand freely in any direction at any given moment. The ordinary chronological development seems to me wooden and artificial, a synthetic reconstruction of the facts of life. The facts and events of life are for me only the starting points on the way towards the discovery of truth (Miller, 1941: 53-54).

Initially, I wanted to avoid, like Henry Miller, any form of chronological sequencing. Instead, I wanted to create a narrative that would solely rely on “sudden switch[s], long parenthetical detour[s], monologue[s], remembrance[s] which suddenly crop[s] up” (Miller, 1941: 54-55). Similar to *Next Christian Community's* spatial production that challenges the conventional perception of worship spaces, I wanted to challenge the conventional form of academic writing. Similar to *Next Christian Community's* unconventional-conventional church space, my form of writing became both unconventional and conventional. Within my chapters, there are moments that share similarities with Miller's concept of *spiraltime*. My overarching

structure, however, provides a chronology.

Henry Miller's concept of *spiraltime* resembles a DNA molecule, "time that curves back on itself" (Jong, 1994: 243). In her monograph, *The Devil at Large* (1993), Erica Jong finds that Henry Miller's "'novels' constitute an immense Mobius strip. In the end is their beginning" (Jong, 1994: 243). She, however, also states that "[p]eople become furious with Miller for being so hard to follow" (Jong, 1994: 237). By choosing an unconventional-conventional approach in order to reconstruct *Next Christian Community's* journey, I sought to create a narrative that is easy for readers to follow but also would allow me to unravel "'the inner patterns of events'" (Miller quoted in Jong, 1994: 237). Embedded within the overarching chronological order, throughout my work, I circled around particular decorative objects and rooms within *Next Christian Community's* church space. I captured them from a variety of different angles, using different theories in order to highlight the simultaneousness of their diverse functions. Occasionally I allowed my writing to take detours, sharing memories that were important to my interview participants such as their memories of the time during which the former Village Landing Movie Theatre still was a functioning business. It is possible to perceive the inclusion of these detours as repetitive and/or unnecessary. I, however, find that they emphasize and bring the 'inner patterns of events' to the surface that shaped *Next Christian Community's* particular identity and its particular form of church space.

Although my overarching three-act structure suggests that *Next Christian Community's* narrative has a beginning, a middle part, and an end, I find it important to acknowledge that the congregation's identity production, including its production of space, did not come to an actual end. While *Next Christian Community* was able to establish itself as an independent entity, its identity production and its production of space will nonetheless continue to evolve/morph/change/develop for as long as the congregation exists. For example, the entire pastoral staff (the Lead Pastor, the Associate Pastor, and the Pastor responsible for kids' church) I interviewed for this particular project left *Next Christian Community*. Such a staff

change may have an impact on the congregation. Furthermore, new members who join the congregation and cultural influences outside the congregation, including continuously developing church traditions, will continue to shape the culture of *Next Christian Community* and may inspire its members to experiment with other forms of doing church and other forms of church spaces.

Next Christian Community's spatial production, in its recent form, however, challenges the perception of worship spaces and emphasizes the need for scholars to re-think old categories and dichotomies. If one looks at each of the elements that belong to *Next Christian Community's* church space separately, then these elements are nothing but common characteristics that belong to a variety of different worship spaces. For example, it is not unusual for an Evangelical congregation to meet in a movie theatre, to offer spaces for leisure activities, and/or to rent out its facility for rental income. Furthermore, it is not unusual for a Christian church space to feature a variety of religious accoutrements. It also is not unusual for a group of persons to create a space that can comfort them, that can make them feel secure, and that can make them be at ease. Rather, it is the combination of all of these elements combined into one single facility that makes *Next Christian Community's* church space an interesting case. Throughout the span of my project, I visited a variety of other church communities, church communities that belong to Catholicism, Protestantism, and Evangelicalism in Canada and in the United States. I, however, never came across a similar combination of church space, home space, and community space.

Although *Next Christian Community's* particular production of space remains to be unique (at least from my perspective), *Next Christian Community* is not the only religious community that created a worship space that sought to dissolve various boundaries, challenging existing categories and dichotomies. In their monograph, *Sacred Places in Modern Western Culture* (2011), Post, Molendijk, and Kroesen bring together a variety of essays that all capture unique forms of religious worship spaces and/or memorial spaces. For

example, in their essay, Nienke Pruiksma and Martin van der Meulen introduce the *Celestial Church of Christ*, a congregation in Amsterdam that utilized and transformed a garage box into a sacred space (Prukisma and Meulen, 2011: 95-99). In his essay, Post provides another example of a spatial production that sought to cross existing boundaries, analyzing the Millennium church, *Tor Tre Teste*, in Rome. *Tor Tre Teste* is a newly-built Roman Catholic Church that was designed by a Jewish-American architect. Richard Meier, the Jewish-American architect who designed the church, “wanted to transcend the boundaries of religions in the Tor Tre Teste project, while at the same time serving a particular religious tradition by adopting it at that basic-sacral level” (Post, 2011: 114).

In his chapter, “Fields of the Sacred: Reframing Identities of Sacred Places,” a theoretical chapter that prefaces the collection of essays, Post states that “[t]he fundamental changes in society and culture which are variously characterized as late-modern, postmodern or sometimes as post-secular, force us to reconsider the position of sacred space, and also require this to be done in the broader context of ritual and religious dynamics and what is labeled as a ‘spatial turn’” (Post, 2011: 13). He further explains that “[t]his process of re-evaluating can also be designated as ‘re-inventing’, ‘refiguring’ or ‘reframing’. A concept that plays an important role in this connection is *identity*. For my purpose here identity is a process, a repositioning and reformulation of cultural phenomena and practices” (Post, 2011: 13).

Similar to Post, Gibbs and Bolger also acknowledge these fundamental changes in culture and society, finding that the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity “represents a challenge to the main assertions of modernity, with its pursuit of order, the loss of tradition, and the separation of the different spheres of reality, expressed, for example, in the separation of the sacred and the profane at every level” (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 18). In accordance with Gibbs and Bolger, Post finds that previously separate entities and/or identities, in fact, became fluid. “They simply cannot serve as clearly defined profiles or

symbolic configurations any longer. The boundaries between museum and ritual space, between tourist and pilgrim, between art and ritual have become extremely fluid” (Post, 2011: 33-34). In other words, previously separated types are in a constant interaction with each other, reinventing and reframing themselves (Post, 2011: 34).

Gibbs and Bolger further argue that both shifts, the cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity and the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom, are challenging for churches, impacting them profoundly. “In response, churches can live in denial, set up protective perimeter that they will defend against all they define as outsiders, or venture forth in mission” (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 18). For example, I find that the seeker church tradition, especially in its megachurch formation, established such a protective perimeter. Instead of being a part of that cultural shift, allowing fluidity to happen, they imitate (offering choices, addressing every aspect of persons’ daily lives, creating an entertaining worship program with Rock and Pop music) their surrounding culture in order to grow numerically. Their often complex, large, and well-equipped facilities offer a variety of services, enabling and encouraging persons to fulfil their physical, spiritual, and personal needs in a solely Christian setting. Their specific set-up makes other recreational and non-profit organizations obsolete for their members, creating and maintaining a church bubble.

Undoubtedly, the large, complex, and well-equipped worship facilities that correspond with this church tradition provoke a particular atmosphere, an atmosphere that not only transmits and symbolizes power but also ensures visibility. It creates the illusion that church will continue to be a powerful and relevant institution, even if it imitates and/or separates itself from its surrounding culture rather than to interact with it. In comparison, church communities that were inspired by the emerging church tradition, such as *Next Christian Community*, produce(d), use(d), and create(d) spaces that often do not provoke such an atmosphere. Instead of being large and visible, some of these churches are hidden such as inside a movie theatre, inside a garage box, inside a strip mall, or inside a coffee shop.

Although the transmission of power and/or visibility does not necessarily belong to these churches' production of space, it does not mean that the spaces they produce are not in itself powerful spaces. Some of these spaces are powerful precisely because they are able to provoke an atmosphere of openness, inclusion, and approachability.

Similar to Post, Gibbs and Bolger highlight the fact that an understanding of and an interaction with the outside culture is, in fact, crucial for the survival of Christianity in the future:

When a culture is static, as the West was for many years, an understanding of outside culture is not as critical. [...] In a time of immense cultural change, however, the church's ignorance of the wider culture becomes problematic. Due to its cultural entrenchment, the church no longer relates to the surrounding culture, hence its increasing marginalization and perceived irrelevance (Gibbs and Bolger, 2005: 18).

Many of the examples in the essay collection are, like *Next Christian Community*, examples of Christian congregations that reinvented, refigured, and/or reframed their identities and are in accordance with the cultural shift that surrounds them and influences them. Instead of separating themselves from other denominations and/or other non-Christian religions in a religiously pluralistic society, these congregations found ways to engage with them. For example, the *Tor Tre Teste* church space has no tower with a cross, an absence that persons interpreted "as an interreligious gesture of obeisance to the context of cultural and religious plurality" (Post, 2011: 109-110). In addition to its reconciliation of Evangelicalism's traditions and Christendom's traditions in worship space and worship practice, *Next Christian Community* offered a two month yoga course that took place in the congregation's studio instead of a conventional Bible study course, showing that believing in God is not incompatible with the practice of yoga.

My examination of *Next Christian Community* as well as Post's, Molendjik's, and Kroesen's essay collection, suggest that the research surrounding worship spaces in contemporary Western culture still is relevant. In his theoretical chapter, Post introduces his

framework of fields of the sacred. He finds that it is “a matter of fields where a certain coherence, and thus an identity or profile, emerges from the interplay of locus and situation, cultural practices, and representations in the sense of ideas, ideals, dreams and visions. Thus, a sacred field is evoked by concrete places that are in turn connected with particular practices and representations” (Post, 2011: 38). He starts with Lefebvre’s spatial triad and further continues by identifying six fields that are, according to him, the fields of the sacred: the religious field, the field of healing, the field of memorial culture, the field of ‘culture’ (a field that captures the arena of ‘art and culture’), the field of leisure culture, and the overlapping field of heterotopia.

Despite the fact that Post’s framework could have been a useful tool in analyzing *Next Christian Community* and its form of church space, I was primarily interested in examining in which ways classical/traditional authors such as Durkheim, Bollnow, Turner, and Assmann are still relevant and in which ways their theoretical and analytical perspectives limits the understanding of new forms of worship spaces and/or sacred spaces in contemporary Western culture. I find that this approach nonetheless brings me to a conclusion that shares similarities with Post.

Due to the fact that the perspectives that these authors developed are embedded within Western culture and were informed by Western culture, they still influence the identity production and spatial production of recent church communities, which includes the longing for sacred spaces and the appreciation for aspects of Christendom’s spatial and liturgical traditions and/or other church traditions that belong to Christianity’s cultural memory. Interestingly, Jan Assmann, in his interview with Caroline Gaudriault, states that there “will never be an exclusive, universal culture” (Assmann, 2013). He further believes that the different Christian faiths such as “Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy will never unite” (Assmann, 2013). Assmann may be right when he makes this statement. *Next Christian Community* and some of the Christian congregations in Post’s, Molendijk’s, and Kroesen’s

essay collection, however, are examples that show that the borders between these different Christian faiths are not nearly as strict. Instead, they became porous and most likely continue to do so. Thus church communities may continue to reinvent, reframe, and refigure their identities, including their worship spaces, by using and relying on the existing categories, dichotomies, and traditions that authors such as Durkheim, Bollnow, Turner, and Assmann address, but not without combining them in new, creative, and interesting ways. Continuous research that particularly focuses on the identity production and spatial production of church communities could inspire recent church communities to experiment with their forms of doing church and with their forms of church spaces, inviting openness, inclusion, and curiosity to be a part of this process.

I end this work with a brief reflection on my personal development as a long-term ethnographer at *Next Christian Community*. Being with a religious community for an extended period of time can resolve in the conversion of the researcher. For example, James Ault is a researcher who found/regained his faith after studying a fundamental Baptist church for three years. My story with *Next Christian Community*, however, is not a conversion story. I joined the community by being a non-follower of Christ and I left the community by being a non-follower of Christ. Although I was sad to leave a community of persons behind that started to feel like friends rather than research participants, I was happy to regain my Saturday evenings and my Sunday mornings. Despite the fact that I continue to be a non-religious person, my time at *Next Christian Community* nonetheless challenged some of my negative connotations I had towards Christianity. It not only made me rethink my own perception of worship spaces. It also showed me that there are Christians who are critically engaged with the content, the traditions, and the history of their faith. For example, many members were

willing to discuss, either in informal conversations or during my interviews, topics that are generally challenging for Evangelical Christians such as issues evolving around aggressive evangelization, including missionaries in other countries, homosexuality, ordained female Pastors, the need to intentionally create a church bubble, etc. Although I did not address these topics throughout my work, they could provide a valuable starting point for future research.

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Interview Guide

In this interview I want to explore your experiences with the church space of your church community. I find it very interesting, especially coming from Europe, that church communities in Canada meet in different spaces. I am particularly interested in *Next Christian Community*, because the community has re-purposed a former movie theatre and I am curious how this process happened and what it means to you as a member of the congregation.

First I would like take a little tour with you through the space and talk about how it looked when it was still a movie theatre and how it has changed. For the tour through your church space, I will give you a digital camera. I encourage you to take pictures of objects and rooms in your church space that are meaningful to you. Please feel free to take pictures of objects and rooms you like but also of objects and rooms you do not like. After that I would like to ask you questions about your church space and your community.

Part 1: Tour through the church space

I would like to take a tour with you through the building, starting outside.

Q1: Has anything changed since the congregation moved here first?

- What were your first impressions of this space?
- What do you remember about moving?

Q2: How did the area around *Next Christian Community*'s church space change?

- Are there different stores?
- Is it more lively now then it used to be before?
- Is there more parking space?

Now I would like to continue the tour inside the building

Q3: How did the space look like in the past? Can you describe the changes?

- What has changed?
- How did it change?
- Different stages of the renovation?
- Where there services at the building during the renovation process?

How long did it take to renovate the building?

- Is the building still changing?
- How were you involved in the changes?
- How did you experience them?
- Are there any more renovations you would like to see in the future?

Part 2: Questions about the physical church space of *Next Christian Community*

Q4: What are the things that come to your mind when you think of your church space?

- What do you like about it?
- What are the things you don't like?
- How do you feel meeting for church in a former movie theatre?
- How does this space compare to the previous spaces that Next Christian Community used?
- What are your memories of the previous church spaces?

Q5: Tell me about your memories of the space when it was still a movie theatre?

- Did you go and watch movies there?
- How did you feel in the space when it was still a movie theatre?
- Do you remember talking with many other people who enjoyed going there to watch movies?
- How do you remember people talking about the space?

Q6: What kind of experiences do you have with your church space?

- How important is it for you to have a permanent church space?
- Do you have a story about something special that happened at your church space?
- What memories do you have that are connected with your church space and are important to you?
- Do you feel at home at your church space?

Part 3: Questions about *Next Christian Community*

Q7: When did you decide to join Next Christian Community?

Q8: What were your reasons for joining Next Christian Community?

- Have you been with another church community before?
- Did you decide to join Next Christian Community because of their space/ philosophy/ size of community, people you know, etc.?

Q9: What comes to your mind when you think about Next Christian Community?

- What do you like about Next Christian Community?
- Are there things that need to be improved? If yes: What needs to be improved? (More community activities? Smaller size? More outreach?)

Q10: What memories do you have of Next Christian Community as a ministry?

- In what ways is Next Christian Community different from St. Albert Alliance Church?
- What are your experiences at St. Albert Alliance Church? (space, mission, ideology, beliefs)
- What are your experiences of St. Albert Alliance Church's space? (compared to Next Christian Community's recent space)
- Did Next Christian Community change over time? What are your experiences of Next Christian Community's changes? (positive/negative experiences, changes in mission, ideology, beliefs)
- Are you still connected to St. Albert Alliance Church? In what ways?

Q11: How are you involved in the community's decisions?

- Are you able to make some decisions/changes and how?

Q12: How do you use the church space?

- Do you use the space only for church purposes: church services/ meeting up with community members, etc.

- Do you use the space also private: children birthday parties/ dancing lessons, etc?

Q13: In what way is your church space an expression of your congregation?

- How do uses of the church space reflect the mission/philosophy of the church?
- Which uses of the church space do you think are especially interesting or important?
- Why are they important?

Is there anything else, you would like to tell me, that has not been covered, but that you believe is important?

Thank you for your time! This interview has been very helpful for me, and I hope you have found some things to be interesting as well.

Study Title: Experiences of physical church space – congregation members' perspectives

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Consent Form

This study is particularly interested in *Next Christian Community* and the physical church space the community uses in order to meet. It is not common that church communities have the opportunity to re-purpose space for their own interests and goals as a church – that makes *Next Christian Community* unique. I hope that your participation in this research will contribute to the understanding of church spaces, how they might function as homes for members of congregations and how they might reflect the identity of church communities.

The interview will be conducted by Janine Muster, Master's Student in Sociology at the University of Alberta. The interview will focus on your experiences as a member of the congregation of the *Next Christian Community*. I am particularly interested in your experience with the church space of *Next Christian Community* and your memories of the space when it was still a movie theatre. If you feel comfortable, I would like to conduct the interview in your church space. I would like to take a tour with you through the building and talk to you about how it has changed. The interview will take approximately 1 1/2 hour to 2 hours. If you don't feel comfortable doing the interview at your church space, we will schedule it for a time and place that is comfortable for you. I hope to audio record the interview, but will only do so with your permission.

I will ask you if you wish to be identified by name in the results of this study. If you do, then you will be identified as the source for any quotes from the interview that might appear in the researcher's written work or conference presentations. If you choose to remain anonymous, then I will erase or alter any information that might identify you. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose not to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study. At any point during the interview, you can withdraw your participation and ask to have any information that has been collected to be withdrawn and not included in the study. You also have the right to withdraw from the study any or all portions of your contributions to the research project. You must indicate that to the researcher not later than five days after the interview.

Audio recordings and any written notes from this interview will be kept on a secure, encrypted computer and in a locked office. Only the researcher and a partner will have access to these files. The partner who helps to interpret and transcribe agrees to keep your information confidential and secure.

I will use the data you provide as part of my Master's Thesis at the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. It also may appear in other published works or conference presentations.

A Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has reviewed this application for ethics compliance. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research

or if you have concerns about this study, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

If you have any further questions regarding this study and/or your participation, please do not hesitate to ask the interviewer during the interview, or contact Janine Muster at 780-709-2072 or at muster@ualberta.ca. You may also contact Dr. Kent at skent@ualberta.ca.

Consent

By signing below, I am indicating that I have read and understood the above information, and that I consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
Interviewee's Name	Interviewee's Signature	Date

Please initial below for any items to which you agree:

I give permission to be contacted for follow-up research. _____

I give permission for my name and identity to be used in this research project. _____

If yes, do you wish to review transcripts first. _____

Signature of Researcher _____	Date _____
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