



**(Re)forming Christian Education in Congregations
as the Praxis of Growing Disciples
for a Missional Church**

by

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Date: 5/7/2018

ABSTRACT

This study explores the question, How are churches reframing Christian education in order to be effective in growing faith and engaging in mission in Australian society in the 21st century? It is based on qualitative interviews conducted with leaders from thirteen congregations from the Uniting Church in Australia in 2012. The research explores how churches and their leaders are intentionally (re)forming Christian education and formation in the early 21st century in the Australian context. The Uniting Church is Australia's third largest denomination, formed in 1977 from the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches. For the purposes of the study, Christian education was defined initially as the theory and practice of teaching, learning and formation in life-long Christian faith and discipleship, both for individuals and communities of faith.

Across the western church, the place of Christian education has been changing in response to both institutional and social factors—the age and decline of mainline denominations, increasing pluralism, and relativism. Mainline churches have been influenced by a “missional turn” whereby the church's mission is seen as participation by local churches in the *missio Dei*. This has raised questions about the place and purpose of Christian education in relation to mission.

The research interviews were structured around four themes: *congregations as learning communities*, *congregations as communities of practice*, *leadership of learning communities*, and *forming disciples for mission*. Research subjects were the principal ministers in their congregations. The sample was diverse in terms of geography, church membership, theology, length of ministry tenure, and orientation to mission.

The research method follows a Shared Praxis approach to practical theology, drawing particularly on Thomas Groome, and uses Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* along with *praxis* and practice to frame the field of Christian education in relation to *Christopraxis*. Consideration is given to the practices of the early church as described in Acts 2, and to the nature of Christian discipleship in John 15, as a way of exploring the being and doing of discipleship.

The findings include details about the relational climate of congregations as learning communities, the cultivation of Christian practices as teleological participation in the mission of God, the

intentionality and improvisation of church leaders, and how congregations learn for, in and from their engagement in mission. Particular teaching and learning programs are also described.

The key conclusion is that the intentional (re)forming of congregational Christian formation and education is core ecclesial praxis for growing mission-shaped disciples. Christian education and Christian mission are seen as inter-related and interdependent. The research suggests the need for further empirical studies of congregational Christian education, as well as attention by denominational leaders as to how congregations are resourced and led for lifelong learning in discipleship for the sake of mission.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACC	Assembly of Confessing Congregations
ASC	Assembly Standing Committee
CERC	Christian Education Reference Committee
ELC	Effective Living Centre
FED	Formation, Education and Discipleship
JBCE	Joint Board of Christian Education
NCD	Natural Church Development
NCLS	National Church Life Survey
NCYC	National Christian Youth Convention
NYCC	National Youth and Childrens Coalition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
UAICC	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
UCA	Uniting Church in Australia
UTC	United Theological College
YAF	Youth of Australia Fellowship

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Changing church, changing society

The hallmark of a 'congregation of learners' is a culture of learning, in which learning permeates every aspect of the congregation.¹

This study explores the question, *How are churches reframing Christian education in order to be effective in growing faith and engaging in mission in Australian society in the 21st century?* The *praxis* of forming and educating people in Christian faith is explored as a core aspect of vibrant communities of faith. For the purposes of the research, Christian education was defined initially as *the theory and practice of teaching, learning and formation in life-long Christian faith and discipleship, both for individuals and communities of faith.*

This is a qualitative research project regarding congregations in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). The field work in this study involved *in situ* interviews with sixteen ministry leaders in thirteen Uniting Church congregations or regions spread across Australia, conducted in mid-2012. The research was prompted and in part sponsored by the Uniting Church in Australia's national Assembly which resolved in 2010 to undertake a project to explore the nature and future of Christian education in the UCA. Thus, the study has a broad scope in terms of the place of faith development in the life of a Christian church, while examining a small yet diverse sample for indications of general factors. The field research that I conducted for the UCA Assembly project in 2011 and 2012 forms the basis for this project.²

The Uniting Church in Australia was formed in 1977 from the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in Australia, following negotiations since 1905.³ The churches' motivations were about mission, not survival. The Uniting Church saw itself as the first truly Australian church, with an opportunity to discover what that might mean for its identity and

¹ John Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation* (Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2010), p123f.

² The Standing Committee of the Uniting Church's national Assembly provided funding for this research project in order to help determine national priorities and resourcing for Christian education in the UCA for the coming decade. The UCA Assembly provided a stipend for the researcher in 2011 and 2012 in addition to travel costs for the field research. The research ethics application addressed the terms of this sponsorship and was approved by Flinders University in 2011. Further details are provided in Chapter 2.

³ Andrew Dutney, *Manifesto for Renewal: The Shaping of a New Church* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1986), p11.

purpose in this land. My study of Christian education is in one sense a mirror to where the Uniting Church finds itself in the latter part of its fourth decade, examining its purpose in expressing faith in contemporary Australia.

How is a key aspect of the church's life, namely Christian education, being transformed in relation to the church's ongoing sense of identity and mission? This question in itself is extremely broad. Hence, the research focuses on a sample of congregations to gain insight into how faith formation and education take place in their social and cultural contexts. It seeks to examine Christian education in relation to congregations' senses of identity and purpose.

The decline of affiliation with and attendance of Christian churches in Australia in recent decades has been widely reported, with the causes being much debated within the churches themselves. According to Australian census data, in 2016, 52.1% of Australians identified themselves as Christian, compared with 57.7% in 1996 and 88.34% in 1966.⁴ NCLS research indicates that weekly church attendance declined from about 10% in 1991 to 6% in 2011.⁵ These statistics are one indicator of the increasing marginalisation of the church in Australian society, a factor exemplified in church and media responses to public issues.

Of course, the mission of the church involves far more than numerical membership. According to Lesslie Newbigin, the church participates in the mission of God to the world as a sign, foretaste and instrument of the coming reign of God.⁶

David Bosch says "Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first, in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth."⁷

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Aboriginal people were not included in this 1966 census data.

⁵ Ruth Powell, "A Profile of the Uniting Church at Forty: Preliminary Research Findings From the 2016 Australian Community Survey & 2016 National Church Life Survey" (UCA National Presbytery Minister's Gathering: NCLS Research, Sydney, April, 2017).

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

⁷ David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American society of missiology series 16 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), p9.

1.2 The changing place of Christian Education

Along with the ageing of the Australian population, the decline and ageing of church membership coincides with significant shifts in denominational practices in relation to Christian education. My interest in these shifts is both personal and professional. Let me introduce the changing landscape of Christian education with a narrative that relates to both.

I am in many ways a child of the Uniting Church. I was raised Presbyterian from generations of Scottish descent. Our Presbyterian congregation in south Brisbane formed a co-operative ministry arrangement with the nearby Methodist Church in the early 1970s. In 1977, when I was 19 years old, I was confirmed just prior to church union and had the opportunity to choose whether to be Presbyterian or Methodist.

The church of my youth had a bustling Sunday School and vibrant youth group in which my parents provided leadership. I remember Sunday School anniversaries with a children's choir of a few dozen standing on a tiered dais, and the annual bus trip to the Sunday School picnic. At youth group I learned to play guitar, lead prayers, write and lead group discussions, and organise social events and camps. As a young adult I helped produce youth musical productions and also taught Sunday School using the curriculum provided by The Joint Board of Christian Education—the church's national Christian education agency. My faith was being formed through age-level Christian education, peer group friendships, the mentoring of leaders and adults, and an all-age 'family church' atmosphere.

Along with friends, I was also encouraged to participate in wider church activities where leadership was developed through training, modelling and participation. During university holidays I served as a volunteer leader on high school camps organised by the Synod Department of Christian Education (DCE). Synod staff provided high-quality education and oversight for such events. My friends and I also attended monthly Synod youth rallies (YAF) and I performed at a couple of them, as well as in the annual Synod youth musical. These were opportunities to experience the church at large and learn that it was a rich, diverse, lively community of faith. Young people were encouraged to develop and share their gifts.

After moving to Canberra in 1978, I joined a local Uniting Church, led their youth group and became involved in youth worship events. I soon became part of the Presbytery youth leadership

network that organised and ran Easter Camps and initiated a Leadership Training weekend and regional worship event. The church system was such that I could move to another state and immediately slot into groups, activities and roles that paralleled my home church experience. This meant that for me, as for many others, faith and leadership development could continue fairly seamlessly.

Despite having a blossoming career as an economist, I sensed some kind of “call” to study at the Uniting Church’s lay training college in Brisbane. I can count dozens of peers during this era who were encouraged to pursue education for full-time ordained or lay ministry. While there was a ferment taking place in theological and ministry education, it was nevertheless true that education for ordained ministry occupied a recognised place in the church’s education system, and congregations willingly encouraged young adults to go to the next stage.

Moving to South Australia in 1982, I discovered a Synod at the peak of its baby boomer years, offering a statewide children’s camp (Kids Campout) that attracted about 3,000 children and leaders, regular Synod youth worship events and Youth Conferences, and a strong cohort of congregational youth and children workers, all supported by a well-resourced, creative and gifted Synod staff team. Once again, the system of synod and presbytery provision of staff, faith-forming events, leadership development, and program resources was familiar, yet also brimming with its own local character. Christian education staff were well-networked across synods/states and with the national Assembly.

Many churches continued to sponsor youth groups and Sunday Schools into the 1990s. Synod and presbytery youth camps were widespread and well-attended in the first two decades of the Uniting Church. An example of the health of the faith-formation system is that the 1991 National Christian Youth Convention (NCYC) in Queensland was attended by over 3000 people and was one of the largest ever held. Held every two to three years, NCYC had its roots in the 1955 Methodist *Mission to the Nation*. NCYC provided an experience of large Christian community, creative worship, Bible study, learning for discipleship, recreation, and leadership development at a level beyond the scope of most state or regional events. However, despite remaining a lively event, it had declined to about 800 participants at the 2017 event, and at the time of writing its future was uncertain.

This Christian education system functioned across all ages, with the national Assembly and Synods also providing staffing and resources for adult faith development, along with a broad array of lay education programs for church members and leaders.

I come to this study with the perspective of having worked in national, state/synod and regional/presbytery roles in Christian education and leadership development since the mid-1980s. In these last thirty years, the situation has changed significantly. At the time of writing, I have just concluded a role as the National Director of Christian Education with the UCA, a role that from mid-2017 has ceased to exist.

1.3 Some key shifts

The purpose of the above narrative is to highlight that parts of this world that I have described no longer remain, though its characterising features are worthy of note for the discussion ahead. Both society and the church were changing and, as a result, structured faith education and formation programs suffered significantly over time.

- Few Uniting Church congregations today have active ministries with substantial numbers of children or young people. According to the NCLS in 2016, 7% of UCA church attenders were aged 15-29, while 48% were over 70 years of age.⁸ A 2013 census of UCA congregations found that the median number of children attending worship was three per congregation.⁹
- The decline in attendance of younger generations was accompanied by a loss of programs and activities for young people, particularly Sunday Schools and youth groups, along with fewer structured adult education opportunities in congregations.
- Synod Christian education departments, at full strength in the 1980s, gradually diminished in staff and resourcing. By around 2010 they had either disappeared or were merged with other departments.
- National and synod children's and youth organisations such as Presbyterian Youth Fellowship of Australia (PFA), Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF), Rays, OKs (Order of

⁸ (2016 National Church Life Survey, NCLS, North Sydney, 2017), p11.

⁹ Ruth Powell *and others*, (Headline Report: March 2014, NCLS Research, Sydney, 2014).

Knights) and Christian Endeavour were either phased out with the inauguration of the Uniting Church in 1977 or gradually disappeared from congregational life, along with their regional, state and national support systems.

- From 1998, the UCA National Assembly phased out publishing Christian education curriculum for congregations, ceasing it completely in 2003.
- Presbytery (regional) staffing for Christian education has also declined dramatically over the four decades since 1977.

Such changes were not peculiar to the Uniting Church but were reflective of decline in most mainstream churches.

Questions abound in response to these changes.

- What factors within the church and in wider society contributed to the change in programs and participation levels across local, regional, state and national sectors?
- To what extent has Christian education diminished as a priority across these sectors?
- To what extent do these changes highlight the need to change or reform Christian education, either its purposes or its approaches?
- What is the relationship between the resourcing of Christian education and its vitality for the church?

It could be argued that the emerging challenges for the church's mission in late modernity have been accompanied by changes in its internal practices. Might a renewed sense of mission lead toward a revitalised focus on growing Christians in their faith? Christian educator Charles Foster, reflecting on recent decades in the US with similar changes in church and society, says "Congregations of the old Protestant mainline denominations ... continue to sponsor many educational activities, but they lack the intentionality, the coherence and the continuity needed to maintain and renew their identities as communities of faith."¹⁰ If Foster is correct, then

¹⁰ Charles R Foster, *From Generation to Generation* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), p45.

congregations and their leaders are left more and more to their own devices, not only to program and resource Christian education but, indeed, to work out what they are trying to achieve in forming disciples of Jesus Christ in today's world.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research method adopted in this study. This is an empirical study of thirteen congregations conducted via interviews with their key leader or leaders; sixteen in total. The overall research framework follows a practical theology approach.

Chapter 3 introduces the main themes of the inquiry, beginning with a consideration of the changing place of Christian education in the Uniting Church, with reference to broader global influences. I also introduce the three key areas examined in the study and how they may be inter-related: *learning communities of discipleship*, *educational leadership* and *congregational mission*. These form the basis for the research interviews and subsequent analysis.

Chapter 4 describes the research interviews, the sampling method, interview structure and approach, and method of analysis. This section refers to the overall research method, and to the discussion that follows.

Chapters 5 to 8 address the main themes of the study. The field interviews are analysed with regard to learning communities, congregational practices, educational leadership and congregational mission. Following the shared praxis research method, the interview data is examined in relation to educational, biblical and theological sources. The discussion draws on both Christian education and broader educational theories. Theological material relates to the themes of each chapter.

Chapter 5 examines the characteristics of communities of learning and how learning and community life are generative of one another.

Chapter 6 explores characteristics of communities of practice and how participation in practices of discipleship is Spirit-led participation in the ministry and mission of Christ.

Chapter 7 addresses leaders of learning communities in terms of ethos, role and intentionality in the praxis of (re)forming Christian formation and education.

Chapter 8 discusses how Christian formation and education takes place in relation to congregations' participation in the mission of God.

The dialectic also involves the metaphor of a local Australian craft, wine-making; biblical engagement with the Gospel of John, Chapters 14 to 16; and an examination of the early church, the book of Acts. These have been chosen to explore the themes of church, leadership, discipleship and mission.

Chapter 9 presents conclusions from the study in relation to how the forming of disciples for the sake of God's mission might be approached as ongoing praxis for Christian churches. A key conclusion is that *the intentional (re)forming of congregational Christian formation and education is core ecclesial praxis for growing mission-shaped disciples.*

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research arenas

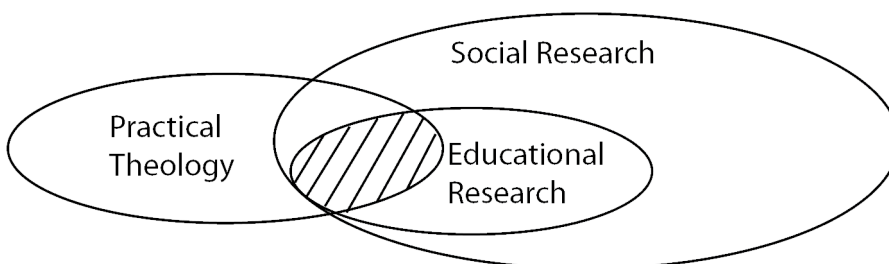
Any research contains certain implicit or explicit ontological and epistemological assumptions. While there is a degree of agreement among researchers about nomenclature and theories, there is also distinct variance.

In the context of this study, there are three related areas to consider.

1. **Overall research assumptions** (ontological and epistemological); in particular the overlap or difference between (a) social research assumptions, (b) educational research assumptions, and (c) theological assumptions.
2. **Research methodology and assumptions**; the relationship between the overall methodology of the study, the particular qualitative research approach, and the subject being examined.
3. **Researcher and subject worlds**; the researcher's worldview, the research participants' worldviews, and their congregations' worldviews.

These fields are overlapping but not identical. For example, while educational research may be seen as a subset of social research in general insofar as both involve studying human beings in society, practical theology cannot be seen epistemologically as a simple subset of the latter. The assumptions of practical theologians are too varied. Both social research in general, and educational research in particular may be driven by quite varied goals and assumptions. We could envisage something like the following, where the shaded area is the overlapping area of interest.

Figure 1: Research Arenas



The diagram represents epistemological concerns rather than research methods, although the latter will be referenced later. While practical theology was seen by some to either sit within or incorporate social science research, more recent practical theologians from a Neo-Barthian perspective, such as Andrew Root, Ray Anderson and Andrew Purves, place practical theology outside the social sciences epistemologically. Root critiques practical theology and its tasks as taking place too often solely within the realm of the social sciences, thereby excluding wider ontological and epistemological considerations.” In this Chapter I will explore these sets of assumptions to lay out the framework of the study. My aim is to locate some common ground between these three fields as indicated by the shaded area in the diagram. I will also canvas the breadth of practical theology, indicate its foundations for my study overall and outline the shape of the research in relation to practical theological method. Finally, the qualitative research methodology will be introduced. The qualitative research method is then explained in more detail in Chapter 4.

2.2 Social research

According to Bryman, the two broad ontological schools in social research are *objectivism* (external, objective meaning) and *constructionism* or *constructivism* (internal, subjective meaning); order, knowledge, beliefs and values that are either given or constructed.¹¹ Meaning is either externally imposed on a social environment (and in some sense fixed), or it is produced through social interaction (and is in some sense evolving). This dichotomy reflects something of modernist and postmodernist distinctions. Bryman lists epistemological lenses as *positivism*, *realism* (empirical or critical) and *interpretivism*—the former and latter corresponding with *objectivism* and *constructionism*. *Realism* is something of a middle ground, with the belief that "there is a reality that is separate from our descriptions of it," therefore this creates analytical and interpretive challenges for us.¹² In relation to this study, interpretivism is both a phenomenological and a hermeneutical approach insofar as it is concerned with how people see and make sense of the world.

¹¹ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² *Ibid.*, p14f.

Creswell names four worldviews— *postpositivism*, *constructivism*, *advocacy/participatory*, and *pragmatism*.¹³ There is a blurring between ontology and epistemology in these categories. Creswell's additions to Bryman's taxonomy include *participatory* activist research (also called *emancipatory*) which empowers the participants to not only change their worldview but to change their world. The *pragmatic* approach draws on a range of assumptions to solve real world problems.¹⁴ "Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality... Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity... Truth is what works at the time."¹⁵ There is something relevant to the study here, namely a pragmatism whereby congregational leaders decide what works best for them in their contexts and according to their worldviews.

Given the nature of my research, it is helpful to locate grounded theory at this point, as it represents a shift in qualitative research.

Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves. Thus, researchers construct a theory "grounded" in their data.¹⁶

Kathy Charmaz' history of grounded theory is illuminating as it charts a shift from a *positivist* approach by Glaser and Strauss to more *constructivist* assumptions and methodologies.¹⁷ Charmaz characterises constructivist grounded theory as "inductive, comparative, emergent and open-ended."¹⁸

Researchers can use grounded theory strategies without endorsing mid-century assumptions of an objective external reality, a passive, neutral observer, or a detached, narrow empiricism. If, instead, we start with the assumption that social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed, then we must take the researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality. It, too, is a construction.¹⁹

¹³ John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2009), p6ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p10f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p10f.

¹⁶ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), p1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Barney G Glaser and Anselm L Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Observations (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co, 1967).

¹⁸ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* p12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p13.

Such an approach not only recognises that research subjects construct their own worldviews, at least in part, but also that the researcher is an active knowing presence in recognising meaning and patterns of meaning. This is relevant particularly for subjects who are socially, culturally and contextually differentiated.

2.3 Educational research

Social researchers in human services fields such as education, social work and nursing bring similar, though applied, concerns to their approaches. Since the study encompasses Christian education, reference to broader educational research is helpful in defining assumptions.

Australian researchers Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis identify eight traditions in the study of education.²⁰ Drawing on Weber's definition of sociology as "interpretive understanding of social action," they see an interpretive approach firstly, as assisting people to uncover and understand the social norms that surround them, and secondly, to understand and reflect on their own practices.²² Educational research can assist educators to understand better what shapes the teaching and learning environment (including wider cultural and political factors) and to be more aware and empowered in relation to their roles, relationships and professional habits within a school.²³

Such an interpretivist or constructivist stance has become widespread in educational research. Theologian Elaine Graham sees practice as "something which mediates between structure and agency."²⁴ People live within social orders; however, they are not merely subject to these, but participate in the re-ordering of society. While Carr and Kemmis draw on Aristotle's understanding of *praxis*, it is Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* that has been widely influential in educational research in recent decades, particularly in distinguishing between societal norms and individual agency.²⁵ In

²⁰ a. Philosophical Studies of Education; b. Grand Theorising; c. The Foundations Approach; d. Educational Theory; e. The Applied Science or Technical Perspective and the New Practicality; f. The Practical; g. Teachers as Researchers; h. Emerging Critical Tradition. Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (Melbourne: Deakin University Press, 1997), p10ff.

²² Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* p87

²³ "[It] may suggest to individuals alternative ways of interpreting their actions and defining their 'reality'... Practices are changed by changing the ways in which they are understood." Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* p91.

²⁴ Elaine L Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in An Age of Uncertainty* (London: Mowbray, 1996), p97.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). See, for example, Anna Neumann and Aaron M Pallas, "Windows of

Australia, educational researchers have drawn on Bourdieu to examine areas as diverse as the workings of a national school curriculum, students' perceptions of schooling, regenerating rural communities, social class and student identity, and language barriers in educating refugee women, among other things.²⁶ What such studies share in common is an examination of local subjects' (students, teachers, schools) agency in relation to broader social and cultural forces and constructs.²⁷

For Bourdieu,

The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions.²⁸

Graham's summary of Bourdieu's thinking is helpful. While social structures are, in a sense, given, people are also the revisers, renewers and creators of culture. Cultural practices contain multivalent symbols, yet these are not universally objective. They are social creations which convey and embody cultural meanings. However, human beings do not simply receive these, but are engaged in self-reflexivity in relation to them.²⁹ Education, then, both takes place as a cultural field with particular habitus (practices), to use Bourdieu's term, and may also empower its participants (teachers and learners) to engage reflexively in cultural reform. This is, to some

Possibility: Perspectives on the Construction of Educational Researchers," in *The Sage Handbook for Research in Education* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006).

²⁶ Jessica Gerrard *and others*, "Researching the Creation of a National Curriculum from Systems to Classrooms", *Australian Journal of Education* 57, no. 1 (2013): 60-73. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/1494147965?accountid=10910> (accessed September 28, 2017). Peter J Hay, "Students' Perceptions of Schooling in a Senior Secondary Education System", *Australian Journal of Education* 53, no. 1 (2009): p54-68. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/205858694?accountid=10910> (accessed September 28, 2017). Jo-Anne Reid *and others*, "Regenerating Rural Social Space? Teacher Education for Rural-regional Sustainability", *Australian Journal of Education* 54, no. 3 (2010): p262-276. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/819182733?accountid=10910> (accessed September 28, 2017). Jane Pearce, Barry Down and Elizabeth Moore, "Social Class, Identity and the 'good' Student: Negotiating University Culture", *Australian Journal of Education* 52, no. 3 (2008): p257-271. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/205858870?accountid=10910> (accessed September 28, 2017). Paula G Watkins, Husna Razee and Juliet Richters, "'I'm Telling You ... The Language Barrier Is the Most, the Biggest Challenge': Barriers to Education Among Karen Refugee Women in Australia", *Australian Journal of Education* 56, no. 2 (2012): p126-141. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/1040168959?accountid=10910> (accessed September 28, 2017).

²⁷ Bourdieu's notions of *field* and *cultural capital* are relevant here.

²⁸ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* p52.

²⁹ Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in An Age of Uncertainty* p103.

extent, mirrored in the evolution of school-based research in religious education in the UK.³⁰

“Research was now recognised to be a reflexive and dialogical process.”³¹ According to Jackson, such research needed to attend to representation of religion, interpretation, reflexivity, edification and constructive criticism.³²³³

Bourdieu’s value for education in relation to postmodernity is that people are seen to be actively engaged in meaning-making within day-to-day life, not simply as passive recipients of culture, but as social agents. People live, learn, work and grow within the structures and practices that society provides, good or bad. The structures of meaning which people inhabit are not merely subjective, nor are they simply inherited. Such structures, including educational systems and class divisions, may be critiqued and reformed. Bourdieu holds traditions, current social practices and individual agency together in relationship. When it comes to thinking about education and formation in congregations, this is a very helpful set of associations. We turn now to the field of practical theology to explore how it might intersect with the above.

2.4 Practical Theology

Practical theology names practice—with all its specificity and limitation—as the place of encounter with the infinite mystery of God, the place of grace; the Christian practitioner is thus compelled to seek out and speak the language of God within definite human contexts.³⁴

³⁰ Such research has shifted focus from religious education as a phenomenology of religion approach to a contextual linguistic-symbolic approach, from the teaching of belief systems to the exploration of living expressions of faith, both for communities and individuals. Julia Igrave, Robert Jackson and Kevin O’Grady, *Religious Education Research Through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach* (Münster: Waxmann, 2009). James C Conroy and Robert A Davis, "Religious Education," in *The Sage Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (London: Sage, 2010).

³¹ Igrave, Jackson and O’Grady, *Religious Education Research Through a Community of Practice: Action Research and the Interpretive Approach* p24.

³² As we will see later, such elements bear a relationship to Etienne Wenger’s notions of the importance of *reification* and *participation* in shaping identity and meaning in a community of practice. Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³³ Research regarding religious education in schools also encompasses the philosophical and theoretical foundations of practice, the relationship between religion and culture in general, approaches to teaching and learning, and the social and political agendas of religious education. *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*, ed. Marian De Souza (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).

³⁴ Helen Cameron, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p23.

This study takes place within the framework of practical theology, an evolving discipline which traces its origin back to Schleiermacher.³⁵ In the last few decades, the surge in practical theology has been, in part, a collective exercise by academics to carve out an institutional and scholarly arena broader than pastoral studies. Secondly, it represents a challenge to systematic theology as the primary way of engaging in theological analysis. Thirdly, practical theology seeks to come to terms with what scholars and religious communities bring to the task of doing theology. In all three aspects, practical theology can be seen as a move in late modernity to locate theological meaning-making in relation to particular contexts and purposes.

My research draws on practical theology and its methods, and on notions of praxis and practices, in the following related but distinct ways:

1. It takes a *practical theology discipline and approach* to the research project overall.
2. It uses an *ethnographic study method* with practical theological assumptions.
3. It has a *research focus* on Christian education and formation as congregational *praxis* (or *habitus*).
4. It seeks *research findings* regarding congregational praxis which describe specific *practices* of formation and education.

The above includes three of the four locales of practical theology identified by Bonnie Miller-McLemore: *scholarly discipline*, *method of study* and *activity of faith*.³⁶ Thus, the research approach aligns with a critical aspect of the field of Christian education, the organisational schema of the study, and my primary thesis regarding faithful and effective congregational Christian education. Distinction is needed here between the research subject, the research assumptions and the research method.

³⁵ Don Browning, *Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

³⁶ Bonnie J Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p5.

a. The changing concerns of Practical Theology

Practical theology broadly traverses the nature of faith, the purpose of the church, the nature of human experience, the place of culture or context, and the activity of God. The recent interest in practical theology can be seen as a religious response to postmodern or late-modern change with its associated pluralities, ambiguities and uncertainties—revelation, relativism and risk. There have been several attempts to chart the evolution and shape of practical theology. Swinton and Mowatt describe its approaches as *empirical, political, ethical, psychological, sociological, pastoral, gender-oriented* and *narrative-based*.³⁸ This list evidences the existential grounding of practical theology: it is not objective observation but interpreted experience.

The church's intense interest in theological meaning-making and the efficacy of its ministries is a sign of the times. This narrows our practical theology focus to the congregation's role in formation and education in postmodernity. What kind of faith-forming church is needed for these times? How do congregations provide theologically grounded and constructive environments, processes and tools to shape Christian believing and Christian living? Walter Brueggemann has challenged the church to step aside from imperialistic truth claims in the postmodern world and instead offer people tools for making theological sense, like offering them pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to piece together.³⁹ He suggests providing them with opportunity and power to engage in their own work of interpretation.⁴⁰ This is important for our epistemological frame in this study. Australian theologian Val Webb also sees theological meaning-making as an opportunity that the church can offer to people. She says:

Theology—talking about God—has to be returned to its rightful place as part of the natural process of every thinking Christian and the activity of the whole people of God together. Theologians have defined the theological endeavour down the ages as taking the story of faith and interpreting it for the current age. Theology is therefore about practical Christian living and far too important to be left to the limited life experiences of theologians.⁴¹

³⁸ John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), p3.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination: Texts Under Negotiation* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

⁴⁰ For Brueggemann, "knowing is essentially imaginative," so the role of the church is to fund postmodern imagination. *Ibid.*, p18f. Practical theology, like liturgy, is a work of the people. He sees, liturgy (and indeed the church) as "a place where people come to receive new materials, or old materials freshly voiced, that will fund, feed, nurture, nourish, legitimate and authorise a counter imagination of the world." *Ibid.*, p20.

⁴¹ Val Webb, *Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: Finding Your Own Voice* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub., 2015), p128.

Heitink describes practical theology as a theory of crisis related to the shifting place of the church amidst wide social upheavals.⁴² Practical theology is theology *in situ*, culturally as well as geographically. In this respect, approaches to practical theology differ in how they attend to both practice and theology in context, not just in terms of place, but also in terms of what constitutes knowledge in particular settings. Heitink distinguishes between practical theology as a *theological discipline* and as a *theory of action*. Practical theology involves the interacting praxes of (a) the mediation of Christian faith and (b) the praxis of modern society. He sees the practices of the church integrated through the concept and experience of *koinonia*, which has both internal and external dimensions.⁴⁴ Ultimately, for Heitink, the *agogic* drive of practical theology is for transformation in church and society. We see here an indication that practical theology may be approached as a way to understand the church's identity and purpose in relation to the world, and God's purposes for the world. This is critical for our analysis of Christian education as praxis.

US theologian Andrew Root is critical of a range of approaches to practical theology as not attending sufficiently to the activity of the divine as both the source and active presence in the experience and work of the church.⁴⁵ In *Christopraxis*, he maps four dominant North American models of practical theology. In the following table I summarise Root's analysis and combine it with Ted Smith's mapping of theories of practice.⁴⁶ These models have associated ontological and epistemological assumptions; however, the authors in each category are not agreed on these.

b. Approaches to Practical Theology

See Table on following page.

⁴² Beginning with Kant and Schleiermacher and ending in the late 20th century, Heitink describes three phases and emphases in practical theology: *historical-interpretive*, *hermeneutical-critical*, and *practical-constructive*. Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Heitink's analysis defies any easy summary. Ibid. See his summary diagram on p12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p277.

⁴⁵ Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2014).

⁴⁶ Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*.

Table 1: Approaches to Practical Theology

Approach	Sources	Features
Hermeneutical	Browning ⁴⁷ , Groome ⁴⁸ (Gadamer ⁴⁹)	Practice to theory to practice perspective Focus on description Hermeneutics as the process Tradition as a source for interpretation Knowing <i>in</i> practice Practical wisdom (<i>phronesis</i>) as the goal
Bourdieuian	Miller-McLemore ⁵⁰ , Graham ⁵¹ , Scharen ⁵² , Fulkerson ⁵³ (Bourdieu ⁵⁴)	Cultural location of the individual—"living human web" <i>Habitus</i> —social structures or schemes of thought and expression Strategies of normative action and shared commitment Community shaped by bodily habits, embodied values Human suffering and limitations bring openness to community and religion
Neo-Aristotlean	Dykstra, Bass ⁵⁵ , Cahalan ⁵⁶ (Aristotle ⁵⁷ , Macintyre ⁵⁸)	Christian practices together constitute the Christian way of living and believing Tradition as the source of Christian practices Practices are communal activities that both express and lead to what is good or virtuous God is experienced through participating in these practices in the world
Neo-Barthian	Purves ⁵⁹ , Root ⁶⁰ , Anderson ⁶¹ , Latini ⁶² , Loder ⁶³ , Hunsinger ⁶⁴ , (Barth)	Practical theology begins with divine action The praxis of the church is response to and participation in divine action The activity of God engages with human experience Tradition as the source of doctrine Practical theology is more about participation in Christ than imitation of Christ Ministry as the goal of practical theology

⁴⁷ Don S Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ Thomas H Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).
Thomas H Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991).

⁴⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

⁵⁰ Bonnie J Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁵¹ Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in An Age of Uncertainty*.

⁵² Christian Batalden Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography As Christian Theology and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

⁵³ Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁴ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

⁵⁵ Dorothy C Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002). Craig R Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). Dorothy C Bass and Craig R Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). Dorothy Bass and others, *On Our Way: Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2010).

⁵⁶ Kathleen A Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010).

⁵⁷ Aristotle: *Ethics*, trans. Thomson (London: Penguin, 1976).

⁵⁸ Alasdair C MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

⁵⁹ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (Louisville, Ky. Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

Following from Smith, we could say that these approaches vary in terms of what is primary when it comes to practical theology: belief, situation (experience), divine activity, or practical wisdom. Does meaning-making derive from doctrine, from cultural habits, from God's initiative, or from interpretive action? And are these models discrete or something of a deconstruction of the whole, namely *the ongoing interpretation of faith within purposeful, tradition-formed, Spirit-breathed habits that are open to reformation for the sake of God's purposes?*

Andrew Root's critique of practical theologies is that other researchers' assumptions are too narrow in terms of both ontology and epistemology. Drawing on his theological mentor, Ray Anderson, and also Eberhard Jungel, Root makes a compelling case for seeing divine action as primary in practical theology.⁶⁷ For Root, our knowledge of God comes firstly from our experience of God's self-giving in ministry and mission.⁶⁸ Theology is only practical because God is known or experienced firstly through God's action. So practical theology is more about ontology than epistemology, since it is God who is encountered in ministry and in mission. The hermeneutical task of practical theology is to discern "God's becoming."⁶⁹ Ministry (or rather, as I would say, discipleship) is not simply about imitating Christ but is participating in the life of Christ.⁷⁰ What is the *shape* of ministry? It is *theologia crucis*, the "death-to-life, life-out of death" work of grace.⁷¹

Root wants to locate himself outside of a social research mindset and make the theological concerns of practical theology primary. I agree with him about the primacy of God's action; God is experienced within ministry and discipleship as participation (not just imitation) in the life of

⁶⁰ Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*.

⁶¹ Ray Sherman Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline: A Practical Theology for An Empowered Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁶² Theresa F Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community: A Practical Theology of Small Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁶³ James E Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989). James E Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

⁶⁴ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A New Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Ministry on the Fireline: A Practical Theology for An Empowered Church*.

⁶⁸ "God's being as becoming is God's very ministry, God's giving Godself to humanity so humanity might be with God." Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* p94. "[The] hermeneutical shape of practical theology is Jesus Christ, revealed to us in our concrete, lived experience of the Spirit." Ibid., p100. "Practical theology ... has its own concrete operation in studying those in the practice of ministry. ... with the desire to witness and articulate how concrete actions of ministry are movements of the Spirit into God's becoming through Jesus Christ." Ibid., p102.

⁶⁹ "To discern God's ministry is to be led into it; it is to ontologically encounter its shape." Ibid., p100.

⁷⁰ "We experience divine action as we communally practice the faith." Ibid., p75.

⁷¹ Ibid., p104f.

Christ. However, there is a potential problem in conflating the research methodology with the assumptions about the research subjects, particularly when it comes to theology. Congregations do not live out of a particular model of practical theology or theory of practice. Imagine each congregation, in one sense, as its own theological world with its own Christian beliefs and practices, within a broader frame of what it means to be Christian. There are multiple understandings of Christian faith, or as Andrew Dutney says, multiple Christianities.⁷² Each congregation will have its own interpretive habits and lenses; there are multiple epistemologies operating, many faith perspectives. As Scharen says, “it is better to say that one *has* a world than to say that there *is* a world.”⁷³ These theological worlds are formed by the church’s praxis as much as they are chosen by individual church members.

c. Encountering God in (re)constructed practice

Given the overlapping areas of interest in the above diagram, it is unsurprising that it is Christian Scharen’s account of Bourdieu in relation to ethnographic practical theology research that is the most helpful for my project. In *Fieldwork in Theology*, Scharen explores Bourdieu’s thinking along with his mentors and a student, alongside a dialogue with theologians including Rowan Williams and Nicholas Healy.

For Bourdieu, the cultural forms that we receive, whether institutional, symbolic, linguistic or relational come from traditional social norms and structures, yet they are human creations and thus open to reformation. These habitus convey the rich and purposeful stories, values, and economies of culture. We are shaped by them as we grow to inhabit their forms and come to value what they teach us. This is true for our life as communities of faith as well as for our everyday life in the world.⁷⁴

⁷² Andrew Dutney, *Food, Sex and Death: A Personal Account of Christianity* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1993), p22.

⁷³ Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), p24. Scharen is summarising the view of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, mentor of Bourdieu.

⁷⁴ According to Bourdieu, habitus “is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions.” *Ibid.*, p52.

Drawing on Bourdieu, Graham says,

[Practices] are not simply moral entities; they have creative and epistemological status as well. Engagements in new practices give rise to new knowledge.⁷⁵

Embodied practices have meaning, but the meaning is implicit and inseparable from the practices themselves.⁷⁶

In terms of practical theology, we encounter God (or revelation of God) through experience, and firstly seek to express or articulate this (as practical theology) before we seek to speak more abstractly or systematically about the experience. The lived experience of a faith community is a primary, not secondary, source of theology. For Browning, Dykstra and Bass, tradition-formed practices convey wisdom which is revised over time within a living faith community. We cannot know what meaning such practices convey if we are merely observers of them.

Root's criticism that some practical theologians are too preoccupied with description is an issue here. Root says, "Critical realism heightens the importance of practical experience and yet does so by opening avenues for practical experience to actually be true experiences of divine encounter."⁷⁷ My primary difficulty with Root is his emphasis on divine encounter, in contrast with a more holistic or continuous view of the experience of God in everyday life. Those who draw on Bourdieu take a more systemic view of God's ongoing activity in the life of the church and the lives of Christians.

For example, Fulkerson's alternative is to view close attention to the complexities of human life and experience as vital to the task of doing theology.⁷⁸ She argues that it is in attentiveness to situations that call for transformation that we will encounter and understand a worldly God-with-us.⁷⁹ In particular, Fulkerson calls for attention to the ways in which meaning is embodied in everyday life, drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus in a field of socially-enculturated

⁷⁵ Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in An Age of Uncertainty* p99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p103.

⁷⁷ Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* p221. "It is ministry that allows practical experience to be the encounter with God from a realist perspective." *Ibid.*, p222.

⁷⁸ She says that researchers should pay "full attention to the structure of situation, its shape and demand, in such a way that the complex of racialised, normalised, and otherwise enculturated bodies and desire are as much a part of the analysis as the presence of biblical and doctrinal elements." Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* p21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p6-7.

practices.⁸⁰ Quoting Terrence Tilley, Fulkerson speaks of tradition as “a communicative process best imagined as participatory, vision-shaped practices.”⁸¹ Traditions are seen here as embodied; inscribed in corporate memory and incorporated in bodily expression.⁸² While not denying the reality of the kind of God-encounter that Root describes, I seek in this study for a broader acknowledgement of Christian discipleship as practiced participation in the life of God and in God’s purposes or mission. Further, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as embodied history is helpful in considering God’s activity within the living story that is the church.

Linking Bourdieu and Alasdair MacIntyre, Christian Scharen states a case for what he calls a carnal theology; namely, theological understanding that begins with embodied, practiced experiences—theology, like discipleship, coming from *in situ* apprenticeship.⁸³

To summarise, drawing further on Scharen:

Our experience of God is embodied. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, he suggests that we wear our world like clothing.⁸⁴ Like learning to play soccer, we learn to act from instinct according to the rules of society. Christian faith is a bodily apprenticeship where we learn both by and from Christian practices.⁸⁵

Theology starts in the middle. Scharen summarises Rowan Williams as saying:

[A] theologian begins in the middle of things and begins to say something about God through the common life and language already there and being practiced as a specific way of life in relation to God. Therefore, what the community does helps us to know the meaning of “God” within that community.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Ibid., p35.

⁸¹ See footnote, Ibid., p37.

⁸² See footnote, Ibid., p43.

⁸³ Christian B Scharen, "Ecclesiology "From the Body": Ethnographic Notes Toward a Carnal Theology," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p69. I fully recognise that such an understanding requires a researcher to participate in the practices of a community that she or he studies. This is not the method employed in this study. Rather, this is the rationale for drawing on ministry leaders’ reflections on their own embodied practice and that of their congregations. The researcher examines and trusts the leaders’ interpretation of their experience as valid knowing about the activity of God—insider theology.

⁸⁴ Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology* p24.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p101.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p82.

The main case here is that our knowledge and speaking of God is grounded neither in the wholly “other” nor simply in the everyday, but in learning to see and know God through the tradition-formed and interpretive habits of a Christian community.

The distinctive identity of the church is grounded in Jesus Christ. For Christians, this claim sounds self-evident. Quoting Williams again, Scharen acknowledges that Christian truth-claims are centred on both the person and the narrative of Jesus Christ, in particular his *kenotic* self-giving love.⁸⁷

Our study of communities is firstly about their lives. Scharen explains that Bourdieu became an ethnographer who questioned the abstraction of theory from practice and learned the value of inhabiting a community to learn of its identities and habits from the inside.

Research involves multiple reflexive processes. According to Scharen, Bourdieu describes three kinds of reflexivity: between the researcher and the community being studied, between the researcher and their academic field, and between the researcher and their own assumed objectivity.⁸⁸ I will expand on this in the subsequent section on qualitative research method.

Referring also to Williams, Nicholas Healy explores what it means to study the church and to look for identity in uniformity.⁸⁹ Let me state some key insights as they relate to my research.

Congregations and denominations are diverse. Healy questions any assumption that the church, global or local, can be described in uniform terms, including common identity within congregations. “Within the same denomination and in similar localities, congregations usually differ substantially, each having its own, often easily recognisable, style.”⁹⁰ Even within a single congregation there is a diversity of individual views and expressions of faith.

Diversity of Christian identity is partly contextual and cultural. “Both what is diverse and what is shared are as much the product of non-Christian influences.”⁹¹ If both God and the church are

⁸⁷ Ibid., p84.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p79f.

⁸⁹ Nicholas M Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography, and God: An Interplay of Reality Descriptions," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁹⁰ Ibid., p185.

⁹¹ Ibid., p187.

genuinely in the world, then the church can and will reflect its place and culture, not only in its habits but in its understandings of God.

The church's distinctiveness is theological rather than empirical. Despite the above recognition of the church's contingent and diverse nature, Healy affirms that what distinguishes it is the call of God, rather than the church's response to God.⁹²

Healy seriously questions whether empirical observation of the church can tell us anything much about its nature. "Coherence and consistency among the members of any given congregation are not, therefore, to be expected."⁹³

The church's identity is in its calling to "live authentically as Christians within the world."⁹⁴ In contrast to Healy's above view regarding empiricism, I suggest that by examining the church's flawed, enculturated expression of faith in society one can understand the teleological nature of the people of God on the way."

There are multiple implications for this study in terms of how we seek to understand the lives and faith of congregations and their individual members. The priority of this study is to allow each congregation's life to speak of itself and on its own terms. While there may be apparent patterns *across* congregations, these may be less illuminating than those *within* the life of each congregation. The life of a congregation needs to be understood in relation to its social and cultural context, its habits seen as expressions of Christian faith in the world. While we may assume that God is present (and beyond) the life of the congregation, any identification and articulation of this will be provisional. Nevertheless, the church's expression of life in the world in particular times and places may be our best means of discovering the nature of its calling. Finally, the researcher cannot be a detached theorist.

⁹² Ibid., p198.

⁹³ Ibid., p187f. Later I will challenge this view and suggest that practices contain both similarities and differences across eras and cultures, and this in and of itself demonstrates both particularity and the breadth of the Gospel.

⁹⁴ Nicholas M Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p197f.

2.5 Research methodology

The focus of the study is on Uniting Church congregations' approaches to Christian education in the early part of the 21st century. In this section, I will describe the overall research methodology prior to explaining the chosen qualitative research method. To reiterate, for this study Christian education is defined as *the theory and practice of teaching, learning and formation in Christian faith and discipleship, both for individuals and communities of faith*. In other words, "Christian education" is the overarching term for formation *and* education.

This research into congregations' approaches to Christian education follows a *Shared Praxis* method, drawing on Groome, Browning and Osmer. While remaining open to understanding how congregations might construe their praxis distinctively, I draw on the work of Bourdieu to analyse the place of Christian education in their lives.

a. Christian education and practical theology

Why choose a practical theology approach to study Christian education? Education *per se* may be seen to have a range of dimensions—philosophical, psychological, political, religious, theological, sociological, anthropological, and even economic. While the reorganisation of theological and ministry studies in Western churches has begun to place Christian education within practical theology streams or departments, the choice of research framework is not primarily related to this, as if education only existed within a practical theology mindset or approach. This is not the case. Rather, the choice of practical theology relates to the methodological underpinnings of an ethnographic study of congregational life. Also, praxis and practice have been seen to be critical dimensions of Christian formation and education in the work of people such as Browning, Groome and Osmer.⁹⁵

Practical theology has particular relevance for a study of Christian education as it is concerned with theological meaning-making (including hermeneutics) within a community of faith in relation to both tradition and culture (or context). Practical theology is of significance for the church

⁹⁵ Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*.

precisely because it addresses both continuity and change, as evident in the three dialectic processes outlined below. For Groome, the discipline of Christian education involves drawing upon Christian tradition and history to form, inform and transform human experience in the light of the vision of the coming reign of God.⁹⁶ Christian education does not simply flow from theology to life, but also from experience of life and faith to belief. The present study involves both appreciation and critique of current Christian education praxis in the light of educational theory and theology, with a view towards a possible reformulation of Christian education in the Uniting Church. My thesis proposes that the congregational nexus of community life, practices and context, particularly in terms of discipleship and mission, is the fertile ground in which the praxis of Christian education is being reshaped by congregational leaders. Graham says “[The] core values of communities or cultures are not to be conceived as transcendent eternal realities, but as provisional—yet binding—strategies of normative action and community within which shared commitments might be negotiated and put to work.”⁹⁷

In *Portrait of Youth Ministry*, Maria Harris identifies five dimensions of the New Testament church: *leiturgia*, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *kerygma* and *didache*.⁹⁸ In speaking here of Christian education, we are not speaking only of *didache*, but of Christian formation and education throughout the whole of the congregation’s life—how formation and education take place in multiple activities, settings and relationships. Drawing upon Graham, I see Christian education as provisional, yet binding, processes (incorporating, among other things—values, practices and resources) embodying the living faith experiences and convictions of a community. The focus on Christian education as *praxis* is not so much on a particular set of teaching and learning strategies, but on the communal *praxis*, the congregational work-in-progress of constantly shaping and reshaping Christian education and formation. I will say more about Christian education as ecclesial praxis in Chapter 3.

⁹⁶ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*.

⁹⁷ Elaine Graham, "Practical Theology as Transforming Practice," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. Stephen Pattison and James Woodward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p110.

⁹⁸ Maria Harris, *Portrait of Youth Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

b. The Hermeneutical Cycle

Don Browning sees his fundamental practical theology not as one way to do theology, but as the preferred way.⁹⁹ He names four sub-movements in theological method: *descriptive* theology, *historical* theology, *systematic* theology, and *strategic practical* theology.¹⁰⁰

Thomas Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis* is, according to Browning, an exemplary application of the kind of critical hermeneutical approach that constitutes practical theology.¹⁰¹ Groome's work has been recognised internationally as a leading model of Christian education for four decades. He sees *Shared Christian Praxis* as a meta-approach to Christian education, providing a dialogical "critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith."¹⁰² The approach is grounded in a conscious dialogue involving present experience, past tradition and wisdom, and future hope or vision.

Groome's shared praxis process involves five movements:¹⁰³

1. Naming Present Action
2. The Participants' Stories and Visions (critical reflection)
3. The Christian Community Story and Vision
4. Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Christian Story and Participants' Stories
5. Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Christian Vision and Participants' Visions

For Richard Osmer, the discipline of practical theology involves four tasks:¹⁰⁴

1. *What is going on?* The **descriptive-empirical** task; information-gathering in order to "discern patterns and dynamics".

⁹⁹ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*, p7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p218ff.

¹⁰² Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* p184.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), p4.

2. *Why is this going on?* The **interpretive** task; “drawing on theories of arts and sciences to better understand and explain” the above.
3. *What ought to be going on?* The **normative** task; “using theological concepts to interpret” the above, construct norms and learn from practice.
4. *How might we respond?* The **pragmatic** task; “determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable” along with “reflective conversation” with emerging practice.

This is a representation of how these movements parallel each other.

Table 2: Movements in Practical Theology

Don Browning <small>105</small>	Thomas Groome	Richard Osmer
1. Descriptive theology	1. Naming present action 2. The participants’ stories and visions	1. Descriptive-empirical task 2. Interpretive task
2. Historical Theology 3. Systematic Theology	3. The Christian Community Story and Vision 4. Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Christian Story and Participants’ Stories	3. Normative task
4. Strategic Practical Theology	5. Dialectical Hermeneutic Between the Christian Vision and Participants’ Visions	4. Pragmatic task

While the above three approaches have similarities, they are not identical. Nevertheless, we can say that, broadly speaking, the key steps in such a method involve:

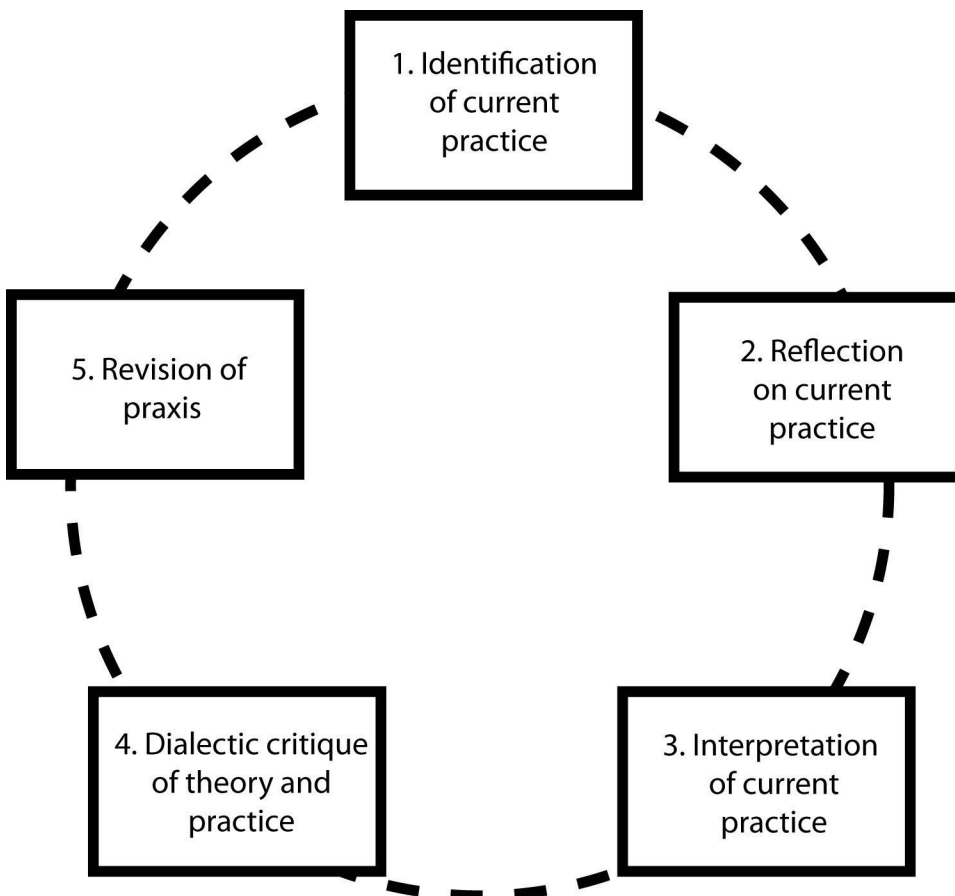
- *Identification of current practice*—naming or describing situations, behaviours, actions, and attitudes

¹⁰⁵ Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* p223ff.

- *Reflection on current practice*—gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons for current practice
- *Interpretation of current practice*—using relevant theories to analyse the characteristics of current practice in relation to desired practice or outcomes
- *Dialectic critique involving theory and practice*, both present and future perspectives
- *Revision of praxis for future action*—reformulating theory and revising "practical wisdom" for action

These movements of practical theology can be considered as a learning, or research, loop.

Figure 2: Research Inquiry Loop



This hermeneutical cycle forms the shape of the current research project:

- An examination of trends in Christian education thinking and practice in Australia and overseas, both descriptive and interpretive. (Chapter 3)
- A description of current practices in Uniting Church congregations obtained through interviews with congregational leaders, including leaders' reflections on their current practice. (Chapter 4—Method)
- Interpretation and critique of congregational praxis in relation to biblical, educational and theological sources (Chapters 5 to 8)
- Conclusions and proposals for the ongoing re-formation of Christian education as congregational praxis (Chapter 9)

2.6 Qualitative research approach

Within the Shared Praxis cycle described above, this study includes qualitative research into the nature of Christian education across a sample of Uniting Church congregations. The research was conducted as field interviews with congregational leaders across Australia in mid-2012. I will outline the basis for the qualitative research here, and provide detail about the interview approach, sampling method, questions and data summary in Chapter 4. The research focus is on how people see and understand their social environments. They are acknowledged as active agents in creating the social world in which they live. Thus, it is the reflection-on-practice of educational leaders, rather than the observation of particular educational programs or processes, that is the entry point to understanding congregations.

a. Three aspects of inquiry

The interviews focused on three aspects of Christian education praxis: *learning communities of discipleship, educational leadership and congregational mission*. The genesis of these three emphases is addressed in Chapter 3. However, it is necessary to expand upon them here in order to describe the basis of the investigation.

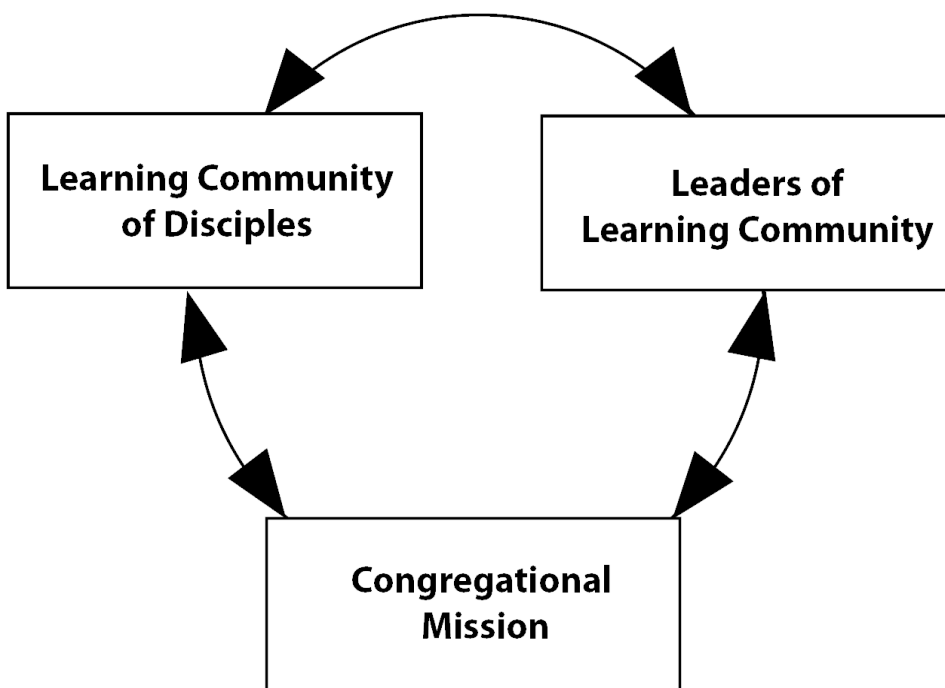
1. In what sense are Christian education and formation communal tasks? Where and how are they located within the life of a congregation? What does the congregation see as the

purposes of formation and education? Is it personal spiritual growth, church membership, moral character, equipping for discipleship, or engagement in mission?

2. What do church leaders, whether ordained or lay, contribute to the importance, shape and agendas of Christian education and formation? What capacities and qualities are required for effective leadership of this dimension of the church's life? Criteria for effectiveness are introduced in Chapter 4.
3. How does a congregation's sense of mission relate to both the processes and the curriculum (broadly speaking) of its formation and education? Is this relationship formal or informal, intentional or accidental, explicit or tacit? In what sense is the learning contextual?
4. How are the three aspects inter-related in terms of formation and education? How do learning communities and their leaders relate to each another? How are a community's ways of learning related to its sense of mission?

These are broad and complex questions. My representation of the three aspects of the inquiry is shown here.

Figure 3: Three Research Foci



This diagram will be further expanded at the end of Chapter 3.

In describing congregational studies in the US, Ammerman et al. highlight six inter-related frames of church life for ethnographic research: *ecology or context, leadership, theology, identity and culture, process/dynamics* and *resources*.¹⁰⁷ Any or all of these frames can be applied to this research project, indeed, they are not discrete. Within the constraints of one study it is not possible to obtain a comprehensive view of these aspects of one community, let alone a systematic view of multiple communities. At best, I can gather some clues about individual churches' and leaders' values and attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and sense of identity within their locale, and draw some broad conclusions across the whole sample.

b. An Interpretive, Constructivist Approach

Drawing on a range of authors, Toma describes qualitative research as *holistic, empirical, interpretive* and *empathetic*.¹⁰⁸ My approach is interpretive in terms of seeking to understand each congregation and its leaders on their own terms. Given that the research explores Christian education as dynamic, evolving praxis in the light of the church's response to a changing world, it seeks to uncover the ways in which congregations and their leaders see their *praxis* as a work-in-progress. Such a qualitative approach is predicated on the assumption that leaders are to some extent reflecting on their understandings and practices and seeking to improve them over time.

Since the study is phenomenological and interpretive, notions such as Christian education, discipleship, faith development, formation, spirituality, mission and effectiveness were explicated by the leaders themselves (rather than defined by the researcher) as articulations of theory and practice.¹⁰⁹ The lens of this study is both contextual—about how context shapes leaders' praxis, and constructionist—about how leaders envision and articulate praxis.

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ J Douglas Toma, "Approaching Rigor in Applied Qualitative Research," in *The Sage Handbook for Research in Education* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), p407.

¹⁰⁹ The inquiry fits what Creswell describes as a social constructivist perspective, whereby "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting." Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* p8. For King and Horrocks, qualitative research of this kind may be seen as realist, contextual or constructionist. Nigel King and Christine Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010).

c. Participants' leadership praxis

Such research requires the researcher to both enter the research subject's world attentively, and to be conscious of their presence within it. As Scharen says:

Ethnographic methods provide a path by which truth emerges, rather than a way to apply truth. The researcher assumes the posture of a learner who wants to be taught rather than that of an expert who possesses the crucial theory for analysing what is going on or what is really real.¹¹⁰

An ethnographic method can actively engage leaders' own processes of reflective practice, not only for the sake of observation, but also in order that the research itself might serve the leaders themselves. Rather than being a positivist approach that simply seeks to objectively evaluate leaders' performance, or a limited phenomenological view that solely evokes leaders' experiences, research can also empower its participants for transformative action.¹¹¹ Drawing on feminist and neo-Marxist scholars, Lather suggests that such "empirical research offers a powerful opportunity for *praxis* such that the research process enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations."¹¹² An interview, can be approached as an opportunity to engage a person regarding his or her own reflective practice. The interviewer reflects with them rather than merely collects data from or about them. Both the experience of the interview and subsequent reporting back of the research findings provide these opportunities. In Chapter 4 I will describe how the interview was approached as a semi-structured, peer professional conversation in order to achieve this.

d. Drawing on Grounded Theory

The study draws on aspects of grounded theory without being bound within it. Kathy Charmaz, former student of one of the founders of Grounded Theory, Barney Glaser, and one of the leading figures in the field, says, "In their original statement of the method, Glaser and Strauss invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way. ... Grounded theory

¹¹⁰ Scharen and Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* p17.

¹¹¹ P Lather, "Research as Praxis", *Harvard Educational Review* 56, no. 3 (1986): p257-277.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p263. "Praxis has its roots in the commitment of the practitioner to wise and prudent action in a practical, concrete, historical situation. It is action which is considered and consciously theorised, and which may reflexively inform and transform the theory which informed it." Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* p190.

methods can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them.”¹¹⁶

Firstly, grounded theory is used here as an approach to data analysis. While the research inquiry is open-ended, I am not simply seeking to build a theory from the ground up. The study has three focus areas and seeks to explore the relationship between them based on theories of Christian education, education and missiology. The theoretical framework is outlined in Chapter 3. While the nature of the relationships may be broad, hence the open inquiry, there is a structure to the interview questions based on the focus areas or lenses. As Kimball *et al* note, grounded theory can be structured according to existing theories, prior research or by the data itself.¹¹⁷ The study does not build on prior theories or research as such, but rather seeks to explore associations based on the concerns raised by prior theories and recent practice. Hence I frame some areas of inquiry without predetermining their possible associations.

As we shall see in Chapter 4, I have not attempted the line-by-line coding approach sometimes used in grounded theory but have looked more broadly at the categories and themes arising from the data. This is partly in resistance to a quasi-quantitative approach to constructivist research, but also a means of analysing and aggregating data in a multi-themed study. The generative nature of grounded theory relies on an iterative approach to cycles of coding. While I have engaged in such an approach, it is in relation to the structure of the hypothesis, and therefore less open to the kind of broad reformulation that some grounded theory studies would take.

Secondly, grounded theory is used here in the descriptive and interpretive steps of practical theology. While grounded theory may raise theological issues and questions, practical theology method requires a dialectic with normative sources of faith or tradition. Stevens notes the current lack of application of grounded theory to practical theology research, while employing it within his own study of older people’s notions of luck.¹¹⁸ “Qualitative research can do more than provide a

¹¹⁶ Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* p16.

¹¹⁷ Kimball, Elisabeth M, Mannes, Marc and Angela Hackel. “Voices of Global Youth on Spirituality and Spiritual Development: Preliminary Findings from a Grounded Theory Study.” In *International Handbook of Education for Spirituality, Care and Wellbeing*. Vol 3. Part 1. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2009, p332.

¹¹⁸ Stevens, Bruce A. "Grounded Theology? A Call for a Community of Practice." *Practical Theology* 10, no. 2 (2017): p201-206. Stevens, Bruce A. "Grounded Theology: A New Method to Explore Luck." *Theology Today* 73, no. 2 (2016): p117-128.

‘thick description’. Indeed, the challenge is to go beyond being descriptive to being generative.”¹¹⁹ Lynne Taylor combines a grounded theory approach within a practical theology framework in her study of narratives of conversion to Christian faith.¹²⁰ In this study, grounded theory is used as a primary constructivist approach to analysing data prior to engaging in theological reflection. I acknowledge that this bears a similarity to other interpretive, phenomenological approaches, as noted by Wilson and Hutchinson.¹²¹ While my interview approach is later described as a professional peer interview, one of the critical issues with Christian education is the apparent lack of professional consensus or coherence regarding Christian education practice among ministry leaders. Rather than investigating a common field of professional practice, I am in this instance seeking to (re)define the field based on current understandings and practices. Hence the more open, constructive approach of grounded theory is better suited than a phenomenological approach of examining practice in relation to professional standards.

e. Proximity and thick description

In the 1970s, John Westerhoff worked with Gwen Kennedy Neville on exploring faith communities through the lenses of both theology and anthropology.¹²² Following C. Ellis Nelson, the faith community was viewed in social and cultural terms as a kind of tribe or sub-culture. In seeking to study congregations, I have been helped by Clifford Geertz’s introduction to *The Interpretation of Cultures* in which he introduces Ryles’ notion of *thick description* and poses a number of important guides and caveats to ethnographic studies:¹²³

- ethnographic study seeks thick rather than thin description, not just a description of behaviour but insight regarding its meanings;
- culture involves public, shared meanings which anthropology seeks to uncover;
- cultural analyses are interpretations, fictions, not realities;

¹¹⁹ Stevens, "Grounded Theology? A Call for a Community of Practice" p204.

¹²⁰ Taylor, Lynne M. "Redeeming Authenticity." PhD Thesis, Adelaide: Flinders University, 2017.

¹²¹ Wilson, Holly S and Sally A Hutchinson. "Methodologic Mistakes in Grounded Theory." In Florence Downs. *Readings in Research Methodology*. 2 ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilson, 1999.

¹²² John H Westerhoff and Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974). Gwen Kennedy Neville and John H Westerhoff, *Learning Through Liturgy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

¹²³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

- cultural systems and their descriptions have minimal coherence not tight coherence: they resist systematic assessment;
- “The locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don’t study villages...; they study *in* villages.”¹²⁴
- cultural theory is descriptive, not predictive.

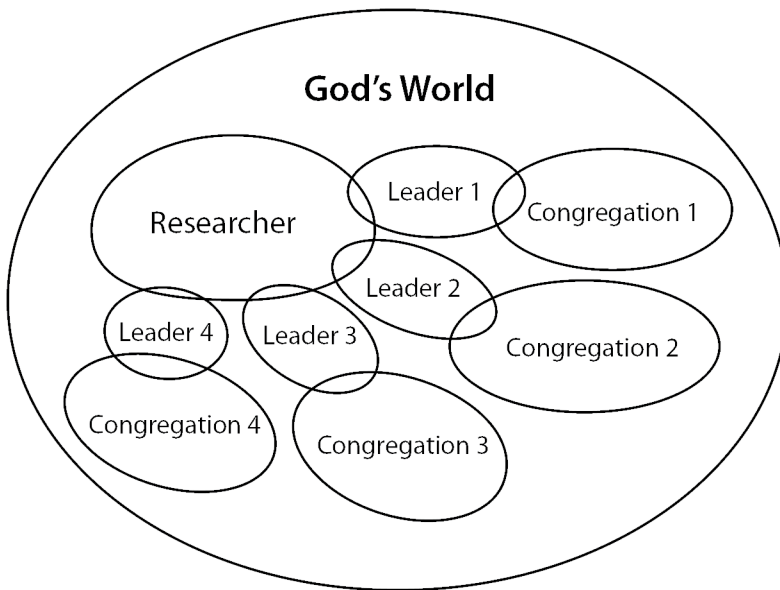
Geertz indicates that the value of cultural description is in its proximity to its source: hovering low.¹²⁵

While a thick description is more likely the product of multi-method, sustained ethnographic observation of a congregation rather than a single interview, my aim here is to allow the participants to tell their own stories and to remain close to their detail. For this reason it was important, as far as possible, to undertake the interviews on site in each leader’s church building or within their suburb or town. This provided me with explicit and tacit information about the setting, created a sense of ease on the part of the interview subject, and allowed both research and interviewee to reference physical aspects of the location (within and beyond the premises). Also, in the first instance, I seek to understand each congregation’s internal life rather than to extrapolate across congregations.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p22.

¹²⁵ “The essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalise across cases but to generalise within them.” Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* p26.

Figure 4: Epistemological Lenses



This diagram represents the epistemological lenses of the study. While it is assumed that the overall study of Christian education takes place in the world in which God is present and active, it does not attempt to give a uniform ontological account of this. Rather, the researcher engages with individual leaders to seek to understand their particular views of the church in the world, and that of their congregations. While each leader gives me insights regarding their congregation, I am not observing the congregation as such. A leader's worldview may overlap that of their congregation, but they are not identical. The congregation itself is made up of many individuals, each with their own view of faith and life. Further, I gain a degree of insight into the leader's view of faith, ministry and their church, yet I recognise that this is partial and a construction within the interview setting. Hence a degree of caution is required in generalising both within and across cases. Certain themes or processes might be recognised and named within the lives of congregations, for example, "action-reflection learning" or "creative, participatory worship," but what these mean in practice can vary considerably. While such thematic descriptions will be provided, they point to local practice, not vice versa. As Bourdieu points out, the map is not the territory.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* p2. Here I acknowledge the "epistemological break" recognised in Bourdieu's method. Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology* p21.

3. REFRAMING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

3.1 Developments in Christian Education

a. Defining Christian Education

In the western church, Christian education came to a crossroads a couple of decades ago as congregational decline became evident. Here we chart some of the changes and challenges and explore the foundations and major themes of this study.

The first part of this section presents an overview of the field and some of its key authors. The second part examines the Australian context in particular, both in terms of church and wider society. The following three sections outline the key themes underpinning the qualitative research. These latter sections both provide justification for their place in this study and review a selection of the relevant literature

C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff and Charles Foster highlighted the formative and transformative power of socialisation or enculturation in Christian faith.¹²⁷ Each author sees Christian education as taking place within a community of nurture and recognises that there are formal and informal aspects of both socialisation and education. Westerhoff's recovery of the language of *catechesis* was an attempt to move beyond the question of whether particular processes constituted formation or education.¹²⁸ "Catechesis [is] the process by which persons are initiated into the Christian community and its faith, revelation and vocation; the process by which persons throughout their life-times are continually converted and nurtured, transformed and formed, by and in its living tradition."¹²⁹

¹²⁷ See for example: Carl Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1967). John H Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976). Charles R Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

¹²⁸ John H Westerhoff and O. C Edwards, *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis* (Wilton CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1981).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p1.

For the sake of this study, the term *Christian education* (rather than *catechesis*, which is not common language in the UCA) will be used as the encompassing term for informal *and* formal education *and* formation. My Christian education focus is primarily on the faith community or congregation rather than church schools or theological colleges. Christian education is seen here in the following terms:

1. Christian education is a communal task; congregations are faith-developing, faith-maturing communities.
2. Christian leaders have educational responsibilities; the church has ministries of teaching and educational leadership
3. Christian education is not simply a theoretical exercise; Christian faith is learned while it is lived.
4. While Christian education includes personal and communal growth, it directs the church beyond itself to God's greater purposes in the world.

Thus, the *context* of Christian education is the church within the world; the *locus* of Christian education is the worshipping, witnessing community of believers; the *goal* of Christian education is grounded in and focused on the work of the Trinity in Creation, redemption and the new creation, the *missio Dei*.

b. Developments in Christian Education

Wherever Christianity has "lived," whether in ancient or medieval times, or in Protestantism with its many branches, it has created its own distinctive kind of education... [Education] is an inherent necessity in Christianity, so much so that Christianity cannot continue to exist without education... [It] is made equally plain that "Christian" education apart from a living Christian faith is ... merely a tinkling bell.¹³⁰

Formation and education in faith are evident in the histories of both the Hebrew people and the Christian Church through the centuries. Indeed, socialisation and instruction are endemic to any religion. Hebrew and Jewish education began at home in childhood and meshed with synagogue

¹³⁰ Lewis Joseph Sherrill, *The Rise of Christian Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), pv, 1.

and school.¹³¹ The Hebrew Scriptures were central to instruction and devotion. Walter Brueggemann notes that Torah, Wisdom literature and the Prophets provided an epistemic basis for Hebrew faith and life. “[What] Israel knows and how Israel knows are closely linked.”¹³² Further, the Hebrew people required a sectarian hermeneutic to legitimate their resistance of the foreign nations.¹³³ This counter-cultural worldview of the people of God was grounded in Yahweh’s covenant with them. Hebrew faith, culture and attitudes to the world were intertwined, and the weaving of formation and education throughout communal life contributed to this. Enculturation and instruction worked together both in daily routine and in religious rituals.

According to Charles Melchert, the particular pedagogical approach of *Wisdom* connects Scripture (both Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels in particular), theology and everyday life through the formation of virtue.¹³⁴ Faith education is more than instruction in the tradition, rather it involves conversational and reflective engagement among people seeking to negotiate the ambiguities of daily existence. The tradition informs and forms people's responses, but does not bind them in mere repetition.¹³⁵

c. Recent Decades

Western Christian education in the 20th century has had its own particular rationales and approaches, shaped by modern religious beliefs and practices, and contemporary thought and practice in education and the social sciences.¹³⁶ Each decade has brought commentary about the nature of Christian education, its purposes and goals, its arenas (church, school, university, society), its social and cultural contexts, its relationship to theology and ecclesiology, and its constituents and methods. Christian education in the United States has had a stronger influence

¹³¹ | Aron and others, "Jewish Education," in *Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). Sherrill, *The Rise of Christian Education*.

¹³² Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon As a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p10. He sees the Torah as shaping *ethos*, the Prophets as an expression of *pathos*, and the Wisdom Writings as *logos*, or providing “a sense of order and meaning to life.” *Ibid.*, p12f.

¹³³ Walter Brueggemann, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19", in *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship*, ed. Mary C Boys (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989).

¹³⁴ Charles Melchert, *Wise Teaching: Biblical Wisdom and Educational Ministry* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

¹³⁵ It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the main challenge to Jewish education in the present age is seen to be the balance between the faith tradition and secularisation. Aron and others, "Jewish Education".

¹³⁶ Christian educators have regularly provoked (and sometimes lamented) discussion about the future of Christian education over the past 40 years. See the annual REA / APPRE editorial and address in the *Religious Education* <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/urea20/current> (accessed August 15, 2017).

on the Uniting Church and its parent denominations than has Christian or Religious education in the United Kingdom.¹³⁷

Australian academics have written very little about Christian education in congregations, including empirical studies in Protestant churches.¹³⁸ There are some recent exceptions, including research by the Christian Research Association regarding youth ministry in Australian churches and regarding Bible engagement by young people.¹³⁹

Since the early 1900s, contemporary Christian education in the USA sought to help churches locate teaching and learning in faith in relation to modern developments in education and social science on the one hand, and theology, both historical and modern, on the other.¹⁴⁰ This took place within a broader field of religious education. For American society, the question was as much about what made education religious as about how religions educate. At various intervals, Christian education as a discipline of inquiry has been debated in terms of its nature, its relationship with other areas of theology, its relationship with education in general, and its *praxis*, particularly in churches.¹⁴¹ In the last few decades, Christian education theory began to reflect the church's renewed concern with God's mission, although this was not always named as such. Particular themes included the nature of the kingdom of God, religious pluralism, and the role of Christian education in social transformation. The emphasis was often directed towards social justice and questions about Christians as citizens of the state.¹⁴² The liberationist pedagogy of Paulo Freire was a key influence on North American theorists, including feminist educators.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Up until the 1990s, the vast majority of key Uniting Church leaders with graduate qualifications related to Christian education had studied in the USA.

¹³⁸ Like much of the UK literature, the large majority of writing in Australia relates to religious (particularly Christian) schooling, and to a lesser extent the place of religion in state schooling. *Religious Education Journal of Australia* (Kew, Vic: Australian Association for Religious Education).

¹³⁹ Philip J Hughes, *A Vision for Effective Youth Ministry: Insights from Australian Research* (Hawthorn: Christian Research Association, 2015). "Bible Engagement Among Australian Young People", <http://cra.org.au/bible-engagement-among-australian-young-people/> (accessed October 22, 2017). Later I will discuss recent work by Wendi Sargeant and John Littleton.

¹⁴⁰ John H Westerhoff, *Who Are We?: The Quest for a Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, 1978).

¹⁴¹ David S Schuller, *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Chalice Press, 1993). Charles R Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). Kate Dooley and Mary Collins, *The Echo Within: Emerging Issues in Religious Education* (Allen TX: Thomas More, 1997).

¹⁴² See for example: *Education for Peace & Justice*, ed. Padraic O'Hare (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983). Maria Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee!: A Spirituality for the Twenty-first Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). Allen J Moore, *Religious Education as Social Transformation* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989).

¹⁴³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972). Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974). Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the*

Alongside this, Christian education writers and researchers explored the nature of the church as a sub-culture, along with connections between tradition and context in the shaping of Christian identity.¹⁴⁴ A third area of inquiry drew on human development—cognitive, psycho-social and moral—particularly Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg. James Fowler’s research into faith as a generic human capacity gave Christian education greater validity for spirituality and personal development.¹⁴⁵ Of course, the developmental school had both followers (Kegan, Parks, Nelson) and critics (Moran, Harris, Webb-Mitchell) and some who were both (Dykstra, Gilligan, Westerhoff).

Typologies of Christian education have been mapped on a number of occasions. In 1982, Seymour and Miller identified five approaches or paradigms for Christian education.¹⁴⁶ These represent both theoretical and practical concerns related to teaching and learning in congregational settings.

1. *Religious instruction*
2. *Faith Community*
3. *Developmental*
4. *Liberation*
5. *Interpretation*

Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 1994). See in particular Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*. Michael Warren, *Youth and the Future of the Church: Ministry with Youth and Young Adults* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982). Daniel S Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁴ Nelson, *Where Faith Begins*. Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture*. Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983). Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Denham Grierson, *Transforming a People of God* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education of Australia and New Zealand, 1984).

¹⁴⁵ James W Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

¹⁴⁶ Jack L Seymour and Donald Eugene Miller, *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

In 1990, the authors followed with an exploration of *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*, exploring themes of *tradition*, the *church*, the *person*, *mission* and *method*.¹⁴⁷ In 1997, fifteen years after the first volume, Seymour and Crain revisited the task and suggested four approaches:¹⁴⁸

1. *Education for social transformation*: “Transformation becomes both the goal and the process of education.”
2. *The Faith community*: “Community as the content and process of Christian education.”
3. *Educating persons*: “Through Christian education persons touch their own deepest centres of meaning and value and are connected to other persons and the creation in meaning, care, and justice.”
4. *Religious instruction*: “A formal process of theological reflection, of teaching and learning, where we come to know, interpret, and incarnate the faith.”

Mary Boys’ map of educating in faith named four *classic expressions*, each with a “particular theological perspective with a particular educational outlook”: *Evangelism*, *Religious Education*, *Christian Education* and *Catholic Education*.¹⁴⁹ In fact, Christian educators seem to have been besotted with charting the changes in their field.¹⁵⁰ Their concerns address the place of education in the church (and church school or university) and the role of the church in the world. Is the marginalisation of educators in the church, and that of the church in society inter-related?

The above schemas address the purposes of faith education, religious and theological perspectives, approaches to teaching and learning, and the learners themselves. As a chart for the

¹⁴⁷ Jack L Seymour and Donald Eugene Miller, *Theological Approaches to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

¹⁴⁸ Jack L Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), p18ff.

¹⁴⁹ Mary C Boys, *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p8f.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example: Marvin J Taylor, *Foundations for Christian Education in An Era of Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976). Westerhoff, *Who Are We?: The Quest for a Religious Education*. Schuller, *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice*. Dooley and Collins, *The Echo Within: Emerging Issues in Religious Education*. *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium*, ed. James Michel Lee (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 2000). Richard Robert Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religious Education Between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany* (W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003).

future, however, they seem more descriptive of known paradigms than prescriptions for revising practice.

e. Looking Back, Looking Forward

In recent years, several key figures in US Christian education with global influence have issued manifestos marking the end of significant academic careers.¹⁵¹ The selection here is based on the summative nature of these prominent authors' works. They represent something of a cross-section of US churches: John Westerhoff (Episcopalian), Thomas Groome (Catholic), Jack Seymour (United Church of Christ), and Charles Foster (Methodist).¹⁵²

John Westerhoff

John Westerhoff released a third edition of his widely-read treatise *Will Our Children Have Faith?* in 2012.¹⁵³ First published in 1976, the book was a significant influence in Australia and New Zealand through the 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁵⁴ Firstly, he seeks to redress an imbalance by affirming that faith is taught as well as caught, so to speak. “[Education] remains the key to faithful, intentional formation.”¹⁵⁵ Secondly, he recognises a lack of clarity or purpose in catechesis, and suggests that the aim is “to form Christ-like communal persons and communities” and that this involves paying attention to faith, character and consciousness.¹⁵⁶ Education and formation must be purposeful, not so much in terms of instruction as in shaping followers of Christ who exhibit the virtues and disposition that exemplify God’s presence in the world. For Westerhoff, this requires a common story, a common authority, common rituals, a common life, a common end beyond itself, and a diversity of membership.¹⁵⁷ He restates the three pathways to God that he introduced in *Living the Faith Community*—the *experiential way*, the *reflective way*

¹⁵¹ I recognise that the following are all Anglo-American males. I will reference female educators and theologians throughout the thesis.

¹⁵² I will refer to Presbyterian Richard Osmer’s less recent yet essential writing in a later chapter.

¹⁵³ John H III Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2012).

¹⁵⁴ Rather than rewriting the book, Westerhoff, in his late 70s, added an updated ending to each chapter of the second edition (dated 2000).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Location 167 of 2892. This is the Preface to the Second Edition, reprinted in the Third Edition. Westerhoff makes this point at length in the Update to Chapter One.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Location 825 of 2892.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Locations 1230 and 1245 of 2892.

and the *integrative* way.¹⁵⁸ Finally, Westerhoff suggests that church planning needs to be visionary and intentional in relation to the dimensions of its common life; to its processes of formation, education and instruction/training; and to the church's mission in the world.¹⁵⁹

Thomas Groome

Tom Groome's 2011 volume *Will There Be Faith?* appears to riff off Westerhoff's title with a degree of urgency. Subtitled *Depends on Every Christian*, Groome's book is also a conscious revisiting and reinvigorating of key themes in his work as a Catholic educator. The basis is markedly evangelical, with a sense of priority about the transmission of faith in an increasingly secular world. Speaking of the purposes of educating in faith, Groome stresses the need to be forming disciples in apprenticeship to Jesus and enriching Christian identity.¹⁶⁰ The what and the why of education coalesce here. True to his earlier works, Groome locates the purpose of Christian education in the coming reign of God. The connection is that it is the disciples' life of faith that is the way of participation in what God is doing—a way of love, justice, repentance, peacemaking and reconciliation.¹⁶¹ Groome goes on to emphasise the necessity of faith-forming communities—parish, household and school—in a broader village than Westerhoff describes. The book outlines a total community catechesis or habitus that is collaborative, intentional, praxis-based, holistic and familial. While Groome inevitably revisits his Shared Christian Praxis meta-approach, the thrust of the book concerns the intentional educating of disciples in a faith-forming ecosystem.¹⁶²

Charles Foster

From Generation to Generation is United Methodist scholar Charles Foster's call to mainline churches to engage in an *adaptive* challenge to form faith in congregations.¹⁶³ Foster sees a direct link between the dismantling of denominational structures that provided leadership and shape to

¹⁵⁸ John H Westerhoff, *Living the Faith Community: The Church That Makes a Difference* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985). Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Locations 1627 and 1642 of 2892. In saying this, Westerhoff abandoned a stage development view of faith in favour of a paradigm of parallel pathways of pilgrimage which people could move between.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Location 1956 of 2892.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas H Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), p101, 103.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p107, 112.

¹⁶² The term *faith formation ecosystem* was introduced to me in this context by John Roberto in John Roberto, *Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century* (Naugatuck CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2015).

¹⁶³ Foster, *From Generation to Generation*.

Christian education, and the lack of intentionality, direction and form of Christian education in congregations. He sees the evidence of this loss most particularly in the church's lack of ability to nurture the next generation towards mature faith. If we cannot pass on faith in our own children, what have we to offer others? The church's failure with children and young people is symptomatic of deeper issues in its life. As Kenda Creasy Dean says, "If you want to account for a people, look at their young."¹⁶⁴

Foster suggests that while there have been interest and new insights in spiritual formation, faith development, spiritual practices and faith development, churches have not generally been able to link "questions about forming faith to challenges of equipping congregations ... in the traditions of the Reformation in a radically and rapidly changing world."¹⁶⁵ He indicates four substantive elements that are missing from the church at the present time: reinforcing structures for faith formation from beyond the congregation; a catechetical culture of formation in congregations, a compelling narrative of God, and intergenerational mentoring.

In the light of these, Foster proposes three critical tasks to be addressed:¹⁶⁶

1. Reclaiming a notion of learning conducive to forming faith in the education of congregations.
2. Revitalising congregations as catechetical cultures of faith formation and transformation.
3. Cultivating an ecclesially grounded educational imagination in congregations.

What is worth noting is the focus on the *culture* of a congregation, a revision of *practices* of formation and education, and the *story of God* that is being told and lived. Like both Westerhoff and Groome, Foster speaks of *catechesis* as the overarching term for forming and educating in faith. A catechetical culture is the context for learning and growing in faith. He emphasises that the main dynamic of such a culture is more relational than ideological.¹⁶⁷ According to Foster, three congregational practices are vital for this: hospitality, celebration and conversation.¹⁶⁸ Our

¹⁶⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Eerdmans, 2004), p11.

¹⁶⁵ Foster, *From Generation to Generation* 7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p8ff.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p9.

¹⁶⁸ 1. *Hospitality* "creates the conditions for generously including young people into a congregation's life and mission."
2. *Celebration* centres "the faith journeys of young people on inherited and contemporary encounters with the Grace

attention is drawn here to the effervescent life of a congregation as being welcoming of inquiry, making space for deep relationships and learning, and rejoicing in the transformations that God brings to our lives and faith.

Jack Seymour

“If we claim to be Christian, we are called to teach the way of Jesus.”¹⁶⁹ I have already referenced Seymour and Miller’s typologies of Christian education.¹⁷⁰ Published in 2014, *Teaching the Way of Jesus* explores remarkably similar themes to those of the other authors. The purpose of teaching is that we might become disciples who follow the way of Jesus for the sake of the realm of God. Our vocation as Christians is to be followers; the church is a discipling community. Seymour is critical of education that results only in a kind of inward faithfulness to the church. He states that the way of Jesus takes us into the world, into public issues of justice and public exploration of faith with those who may be open to hearing. This necessitates the people of God becoming everyday theologians. Seymour states that to grow people into the way of Jesus requires participation in communal faith practices, intentional and systematic instruction, and learning about mission through action-reflection. “Mission is both the goal of ministry and an essential process of Christian education or faith formation.”¹⁷¹ There are some strong resonances among these recent writings, framed with a sense of urgency for the church at this time.

If Christian faith is of necessity formed in community, then the nature of the church’s faith-shaping practices requires critical attention. If the way of Jesus is learned by living it, then the manner of corporate life that we have as the people of God has a direct bearing on the type of faith that we hold and the sorts of Christians that we become. A congregation’s habits and its fruits are in direct correlation. These are not only avenues of service but also vehicles of grace.

If becoming Christian is about learning to live the way of Jesus, then discipleship is more than a synonym for “follower,” rather it describes and prescribes an ongoing attentiveness to the life and

of God.”³ *Conversation* “cultivates learning that forms faith across generations... prepare for and participate in the events that give rise to and shape its identity as a community of faith.” *Ibid.*, pp98-99.

¹⁶⁹ Jack Seymour, *Teaching the Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), px.

¹⁷⁰ Seymour and Westerhoff both served long terms as editors of the *Religious Education* journal, and Seymour’s editorials could be a study in themselves.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p166.

teachings of Jesus with implications for teaching and learning. This is not simply a matter of the Gospels being a curriculum and discipleship being imitation; it is about a narratively formed attention and intention, and prayerful participation in the ongoing work of Christ.

If teaching and learning Christian faith and discipleship best occur within a faith community, then the relational climate of the community has implications for whether and how people grow. A healthy faith-forming village or ecosystem supports faith development and faithful living. Within this, a learning culture needs to be cultivated, with both personal and communal dimensions.

If Christian education is not only about forming but also informing or instructing, then intentional, planned, programmed, resourced teaching is needed. Faith must be taught, and this requires effective teachers and engaged learners. The goal is not simply knowledge but the creation of an interpretive, theologically reflective, witnessing community of believers.

If Christian education is for the sake of the reign of God, then it is always directed towards God's purposes for the world. The multi-faceted nature of the *mission Dei* is embedded in the methods, curricula and outcomes of Christian education. This is not so much education *for* mission as education *in* mission.

In identifying, synthesising and expanding upon these writers' themes, I am suggesting three things.

1. There is a refreshed emphasis on the communal dimensions of Christian education and formation that focus on critical habits of discipleship.
2. There is a call to greater intentionality in what it means to teach the faith, and where and how this happens, with implications for leadership and capacity.
3. There is a missional turn in the intentions of Christian education in terms of local congregational mission, active participation in social justice, and public faith-sharing.

These three themes align with the basis of my qualitative research and are expanded in the following three sections.

3.2 Christian Education in the Uniting Church

a. A National Perspective

In recent decades, Christian education in the Uniting Church has had a decreasing organisational profile and questions have been raised by church leaders regarding its nature and value for the mission of the church.

In 1977 the Uniting Church inherited a rich history in Christian education from its parent denominations and their shared ministries. The work of The Joint Board of Christian Education (JBCE), whose roots stretch back to 1900, developed into a partnership of seven denominations across Australia and New Zealand.¹⁷² The JBCE's work was known and respected internationally for exemplary Christian Education.¹⁷³ As church agencies, JBCE and its successor, Uniting Education, engaged in partnerships with denominations and publishers. The networking and professional development of Christian educators was an important function, along with the formulation of education policies and programs for all ages. These two agencies also gave oversight to national events such as *About Face* and the *National Christian Youth Convention*. Uniting Education developed significant links with Uniting Church schools and commenced national initiatives and policy work in this area.¹⁷⁴

JBCE and Uniting Education applied current educational philosophies and methods to curriculum development and teaching in congregations.¹⁷⁵ These agencies also brought contemporary biblical scholarship and theological thinking to bear on curriculum and teaching.¹⁷⁶ As Uniting Church agencies, JBCE and Uniting Education also engaged in significant ecumenical work. The *Youth Leader Certificate* training program was adapted and used across Churches of Christ, Uniting,

¹⁷² The Sabbath Schools Committee commenced in 1900, followed by the Joint Board of Graded Lessons from 1916-1965. JBCE commenced in 1966. Source: Personal correspondence with UCA Assembly Archivist, Christine Gordon. 25 October, 2017.

¹⁷³ Rev Dr David Merritt, former Executive Director of JBCE, was also moderator of the Education Working Group of the World Council of Churches.

¹⁷⁴ I worked for JBCE and Uniting Education as National Director of Ministry with Young People from 1991 to 1998.

¹⁷⁵ A scan of curriculum materials across several decades reveals the use of role plays, audio recordings, values clarification exercises, simulation games, critical thinking, creative arts, and a range of group discussion approaches. Resources were varied: books, comics, posters, records, videos, cassettes, magazines, games. The issue here is that the Uniting Church didn't have a "jug to mug" approach to Christian education—an instructional teaching approach that assumes that the learner is an empty vessel merely to be filled by the knowledge or expertise of the teacher.

¹⁷⁶ If anything, Uniting Church curricula were seen as too theologically liberal by some parts of the church.

Anglican and Catholic Churches. JBCE and Uniting Education ran national, ecumenical professional development events featuring exemplary overseas Christian educators.¹⁷⁷ They partnered with synods and presbyteries in key learning events such as “Preaching and Teaching in the Year of Mark,” conducted workshops, consultations and train-the-trainer events across Australia and New Zealand, and maintained bilateral alliances with overseas educators in denominations, universities and publishing houses.

The gradual decline of resource sales over a number of years, along with changes in some key partnerships and limits on Assembly funding, resulted in staff reductions in the 1990s. Uniting Education closed as an Assembly agency in 2005.¹⁷⁸ In parallel with this, from the 1980s Christian education Departments in Synods were gradually amalgamated with or replaced by Mission Departments. Age-level ministries traditionally framed as Christian education were at the same time being reconsidered through the lens of mission. In a perceived dichotomy of “churched culture” and “mission culture,” Christian education, particularly of youth and children, came to be associated by some with a churched paradigm of Christendom.¹⁷⁹ While not particularly scholarly, Kitto’s article reflects some of the rhetoric of this period, whereby Christian education was seen by some church leaders as domesticated enculturation and indoctrination within a community whose primary concern was its membership and survival. While this view can be contested, in my experience it was certainly prevalent. It was less evident where such criticism was directed—at congregations, ministers, synod and presbytery leaders, curriculum, writers, or academics. Whatever the reasons, it can be seen as part of the “missional turn” taking place across the Western church at that time, whereby questions were asked about how the church equipped people for mission at a time when church attendance was declining and the church’s position in society was shifting. Presbytery and Synod staff roles were increasingly defined using the terminology of mission, with their educational dimensions becoming implicit rather than explicit. A

¹⁷⁷ These included C. Ellis Nelson, Maria Harris, John Westerhoff, Thomas Groome and Gabriel Moran.

¹⁷⁸ In 1997, John Emmett replaced David Merritt as Executive Director upon David’s retirement. The UCA Assembly agreed to close JBCE (an incorporated body with denominational partnerships and a Board) in June 1997 and from July that year created Uniting Education as an Assembly agency. Uniting Education exercised leadership as an agency and publisher with John Emmett as Director. John concluded his role at the end of 2004, with Dr Ted Endacott working for the agency until its closure at the end of 2005. Rev Dr Mark Hillis became National Director of Christian education within the Assembly Uniting Faith & Discipleship team, serving from 2006 until the end of 2010. I subsequently served as National Director for Formation, Education and Discipleship from 2014 to mid-2017.

¹⁷⁹ Kitto, Fuzz, “Shifting Paradigms in Youth Ministry,” in *The Church and Youth Ministry*, ed. Ward, Pete (Oxford: Lynx Publications, 1995).

national conference on Mission and Education was initiated by JBCE in the mid-1990s to create dialogue around the relationship between these two areas of theology and ministry.

Two key responses were made to the structural and philosophical erosion of Christian education in the UCA. The first was a national study, *Making Disciples*, conducted by Uniting Education and the Christian Research Association, and the second was formation of an Assembly Task Group on the Teaching Ministry and Mission of the Church, both completed in 2000.¹⁸⁰ The Assembly Task Group offered the following challenge to the church:

The emerging church must be far more intentional about Christian education to equip lay members for new and different roles—and far more accepting of lowered dependence on clergy for the diverse tasks of ministry. "Lifetime" Christians need access to the fruits of modern Biblical studies and theology, and new Christians need induction to the basics of a faith they have encountered but not inherited.

Theology must be oriented to neighbourhood mission, and to discernment and decision-making in the family, workplace and church council. Not all churches will be able (or will choose) to address these changes at the same time, so Loren Mead suggests the identification of those at "learning points" of change or crisis, so that timely opportunities may be grasped for experiment and innovation.¹⁸¹

A compelling vision statement was offered to the Assembly and a number of resolutions were approved (see excerpt, Appendix 1).¹⁸² The Task Group imagined a church of lifelong learning in community, growth in discipleship, articulate faith sharing, effective teaching and equipping for mission.

From the mid-1990's to the early 2000's, JBCE and Uniting Education sponsored repeated efforts to invigorate Christian education in congregations with workbooks by Denham Grierson, David Merritt, John Emmett and myself designed for use in professional development workshops with ministers, lay workers, and congregational lay leaders.¹⁸³ These materials addressed the

¹⁸⁰ Philip Hughes and John Emmett, *Making Disciples: A Survey of Christian Education in UCA Congregations* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 2000). (Task Group on the Teaching Ministry and Mission of the Church: Report to the Ninth Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly, Sydney, 2000). The Ninth Assembly of the Uniting Church received a report and proposals from the Task Group, which consisted of Susan Burt, Philip Creed, Denham Grierson, Margaret Griffiths, John Hooper, Tom Kerr, Kellie Lohrey, Eseta Meneilly, Robin Pryor, Raoul Spackman-Williams, Jill Tabart, and Doug Turnbull. Jennifer Byrnes was also a contributor in the initial stages of the Task Group's work.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p12.

¹⁸² *Minutes of the Assembly* (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, 2000).

¹⁸³ Denham Grierson, Joan Benson and Peter Batten, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: A Congregational Workbook* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1995). *A Comprehensive Approach: Ministry and Mission with*

intentionality of teaching in the life of the church, the role of the minister as educator, the connections between worship, learning and mission, the nature of Christian practices and their relationship to discipleship, and the importance of generational and intergenerational faith development. It is not difficult to see a correlation here between the concerns of Australian educators and their US counterparts.

In 2010, the Assembly Christian Education Reference Committee (CERC) produced a definition to assist the Uniting Church to clarify the nature and purpose of Christian education (see footnote).¹⁸⁴ It is interesting to see the stating of macro and micro perspectives on Christian education, plus goals for both individuals and congregations. The CERC definition was intended to be global and comprehensive yet aimed for more clarity in stating the kinds of faith maturity that Christian education might produce.

The funding of my 2011–2012 research by the Uniting Church's national Assembly was aimed at providing fresh national direction for the educational ministry of congregations. An internal report was presented to the Assembly Standing Committee in March 2013.¹⁸⁵ In relation to this study, the

Children, Young People and Families, ed. Craig Mitchell (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1997). David Merritt, *Helping Your Church Teach* (Melbourne: Uniting Education, 1998). John A Emmett, *The Minister As Educator* (Melbourne: Uniting Education, 2002). John A Emmett, "The Godbearing Life" (Uniting Education, Melbourne, 2002).

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth Nolan and Glenda Blakefield, (Christian Education Reference Committee: Report to 13th Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia, Sydney, 2012).

Christian education involves intentional nurture, teaching and learning individually and in community for lifelong Christian discipleship in local and global contexts.

Priority needs in Christian education for our church:

- i. *Learning to live faithfully as Christian disciples in a multi-cultural and multi-faith world.*
- ii. *Learning how to reflect theologically and act in response to the big issues of the day.*
- iii. *Understanding core Christian beliefs and practices including those central to the Uniting Church.*
- iv. *Recruiting and equipping teachers/leaders to nurture children and young people in the Christian faith.*
- v. *Creating appropriate learning opportunities, particularly for children and young people, to grow in faith.*
- vi. *Assisting leaders to develop inclusive learning communities able to share faith stories, insights and challenges on their Christian journey.*
- vii. *Developing and maintaining a Christian ethos within UCA Schools and Agencies.*
- viii. *Expanding our understanding of the Bible and our capacity to interpret it for our lives.*
- ix. *Developing our capacity to articulate our faith with others.*
- x. *Fostering leadership for fresh expressions of being church.*
- xi. *Helping people discern their gifts and be equipped to offer them in service, leadership or ministry.*
- xii. *Exploring the spiritual dimension of life and ways to enhance our Christian spirituality.*

¹⁸⁵ The report was based on a literature review, initial analysis of field interviews, and stakeholder consultations across Synods and the Assembly. Proposals were submitted and resolutions adopted as national priorities for the Uniting Church.

following decisions by the church's Assembly Standing Committee are relevant to this discussion:

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affirm that the role of the Assembly in Christian Education is to provide for the Uniting Church nationally a cohesive vision of Christian education which sees

- d. promoting Christian education as a distinctive ministry yet also integral to worship, teaching, doctrine, formation, community life and mission;
- e. developing and promoting Christian education and formation as vital, interrelated contributors to growth in discipleship in Christian community;
- f. developing Christian identity within the theology and ethos of the Uniting Church;
- g. developing Christian education and formation for the shaping of Christian identity in our globalised, pluralistic, multi-faith world;
- h. calling the church to ways of learning together that reflect our ethos as a Uniting Church – our commitments to the first peoples, to being a multicultural church, a priesthood of all believers, a multi-generational community of faith, and a community of women and men.

While lifelong faith formation and education remains a priority among UCA synods, there have been substantial changes in focus, resourcing and organisation over the past 20 years. In Victoria and Tasmania, the *Centre for Theology and Ministry* was established in 2007, bringing lay education and theological education together. From 2018, the education and mission functions of the Synod will be joined in a new *Mission and Capacity Building Unit*. In New South Wales, the *Board of Education* and *Board of Mission* were combined into *Uniting Mission and Education* in 2012. From 2017, the Synod of South Australia has joined its ministry education and mission resourcing functions into one unit overseen by a *Mission and Leadership Development Board*. At the time of writing, the Synods of Queensland and Western Australia are both seeking better ways

¹⁸⁶ As a result of the Report, the Assembly established a national Formation, Education and Discipleship (FED) Working Group, and later appointed me as National Director of Formation, Education and Discipleship I was appointed in January 2014 for a five-year term. In mid-2017, due to a restructure of the Assembly's structure and priorities, both the National Director's role and that of the Working Group concluded.

¹⁸⁷ *Minutes of the Assembly Standing Committee, 15-17 March 2013* (Sydney: Uniting Church in Australia, March, 2013).

to link education and missional goals and functions, despite having reduced their staffing in these areas. In each case, it seems that the reasons for change are both strategic, in terms of better collaboration on desired goals, and also driven by declining resources.

Across most UCA synods there has been a renewed interest in intergenerational faith formation and education, a growth in resourcing multicultural leadership (including young adults), an emphasis on equipping adults for lay specified ministries (*Lay Preacher* and *Pastor*), and strategies for reorienting congregational leaders towards “fresh expressions” of mission. I will say some more about synods’ priorities later in relation to discipleship.

The purpose of this brief historical survey is to illustrate a degree of ambivalence towards Christian education within the Uniting Church’s structures and priorities. At both national and synod levels there have been repeated attempts to re-energise or refocus Christian education. Yet the bigger picture of how national, synod, presbytery and congregational faith formation and education align is both more complex and less coherent. Speaking of mainline American churches, Charles Foster says:¹⁸⁸

The old mainline Protestant denominations ... systematically dismantled the institutional structures aligning education in the congregation with the purposes and strategies of education in the denomination. ... Lost in this new market-place of religious education options was a notion of education as a theological practice.

I likewise question whether many congregations and their leaders have a coherent vision, clear goals and effective strategies for transformational, lifelong, faith formation and education.

b. Is the Uniting Church a learning church?

What is known about the kinds of learning that Uniting Church members prefer, or that they say enriches their faith the most? Is there any kind of benchmark against which we might compare the learning characteristics of particular congregations?

In 2000, Uniting Education published the *Making Disciples* research conducted by the Christian Research Association on their behalf. The study consisted of quantitative surveys of church

¹⁸⁸ Foster, *From Generation to Generation* p6f.

members and focus group discussions. UCA members were asked what most influenced their growth in faith. Their top-ranked responses, in order of priority, were:¹⁸⁹

- services of worship
- relationships with church members and ministers
- home, family and friends
- participating in church life
- awareness of God’s Spirit
- being in nature

The lack of mention of formal educational programs or groups is striking.

The 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) asked what activities church attenders had undertaken in the last three years to help with their discipleship or leadership. A range of possible activities were listed.

These included:

- UCA mission/ministry conferences/workshops
- UCA Synod or Presbytery education/training courses
- UCA theological college courses, conferences, workshops or training courses organised by other churches/organisations
- distance learning
- other theological/Bible college courses
- spiritual retreat workshops
- reading Christian books/articles
- other; and
- none of the above.¹⁹⁰

About 33% of respondents said, “none of the above.” 54% said that they read Christian books or articles. After that, the responses were low indeed.¹⁹¹ According to the 2011 NCLS, 16% of UCA members rated small groups for prayer, discussion or Bible study as one of the most valued

¹⁸⁹ Hughes and Emmett, *Making Disciples: A Survey of Christian Education in UCA Congregations*.

¹⁹⁰ Ruth Powell, (2011 NCLS: Discipleship or Leadership Help—Question Summary Profile for Uniting Church in Australia, NCLS Research, Sydney, 2012).

¹⁹¹ About 12% attended UC conferences/workshops, 13% attended conferences/courses led by other churches, and 12% said “other.” Ibid., 2.

aspects of church.¹⁹² Very small percentages of people said that they grew as a result of formal teaching and learning programs.

While the two studies asked differing questions and offered differing response choices, together they suggest a low level of interest by Uniting Church members in formal educational activities and programs, yet a deep appreciation of patterns of church life, significant relationships, the inner life, and Creation, as arenas of formation and growth.

Unfortunately, the 2016 NCLS did not ask comparative questions of church members; however, the same survey, completed by 24,239 people aged 15 and over from 596 Uniting Church congregations, contains some interesting data.¹⁹³

In relation to learning, the following findings are of interest.

- 36% of people have a university degree
- 26% of people have a trade certificate, diploma or associate diploma
- 38% have primary or secondary school education

What do people value most about their church?

- 34% value sermons, preaching or teaching
- 32% value sharing in Holy Communion
- 32% value practical care in times of need
- 32% value traditional style of worship or music
- 16% value small groups: prayer, discussion, Bible study

When asked what they would most like to be given priority in the coming year:

- 36% wanted worship services that are nurturing
- 29% wanted spiritual growth (i.e., direction)
- 29% wanted a sense of community

¹⁹² Ruth Powell, (2011 NCLS Denominational Church Life Profile: Uniting Church, NCLS Research, Sydney, 2013), p6.

¹⁹³ *Church Life Profile for Uniting Church*. Note that the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania did not participate in the survey.

When asked about their gifts and skills:

- 40% named hospitality
- 32% named communication
- 31% named interpersonal
- 26% each named music; education; leadership/management; arts and crafts

In addition, 38% of attenders indicated that they had experienced much growth in faith in the previous 12 months.

The learning profile of the Uniting Church, based on the above data, is as follows:

1. The UCA is diverse in terms of people's levels of education. Regional variation in congregational demographics is evident.
2. UCA members place high value on worship and preaching as a primary source of spiritual growth.
3. UCA members are highly relational, valuing and offering a sense of community.
4. UCA members place limited importance on formal or semi-formal opportunities to be involved in learning beyond the worship service.
5. A significant proportion of UCA members are open to growing spiritually and say that they have experienced this recently.

3.3 Learning Communities

The hallmark of a 'congregation of learners' is a culture of learning, in which learning permeates every aspect of the congregation.¹⁹⁴

A religion is learned by participating in its living vitality. Religion is never the same for every worshipper. Religion becomes real as each person lives and responds in community.¹⁹⁵

Let us turn to the three areas that form the focus of the empirical research within this study, beginning with congregations as learning communities. What is the relationship between the kind of Christian education that occurs and the characteristics of the community in which it takes place? Given that Christian education in the broad sense is seen as communal, how do the culture, beliefs and practices of a faith community determine the purposes and efficacy of lifelong development in faith and discipleship?

a. Congregations as Culture

Since the 1960s, many Christian education theorists have grounded the discipline in notions of Christian community. C. Ellis Nelson brought anthropology and sociology to bear on a theological account of the church as an educative community.¹⁹⁶ He saw communication across generations as foundational for not only the transmission of knowledge but the making of meaning.

Communication included cognition (knowledge, ideas, belief) and experience (faith) and had both personal and corporate dimensions. The basis for his approach was to understand the church through the lens of culture.

Westerhoff, Neville and Willimon explored learning, liturgy and life, seeing religious socialisation as inclusive of, but greater than, education.¹⁹⁷

Religious socialisation is a process consisting of lifelong formal and informal mechanisms, through which persons sustain and transmit their faith (world view, value system) and life-style. This is accomplished through participation in the life of a tradition-bearing community with its rites, rituals, myths, symbols, expressions of beliefs, attitudes and

¹⁹⁴ Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation* 123f.

¹⁹⁵ Seymour, *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* p17.

¹⁹⁶ Nelson, *Where Faith Begins*.

¹⁹⁷ Westerhoff also placed strong emphasis on the ritual, symbolic and narrative life of the people of God as expressed in worship. Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture*. Neville and Westerhoff, *Learning Through Liturgy*. John H Westerhoff and William H Willimon, *Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

values, organisational patterns and activities.¹⁹⁸

Religious education, then, consisted of intentional, systematic and sustained activities within the broader life of a faith community. The church transmits faith through all that it does and says.

Charles Foster and Maria Harris both continued this emphasis, exploring how teaching and learning were located within the context of a worshipping, witnessing congregation. Maria Harris saw the church as having an educational vocation which she described as *formgiving*—to give shape to the ministries of the church by priestly, prophetic and political means.¹⁹⁹ Thus “curriculum is about the mobilising of creative, educative powers in such a way as to fashion a people ... [Curriculum] is an activity, a practice of a people.”²⁰⁰ This is a whole community approach towards education rather than seeing teaching and learning solely as discrete schooling.²⁰¹

Charles Foster proposed that “the congregation is the *context*, and its mission—to praise God and serve neighbours—the *impetus* for Christian religious education.”(emphasis added)²⁰² He saw Christian education happening wherever and whenever the church seeks to “transmit, interpret, and create attitudes, knowledge, skills, habits, sensibilities or perspectives” that embody and express its faith.²⁰³ Like Harris, Foster defined the curriculum for learning as the life of the church itself. He saw the meaning-making that takes place through our participation in the church's ministries as cognitive, affective and kinetic.²⁰⁴

Norma Cook Everist described the congregation as a “community of teachers and learners,” and identified a wide range of ways in which lifelong learning could take place within the communal life of the people of God.²⁰⁵ According to Everist, “learning leads to mission and mission leads to learning” in a spiral that begins with baptism and leads us deeper into Scripture, discipleship and

¹⁹⁸ Westerhoff and Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture* p41.

¹⁹⁹ Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p8.

²⁰¹ Here Harris prefigures the 1990's focus on Christian practices which we will examine in the next section.

²⁰² Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* p13.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p14.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p89. See also Everist: “Curriculum is God and God’s people in this time and place. All else is resource... [Curriculum] is essentially a communal encounter with God and with one another around the Word.” Norma Cook Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p44f.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p21.

theological reflection, taking us into witness, compassion, ministry and leadership beyond the church.²⁰⁶ Her writing addressed a number of the themes that are reflected in learning community theories, yet did not refer explicitly to any such theories.

Part of the apparent crisis of Christian education may be that when Christian education is seen as an integral part of community life, it can lose distinguishing characteristics as well as priority. Thomas Groome questioned socialisation theorists such as Nelson and Westerhoff, suggesting that they endorse the formative power of education while ignoring its critical and transformational role. "They are perceptive in explaining how the whole Christian community educates but are not nearly as clear on how the community can be educated."²⁰⁷ The imperfection of the church in any particular time and place requires that its formative power be wielded tentatively. Critical disciplines and processes, both from the church throughout history and from beyond the church, need to be brought to bear on its educational ministry. For Groome, effective Christian education is in part a critical activity, required to help the church remain faithful to the Kingdom vision. Similarly, Grierson saw the incongruence between a congregation's inner life and its outer life as reflecting the struggle for a congregation's faith to be expressed in its culture.²⁰⁸

Christian education, therefore, may not be seen simply as an integral, formative dimension of all aspects of a congregation's life and mission. Rather, Christian education also includes intentional, critical processes that reform a community's identity by addressing the extent to which Christian living is at odds with received tradition and perceived vision, and in so doing makes possible a re-reading of both. Of course, other authors have focused on the congregation as either the hub or the environment for Christian education and formation.²⁰⁹

If a congregation's life and mission are both the vehicle and, in a sense, the substance of Christian education, in other words, a faith-forming *ecosystem*, what makes it a healthy system? Secondly, what kind of faith are we passing on? How does transformation happen along with formation?

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p257.

²⁰⁷ Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* p126.

²⁰⁸ In a manner not dissimilar to Groome, Grierson proposed three tasks of *naming, interpreting* and *remaking* as necessary for the ongoing re-formation of the people of God. Grierson, *Transforming a People of God*.

²⁰⁹ For example, Debra Dean Murphy, Mary Elizabeth Moore and Iris Cully. Moore speaks of a *traditioning* model of education in Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education*.

b. Communities of Learning, Communities of Practice

Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created.²¹⁰

Since the 1970's, a substantial body of literature has developed concerning learning organisations, social learning systems, and communities of practice. These fields explore the ways in which learning is socially constructed, situated or enhanced, traversing systems theory, social theory, educational theory, anthropology, epistemology, and communication theory, among other areas. They address such questions as how apprentices learn their vocations, how professions develop as learning communities, how societies respond to risk, how individual and social identities are formed and change, and how theory and practice are related to the social context of learning.²¹¹

This complex field can be clustered or viewed in a variety of ways, for example:

- how people learn
- how organisations function
- how culture is transmitted
- what constitutes knowledge
- how practices evolve
- how power is shared

We can apply such theories across groups who learn simply by living together (whether as a family household or a nation state), a group of people with a particular vocation or activity that allows ongoing learning (whether it be medicine, motor mechanics or basketball), and a group that meets

²¹⁰ S Kilpatrick, T Jones and M Barrett, *Defining learning communities* (Hobart: Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, 2003), p11.

²¹¹ See for example: Chris Blackmore, *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, ed. Chris Blackmore (London: Springer, 2010). Noriko Hara and J Mackenzie Owen, *Communities of Practice Fostering Peer-to-Peer Learning and Informal Knowledge Sharing in the Work Place* (Berlin: Springer, 2009). Victoria J Marsick, Jeanne Bitterman and Ruud van der Veen, *From the Learning Organization to Learning Communities Toward a Learning Society* (Columbus OH: College of Education, Ohio State University, 2000). A B Moore and R Brooks, "Learning Communities and Community Development: Describing the Process", *Learning Communities: International Journal of Adult and Vocational Learning* (<http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/journal/Contents.html>, November 2000), <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/20993/20010718-0000/www.crlra.utas.edu.au/journal/articles/iss1/1Moore&B.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2011). Kilpatrick, Jones and Barrett, *Defining Learning Communities*. Peter Kline and Bernard Saunders, *Ten Steps to a Learning Organization* (Salt Lake City: Great River Books, 2010).

specifically to learn about a particular subject or skill (a six-week class introduction to using computer databases). Each of these perspectives can also describe aspects of congregations, with a range of possible connections with Christian education theory and practice.

Given that Christian education in the 20th century drew heavily on developments in the broader field of education, it is surprising that there is little reference in recent Christian education writing to learning communities. Jennifer Byrnes Ed.D thesis, *We Don't Need Another Hero*, explored learning community theory in relation to leadership development in the Uniting Church.²¹² John Littleton's recent work on parishes as learning communities in the Australian context contains an excellent literature review of the field.²¹³ Both Littleton and myself assert that the links between Christian education and learning community theory have been sparse.

c. Guided coaching or self-directing inquiry?

Blackmore sketches the development of thinking about social learning systems from early work by Schön and Bateson on learning systems in the early 1970s to Australian studies of critical social learning systems exploring the ethics of social learning, to communities of practice as outlined by Etienne Wenger and others.²¹⁴ The functioning of a social learning system and its intent, such as being a community of practice, are inter-related but not identical. Learning systems theory may apply to a family, a school, or indeed a nation, as in Schön's work on government as a learning system within a complex, changing world.²¹⁵ Schön examined how people learn on-the-job as reflective practitioners. Practice is formed and reformed. New knowledge is acquired to shape practice. Teaching in this setting often takes the form of coaching.

Alongside this "guided practice" view of learning, Malcolm Knowles' work on self-directed learning for adults drew attention to learners' diverse choices, motivations, readiness to learn, and learning styles.²¹⁶ He further shifted attention from the teacher to the learner, and from the textbook to the student's internal library of experience. These two poles of coaching and self-directed learning

²¹² Jennifer S Byrnes, "We Don't Need Another Hero!" (Ed D Thesis, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1999).

²¹³ John Littleton and I were both postgraduate students at the Adelaide College of Divinity in recent years with a shared interest in congregations as learning communities. Thomas John Harvard Littleton, "Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes" (DMin Thesis, Adelaide College of Divinity, March 2016).

²¹⁴ Blackmore, *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*.

²¹⁵ Donald A Schön, *Beyond the Stable State* (New York: Norton, 1973).

²¹⁶ Malcolm S Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1978).

may seem in tension; however, a good coach works at the learner's pace and discloses new knowledge and skills on a need-to-know basis. Both coach and learner can choose to stretch one another, particularly if there is a positive teaching-learning relationship. The point here is that the agency of the learner and the stance of the teacher are critical aspects of learning communities.

In a learning community, as distinct from a one-to-one learning setting, not only are there multiple teaching-learning relationships, there are also varied learning opportunities. In *Learning Through Community*, a range of Canadian authors examine how informal learning takes place in diverse contexts.²¹⁷ They suggest that "informal learning is both voluntary and involuntary, sometimes both."²¹⁸ Their research interests are quite relevant given the learning profile of the Uniting Church. The authors recognise that formal, informal and non-formal learning are not discrete. People are often engaged in a mixture of kinds of learning at the same time—for example, the impromptu conversation that takes place after a worship service or at the end of a directed Bible study. This indicates liquidity rather than rigidity around learning approaches. Furthermore, adult learning should be empowering, as people acquire new skills, insights and attitudes and discard or build on older ones.

Learning communities have differing reasons for being. A congregation is a voluntary association with some stipended ministry agents and voluntary office bearers. Church attenders fall into a number of categories in terms of membership and participation. Whereas much of the learning community literature is related to vocational settings, faith communities exemplify fluid learning associations of people with affiliated values, beliefs and leisure interests.

d. Senge's Five Disciplines

Learning organisations are "organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together."²¹⁹

Peter Senge's influential work on learning organisations, *The Fifth Discipline*, drew on examples of business organisations needing to reorient themselves in response to both external changes and

²¹⁷ Kathryn Church, *Learning Through Community* (New York: Springer, 2008).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p3.

²¹⁹ Peter M Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p3.

internal systemic problems.²²⁰ Corporate goals—whether profits, profile or personnel-related—were a critical yardstick for success. Senge demonstrated how corporate culture could inhibit positive change by limiting learning. The goal for organisations was to become self-renewing communities of inquiry and experimentation, where every member's contribution and capacity was valued and enhanced.

Senge's five disciplines—*personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking*—illuminated the systemic nature of collaborative learning. It did not escape the attention of church leaders that he described the required change of mindset as a *metanoia*—the Greek New Testament term rendered as repentance or conversion.²²¹ Senge's influence through further writing and teaching has been widespread.²²² Hawkins and Campbell each applied Senge's work to congregations.²²³ Hawkins sees learning takes place at individual, team and congregational levels as the church system adapts to a changing world.²²⁴ The agenda for learning is the life of discipleship, where meaning-making arises from experience. Hawkins envisions a church where pastors build action-reflection learning into many aspects of the congregation's life, training lay leaders in such processes. Campbell's application is on facilitating systemic change in congregations rather than directly towards individual or group growth. In each instance, these authors deal with the nature of the congregation as a system that fosters learning. They give less attention to the manner in which Christian identity, both personal and corporate, is formed.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., p13.

²²² Peter M Senge, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: strategies and tools for building a learning organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). Peter M Senge, *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 1999). Peter M Senge, *Schools That Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education* (New York: Doubleday, 2000). Peter M Senge, *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

²²³ Thomas Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). Dennis Gail Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities: Tools for Shaping Your Future* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2000).

²²⁴ Littleton adds a fourth learning circle, *general society*: learning which takes place beyond the confines of the congregation. The emphasis here is on the relational settings in which learning takes place. Littleton, John, "A Learning Community Focus for Christian Education", *Religious Education* 103, no. 5 (2008): p568-576.

A learning congregation facilitates the development of new abilities of its clergy and laity so as to continuously improve its capacity to address ever-increasing demands for the sake of religious claims and commitments.²²⁵

In *How Your Congregation Learns*, Tim Shapiro draws on Senge to frame learning as developmental, resulting in increased skills, proficiencies or capacities—namely, behavioural change. He suggests that "the central and most important behaviour is *the congregation's ability to learn from an outside resource plus its own creativity*."²²⁶ Shapiro reflects my own thinking that a healthy learning community is an open system, not a closed system.²²⁷

e. Wenger's Situated Learning

In parallel with Senge, Lave and Wenger developed their theories about learning as processes of participation in *communities of practice*.²²⁸ They see learning defined by being situated in particular communities of practice; hence, learning is contextually relational. This social theory of learning explores the dynamics between *community* (learning as belonging), *identity* (learning as becoming), *meaning* (learning as experience) and *practice* (learning as doing).²²⁹ Social participation in the practices of a community aids in the construction of one's identity in relation to the community. Wenger seeks to emphasise and analyse the ways in which a community's "routines, rituals, artefacts, symbols, conventions, stories and histories" work socially towards the community's goals or purposes.²³⁰ Broadly speaking, this helps workplaces and institutions to see how they function as cultures—settings where formal instruction may be less significant than (or even at odds with) the community's relationships, habits and norms.

David Csinos' article on Jesus' approach to education as apprenticeship seeks to apply Wenger's work to faith development.²³¹ Recognising that apprenticeship was a common vocational learning

²²⁵ Tim Shapiro, *How Your Congregation Learns: The Learning Journey from Challenge to Achievement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), Location 121 of 3347.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, Location 358 of 3347.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, Location 850 of 3347.

²²⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²²⁹ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p4.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p6.

²³¹ David M Csinos, "Come Follow Me: Apprenticeship in Jesus' Approach to Education", *Religious Education* 105, no. 1: p45-62.

approach in Jesus' time, Csinos suggests that situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation were evident in Jesus' apprenticing of his followers. The relevance of Wenger's work is in his focus on practices as core aspects of a community's life. To what extent does the intentional shaping of a congregation's learning around the habits of discipleship enhance both individual and corporate faith development?

f. Learning to Learn Better

The work of Bawden and the Hawkesbury Group regarding critical learning systems may be seen partly as a parallel to Thomas Groome's emphasis on Christian education bringing a critique to a community's traditions.²³² From the arena of community development, the Hawkesbury educators sought to develop groups who were able to learn about learning itself, thus critiquing the ways in which their beliefs and behaviours had been formed, and allowing the possibility of transformed worldviews and changed learning practices.

In the terms of our critical learning system approach then, we need to facilitate the transformation of communities into learning systems which are sufficiently self-referential that they will be able to learn about their own learning.²³³

This approach echoes Senge's understanding of the learning organisation. The question raised by Bawden's work is the extent to which it is important that a congregation is able to consciously attend to its own learning in order to be more effective in forming disciples.

Isa Aron's analysis of Jewish congregations in the US describes a growth from being a *congregation of learners* to becoming a *learning congregation*.²³⁴ The first step is to cultivate people's desire for learning as a lifelong pursuit. Beyond this, communities may become "*learning congregations* that practice shared leadership and have incorporated deliberation, reflection and ongoing assessment into all of their activities."²³⁵ Drawing on Senge, she speaks of a learning congregation as a self-renewing body engaged in reflexive and cyclical action-reflection and renewal.²³⁶ The insight here

²³² Blackmore, *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*.

²³³ Richard Bawden, "The Community Challenge: The Learning Response," in *Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice*, ed. Chris Blackmore (London: Springer London, 2010), p43.

²³⁴ Isa Aron, *Becoming a Congregation of Learners: Learning As a Key to Revitalizing Congregational Life*, Revitalizing congregational life (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Pub., 2000).

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p1.

²³⁶ Isa Aron, *The Self-renewing Congregation: Organizational Strategies for Revitalizing Congregational Life* (Woodstock Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002), p9.

is to envisage organisations as being on an evolving learning journey with regard to the value, nature and purpose of education.

When it comes to learning community theories, Littleton suggests that there have been three relevant strands in Christian education in recent decades:²³⁷

- The formative influence of parish life on faith education
- A community of faith model
- The parish as a learning community

While, in my view, the distinctions are perhaps not as discrete as Littleton suggests, his schema is helpful and is reflective of Aron's description of different modes of learning-in-community. Though Christian educators have had a strong and varied focus on the community of faith, more recent notions of learning communities from the broader field of education have had relatively little influence. Along with Littleton, my aim is to help remedy this. Hence this is one of the three key areas of inquiry in my study.

3.4 Leadership and Learning

Leadership is the second focus area of my empirical study and a corollary to the focus on learning communities. In *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, Richard Osmer engages in an empirical study of three congregations through four frames: *practices, curriculum, leadership* and *pilgrimage*.²³⁸ He sees such congregational leadership as “the ways a congregation is a learning organization that faces adaptive challenges with the potential of altering both its internal life and its relationship to the surrounding social context”: educational leadership has a transformative role.²³⁹ A critical question for congregations is what kind of educational leadership they offer.

a. Who leads Christian education?

In 1976, Dorothy Jean Furnish published a history of the profession of the Director of Religious Education and Director of Christian Education in the US, with a particular focus on the United

²³⁷ Littleton, "Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes", p20ff.

²³⁸ Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p62, 157.

Methodist Church.²⁴⁰ Furnish's study looked back to 1906 when the profession was seen to have been born.²⁴¹ Until the present day, US seminaries have educated Christian education professionals who have primarily served in large membership, multi-staff churches and schools. This history is without parallel in Australian congregations, where those with graduate qualifications in Christian education served the UCA and its parent denominations mainly in regional roles (Synod, Conference, Presbytery, District, Assembly) or as teachers in theological colleges. The main exceptions to this were congregations' workers with children and young people, who in some synods received diploma-level training (although some studied Bachelor's degrees) in the field. This trend peaked in the 1980s.

In the UCA's traditions, Christian education across all ages has been conducted mainly by volunteers. Professional Christian educators equipped volunteer leaders through a range of centralised and regional schemes, and also provided pre-service and in-service preparation in Christian education for ordained ministers. These training programs were at times extensive and systematic, as indicated in the South Australian history of lay education, *By Word and Deed*.²⁴² However, Christian education professionals, few and far between, were one step removed from most congregations' lives. Ordained ministers usually received no more than one semester unit of Christian education as part of their pre-service education. The availability of in-service learning was sporadic, often related to the occasional release of new curricula. I suggest that there was a critical gap between the wisdom of Christian education theorists/professionals and congregational understandings and capacities. A question for today is about how Christian education capacities are being built among congregational leaders.

b. From Ministers to Leaders

In the academy and in the western church, critical questions have been raised about the nature of ministry as leadership over the last few decades. Alongside a swathe of publishing in the public sphere (Tom Peters, Margaret Wheatley, John Maxwell, Sharon Parks, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge

²⁴⁰ Dorothy Jean Furnish, *DRE/DCE—the History of a Profession* (Nashville: United Methodist Church, 1976).

²⁴¹ The United Methodist Christian Educators' Fellowship (CEF) professional network has since become the Christian Engaged in Faith Formation (CEFF) network, inclusive of volunteer leaders. "Christians Engaged in Faith Formation." <https://cefumc.org> (accessed November 10, 2017).

²⁴² David Houston *and others*, *By Word and Deed* (Unley: MediaCom Education, 2017).

and others), there is a burgeoning field of Christian leadership studies (Kennon Callahan, Tom Bandy, Len Sweet, Craig Van Gelder, Bill Hybels, Alan Roxburgh, Nancy Beach and many others).²⁴³

Several US initiatives, including works funded by the Carnegie Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, Auburn Seminary, and Duke Divinity School's *Faith and Leadership*, have been influential in the re-thinking of seminary education for ordained ministers.²⁴⁴ These sponsors ask what the church requires of its ministry leaders—their knowledge, character, skills and spiritual practices. The overarching theme of Foster et al.'s work is the forming of pastoral, priestly imagination through pedagogies of interpretation, formation, contextualisation and performance. Duke's initiative is aimed squarely at missional ministry practice. Ministerial imagination and missional practice sound like a worthy combination.

The Australian parallel to these studies is *Transforming Theology*, the national study of theological education undertaken by the Council of Deans in Theology.²⁴⁵ While the research focused primarily on pedagogy, it identified that congregation-based ministerial vocation was of interest to a minority of theological students. Nevertheless, there was a stated desire for education that was not only informative but also transformative for students.

Within the Uniting Church, the shift has been marked by changing emphases among theological colleges (priorities, faculty, curricula) and synods (priorities, staff roles), as well as with strategies and events such as *Uniting Leaders*.²⁴⁶ There are multiple reasons for the change of language and focus, some of which are outlined by Andrew Dutney in *A Genuinely Educated Ministry*.²⁴⁷ Some of the key themes are an increased focus on ministry competencies, a "missional turn" in leadership, exploration of ministers as pioneers and entrepreneurs, and an emphasis on reflective practice.

²⁴³ The formation of the Academy of Religious Leadership in the US is also worth noting. "Academy of Religious Leadership." <https://arl-jrl.org> (accessed November 9, 2017).

²⁴⁴ Charles R Foster, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006). "Theological Schools" <http://auburnseminary.org/theological-schools/> (accessed November 9, 2017). "Faith and Leadership" <https://www.faithandleadership.com> (accessed November 9, 2017). Bass and Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*.

²⁴⁵ L J J Ball, *Transforming Theology: Student Experience and Transformative Learning in Undergraduate Theological Education* (Preston: Mosaic Press, 2012).

²⁴⁶ "Uniting Leaders" <http://www.unitingleaders.com.au> (accessed November 9, 2017).

²⁴⁷ Andrew Dutney, *A Genuinely Educated Ministry: Three Studies on Theological Education in the Uniting Church in Australia* (Sydney: United Church Press, 2007).

What is the leadership role of the ordained minister as Teacher within the *didache* of the church? Is the ministry of teaching different from educational leadership? The roots of this run deeply in church history, including the Reformation and post-Reformation, and in more recent Christian education theories. After a comprehensive historical analysis, Osmer strongly affirms the ministry of teaching, and reframes it as doing practical theology.²⁴⁸ Thus the role of teacher is to lead or guide processes of theological reflection. Will Willimon sees the minister as teacher more in rabbinic than therapeutic terms—equipping the saints, albeit with a pastoral focus.²⁴⁹ In terms of the possible scope of educational roles and strategies, the above views are rather narrow. Rowell, Lines and Emmett each identify different typologies of teacher/ educator.²⁵⁰ We will return to these in Chapter 7. There is more than one way to view the minister’s educational role, related to but distinct from educational tasks.

In 2002, John Emmett and David Beckett produced a Uniting Church resource outlining educational competencies for ordained ministers.²⁵¹ They suggested that ministers needed to provide visionary leadership and in so doing be agents of the tradition, the gospel story, and also to “act as a type of mirror” to the faith community’s own story.²⁵² Emmett and Beckett developed a set of benchmarks for educational leaders that could be applied as educational competencies for ministry, including aspects of planning, presenting, engaging, assessing, evaluating and enabling educational activities.²⁵³

With the emerging focus on reflective leadership practice, it is reasonable to ask what a traditional view of “minister as teacher” looks like in terms of role and competencies. Teaching is more than preaching. The church values and thus equips ministers to know its faith and traditions. However, to what extent are ministers expected to be competent educators *beyond* the worship arena? The

²⁴⁸ Richard Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990).

²⁴⁹ William H Willimon, "Pastors as Teachers," in *Rethinking Christian Education: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. David Schuller (St Louis: Chalice Press, 1993).

²⁵⁰ Timothy Arthur Lines, *Functional Images of the Religious Educator* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1992). J Cy Rowell, "Empowering Images of the Minister as Teacher", *Religious Education* 95, no. 1 (2000): p64-78. Emmett, *The Minister as Educator*.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p19.

²⁵³ The Uniting Church’s Ministerial Education Commission adapted these educational competencies for the Lay Ministry of Pastor in 2009. See Appendix 3 "Pastor Competencies - Education", *Ministry of Pastor - General Competencies* (Ministerial Education Commission, Uniting Church in Australia, 2009).

above studies, albeit quite diverse, suggest that there is a pastoral and interpretive nexus in teaching, a visionary and imaginative role which is both theological and practical, and a suite of skills related to planning and leading educational programs. This research project will provide some evidence of how ministers see their role as face-to-face teachers or educators.

c. From Teacher to Principal

The view of ministry as leadership has been accompanied by insights regarding organisational systems: systems theory also seeks to understand the culture of an organisation. What is the role of the minister and church council in overseeing the congregation as a learning system? A simple analogy is to compare a minister to a school principal rather than a classroom teacher, providing oversight of the whole learning ecosystem and ensuring that each part is well-led, well-resourced and exists as a healthy environment for growth.

In the late 1980s, the Centre for Parish Development in Chicago (CPD) was one of the pioneers of a systems approach to church development.²⁵⁴ CPD was concerned not only with systems theory, but also with regaining solid biblical and theological bases for belief and for mission.²⁵⁵ During the 1990s, the Alban Institute developed resources to equip clergy for systemic church leadership, with one focus on church transformation and another on equipping lay leadership.²⁵⁶ A more recent focus for organisational leadership has been on systemic and cultural change for the sake of mission.²⁵⁷

Osmer placed teaching, the doing of practical theology, within a Pauline framework of *catechesis*, *exhortation* and *discernment*, providing purpose to the theological task.²⁵⁸ Grierson identified five educational paradigms or patterns within the teaching ministry of the church—*sacramental*,

²⁵⁴ Paul Dietterich and Inagrace Dietterich, *A Systems Model of the Church in Ministry and Mission* (Chicago: Center for Parish Development, 1994). <https://missionalchurch.org> (accessed November 10, 2017).

²⁵⁵ Inagrace Dietterich, *The Biblical Mission of the Church* (Chicago: Center for Parish Development, 1994). Inagrace Dietterich, *We Believe: Shaping and Sharing Christian Belief* (Chicago: Center for Parish Development, 1994).

²⁵⁶ See for example: Peter L Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2006). R Paul Stevens, *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership* (Washington): Alban Institute, 1993).

²⁵⁷ Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006). Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006). Anthony B Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities* (Pawley's Island SC: 3DM, 2013).

²⁵⁸ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*.

*doctrinal, developmental, pastoral-administrative and missional.*²⁵⁹ His aim was to help congregational leaders see the breadth of educational opportunity in the life and witness of a congregation and plan to resource these accordingly. Drawing on Foster's *Equipping Congregations*, David Merritt's approach was to invite congregations to build education around special events (biblical narratives and church history), special times (seasons of the church year), special community occasions (sacraments, weddings, funerals), unexpected events (crises) and ordinary events (daily decisions, attitudes, values).²⁶⁰ John Emmett oriented congregational education around Christian practices, using Dean and Foster's cluster of practices as described in *The Godbearing Life*.²⁶¹

Each of these provided an intentional, systemic way to view and organise Christian education within a faith community; an overall schema to span the breadth of congregational life and integrate learning, expressions of faith and daily living. These approaches attend to aims, scope, organisation, program leadership, resources and evaluation. The emphasis is more about how Christian education permeates the life of a congregation than on organisational dynamics such as power, conflict, decision-making or empowerment.

When we examine the leadership approaches in congregations, what evidence is there of a systemic approach to formation and education? What do ministry leaders say about their roles and tasks within the learning life of the congregation and its mission? This section has outlined some of the reasons why an exploration of a congregation as a learning community needs to give attention to educational leadership in both personal and systemic terms.

²⁵⁹ Grierson, Benson and Batten, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church: A Congregational Workbook*.

²⁶⁰ Merritt, *Helping Your Church Teach*. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education*.

²⁶¹ Emmett, "The Godbearing Life". Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998).

3.5 Discipleship and Mission

For the disciples who went to school with the Rabbi Jesus, graduation would mean apostolate. And apostolate, initiated by the twelve who are the core of the people of God sent into the world, was equipped and commissioned to form witnessing communities.²⁶²

The third lens in my study concerns the purposes of Christian education, particularly as they relate to discipleship and mission. Christian education involves not simply learning about faith or religion in general but must include growing in faith and living in faith. While religious education might study various traditions and beliefs, through Christian education and formation the church has seen itself as nurturing followers of Jesus Christ in faith and obedience to God.

a. Shifts in the Uniting Church

A notable trend in the UCA in recent years is an increased use of the terms *discipleship* and *mission*. Discipleship features prominently in the current strategic plans of a number of UCA Synods (Queensland, SA, NSW & ACT, Victoria & Tasmania) and the national Assembly.²⁶³ As part of its 2017–2020 strategic direction to “live out a joyful faith,” the UCA Assembly seeks to “encourage and resource deeper discipleship of UCA members, equipping them to participate in God’s mission.” Within one of four key directions, the South Australian Synod’s aim is to “foster life-long Christian discipleship marked by spiritual vitality, through radical practices, deeper biblical understandings, and sacrificial faith.” The Queensland Synod names discipleship as one of five priority directions, without describing what this might mean. The discipleship objective of the NSW & ACT Synod is to “encourage, call and equip people to live and share their Christian faith in creative, sustainable and courageous ways.” The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has “foster faith, deepen discipleship” as one of its nine Vision and Mission Principles.

²⁶² Guder, “Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom”, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (2007): p251.

²⁶³ “Strategic Plan 2017-2020”, <https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/about/strategicplan> (accessed November 14, 2017). “Strategic Plan 2014-2018”, <http://sa.uca.org.au/strategic-plan/> (accessed November 14, 2017). “Priority Directions 2020” (Synod of Queensland, 2016), <https://ucaqld.com.au/about-us/priority-directions/> (accessed November 14, 2017). *Synod Mission Plan 2015-2017* (Synod of NSW and ACT, 2015). “Vision and Mission Principles” (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, 2017), <https://www.victas.uca.org.au/aboutus/Documents/VISION%20AND%20MISSION%20PRINCIPLES/Vision%20and%20Mission%20Principles%20and%20Statements%20of%20Intent.pdf> (accessed November 14, 2017).

The reasons for the church's retrieval of discipleship, what might be seen to be a rather traditional or conservative term compared to Christian lifestyle or spirituality, are no doubt varied. My reading of these priorities suggests that there may be several concerns at play:

1. the outcomes of faith development as more than the fostering of institutional membership;
2. the nature and distinctiveness of Christian identity in a pluralistic world;
3. nurturing faith across all generations;
4. developing faith that is actively shared in word and deed in public life.

We need a whole new vision and approach to religious education if Christian faith is to flourish in our time and culture ... an approach that is contemporary, natural, holistic and flexible ... it takes seriously our present sociocultural situation, ... it reflects the process that goes on in our heads and hearts whenever we learn the stuff of life..., it engages people's heads, hearts and hands, ... a life to Faith to life approach.²⁶⁴

Among other things, formation and education are oriented towards faith maturity defined in relation to contemporary understandings of discipleship. Such growth can be seen as lifelong, grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and directed towards abundant life in the Spirit and the service of God in the world. For Christian educators, discipleship is a whole-of-life state involving cognition, affection and volition, which Groome sees as cohering in *conation* (wisdom) for being and becoming Christian.²⁶⁵ Discipleship is not simply about doctrine or spirituality as such, but about the whole person and all aspects of life. Discipleship is also seen as a communal calling and task, with individual growth in faith and service interdependent with the life of Christian communities.

I noted Uniting Church's increased focus on mission in Section 3.2. From the 1980s, a shifting understanding of mission, the so-called *missional turn*, was reflected in the changing titles and

²⁶⁴ Groome, *Will There Be Faith?: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples* p4.

²⁶⁵ Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*.

roles of synod mission departments, synod and presbytery mission staff, and revised curriculum and faculty roles in theological colleges.²⁶⁶

By adding the suffix "al" to the word "mission," we hoped to foster an understanding of the church as fundamentally and comprehensively defined by its calling and sending, its purpose to serve God's healing purposes for all the world as God's witnessing people to all the world.²⁶⁷

This shift, described in detail by Bosch, Bevans and Schroeder, Kim, Guder and others, reflected 20th century developments in the Western church and in the broader ecumenical movement emphasising the *missio Dei*.²⁶⁸

In the new image, mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. ... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission.²⁶⁹

For the Uniting Church, as with other mainline churches, the new paradigm involved seeing mission as local, not just overseas, and seeing the congregation as a primary agent of God's mission in the world. As Loren Mead says, "We are returning to one of the features of the Apostolic Age. We now assume that the front door of the church is a door into mission."²⁷⁰ Loren Mead's work was used extensively by synod consultants in education and mission during the 1990s. The aforementioned departmental shift across the Uniting Church incorporated a gradual change from resourcing congregational Christian education programs to consulting with congregations regarding their mission goals and strategies.²⁷¹ Across the Uniting Church, there was not a common language connecting discipleship and mission. My observation is that the language

²⁶⁶ For example, *Mission and Parish Services* (Queensland), *Board of Mission* (NSW-ACT), *Mission Resourcing Network* (SA), *Commission for Mission* (Victoria and Tasmania).

²⁶⁷ "We were obviously engaging in a polemic endeavour. We were critiquing theologies of the church that neglect the church's essentially missionary nature. We were critiquing reductions of mission to one of several clusters of activities that are proper to the church; worship, fellowship, service, and, in some cases, mission." Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom", p252.

²⁶⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology series; no. 30 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004). Kirsteen Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* (London: Epworth Press, 2009). Darrell L Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology", *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (2003): p36-54.

²⁶⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* p400.

²⁷⁰ Loren B Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1991), p25.

²⁷¹ From the 1980s onward, Synods and Assembly produced Mission Planning Guides for congregations. Presbytery and synod staff conducted congregational mission planning exercises. The national Assembly adopted a fresh focus on evangelism.

of discipleship was more individual and the language of mission more corporate in nature. Christians lived as disciples; the Church engaged in mission. In the three- or four-decade-long shift in missional focus, the Uniting Church was looking for a fresh perspective and ways of thinking and speaking about how personal faith and Christian living was bound up with the church's call to mission.

b. Christian Education and Missiology

In 2011, I examined the journal *Religious Education* for the period 2002–2012 and summarised the following themes in its articles.²⁷²

The nature of Religious Education

Understanding the ways in which different religious traditions see the nature of religious education

Theology as Religious Education

The religious nature of human experience

Learning in the presence of the Other

Faith development theory

Aspects of Teaching and Learning

Neuroscience and Religious Education

Religious meaning in stories, novels and film

Teaching

Narrative and Religious Education

Contextual learning

Religious Education and civil society

Social Justice, Liberation and Human Rights

Religious education in the public arena

²⁷² *Religious Education*.

Religious education in a globally connected, multicultural, pluralistic world

Education and Peacemaking

Religious Education and particular groups, generations

Ministry with young people

Children's faith formation—spirituality, place of family, children and the Bible, concepts of God, schooling

Religious Education and culture

Christian education through intercultural encounters

Christian education and Culture

Religious Education and schooling in various contexts, cultures and faith traditions

Research in Religious Education

It seemed that religious educators' sense of the mission of the church concerned:

- Social justice, human rights, peace-making
- Religious contributions to public life
- Faith education for younger generations
- The place of religious education within public education and contemporary culture

Some of these themes have been evident in the work of Christian educators cited in this study. However, the scope of these topics also raises questions in relation to the mission critique of Christian education. Have Christian education theorists and practitioners been sufficiently concerned with the missional identity and impetus of congregations? Further, is there a lack of dialogue between Christian education theorists and missiologists?

While there is some overlap between the above list of journal themes and the interests of local churches, I question the extent to which recent published research in Christian education derives from strong empirical links with congregational mission. For example, two areas of omissions in

the Religious Education Journal are a concern for equipping congregational members for evangelism, and for community development as mission.

These questions are both academic and practical. The first relates to how well the educational resourcing of congregations equips them for local mission. Such resourcing might include curriculum but would also be about the focus of formation and education within the congregation's life. The second question is whether leaders in mission are drawing on contemporary Christian education theory in developing leaders for mission, equipping people to use their gifts, and discipling new Christians.

To further this line of inquiry, I undertook some recent searches of prominent journals in Christian education, seeking evidence of mission and missiology.

Religious Education Journal

A search on the term "missiology" in the US journal *Religion Education* from 1906 to 2017 yielded 12 results, including 9 journal articles.²⁷³ Three articles referenced cross-cultural insights in relation to violence, liberation theology and family ministry.²⁷⁴ Three articles consisted of references to other research or organisations.²⁷⁵ Two articles from 1966 consisted of responses to the theology of Harvey Cox from a Symposium on Religious Education in the Secular City.²⁷⁶ In a 2011 study of the teaching of religious education by 24 academics in graduate schools in the US, Tran identified missiology as one of a broad range of theological themes intersecting with religious education.²⁷⁷ However, there was no sustained description or analysis of this.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Mai-Anh Le Tran, "To Set One's Heart in a Violent World", *Religious Education* 110, no. 4 (2015): p358-373. Fernando A Cascante-Gómez, "Latin American Theology and Religious Pluralism: A Latin American Voice", *Religious Education* 104, no. 5 (2009): p556-563. June McConnell and Taylor McConnell, "Family Ministry Through Cross-cultural Education", *Religious Education* 76, no. 3 (1981): p271-279.

²⁷⁵ William B Kennedy, "Education for Liberation and Community", *Religious Education* 70, no. 1 (1975): p5-44. David Steward, "Abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations in Religious Education, 1981-82", *Religious Education* 78, no. 3 (1983): p413. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/1296937068?accountid=10910>. Wilfrid H Paradis, "A Precedent Making Project in the Catholic Church: The Preparation of A National Catechetical Directory", *Religious Education* 70, no. 3 (1975): p235-249.

²⁷⁶ Vol 61. 1966. Issue 2.

²⁷⁷ Mai-Anh Le Tran, "Diferente Desde Aquí: Twenty-Four Ways of Looking at Religious Education", *Religious Education* 106, no. 2 (2011): p147-161.

Not surprisingly, the term “mission” yields considerably more results—2,228. Confining the search to 2008–2017 yields 166 results covering a broad range of topics including:

- Religious education and Christian conversion
- The mission of the Religious Education Association
- The mission of colleges and universities and their teachers
- Mission as colonialism by both state and church
- Mission as an overseas missionary endeavour, including education
- Mission as a broad religious term for God’s purposes
- Mission as a general term for the purpose of the church (including its educational mission)
- Mission as personal purpose in life

An in-depth analysis of this many results (which include editorials and book reviews) would be a complex exercise. The list above illustrates that the word “mission” is used to mean quite a range of things beyond the particularity of the local congregation. For my purposes we will focus on further references to “missiology.”

British Journal of Religious Education

A search of the British Journal of Religious Education from 1997 to 2017 indicated two articles mentioning “missiology,” both regarding the study of religion in schools.²⁷⁸

Christian Education Journal

The evangelical US journal Christian Education yielded 17 results for “missiology” from 1999 to 2017. The main focus of these articles is on Christian education in cross-cultural and overseas missionary contexts, as well as on youth ministry as mission. Dale Lemke provides advice for educational institutions wishing to draw on the insights of missiology and intercultural studies.²⁷⁹ In charting developments in late 20th century evangelical Christian education, Lawson notes the high priority given to evangelism.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ *British Journal of Religious Education* <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cbre20> (accessed August 15, 2017).

²⁷⁹ Dale L Lemke, "Creating Strategic Partnerships: A Guide for Educational Institutions and Their Partners", *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): p486-490.

²⁸⁰ Kevin E Lawson, "Evangelical Christian Education in the Later 20th Century: Growing Influence and Specialization", *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 2 (2004): p7-14. <https://search-proquest->

While searching on “mission” here also reveals a much larger and broader range of references, my cursory analysis indicated that such references were about the purposes and practices of schools and universities, with the occasional general comment about the mission of the church.

References to Missiologists

I also searched across the journals for any reference to key authors in the field of mission for the same period—Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, Kirsteen Kim, Orlando Costas, Darrell Guder, Wilbert Shenk and Stephen Bevans.²⁸¹ I further searched on any reference to additional authors from *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*.²⁸² Bosch, Costas, Shenk and Newbigin were already included above. Karl Barth was omitted as the results would have been quite diverse.

See the Table following for the results.

com.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/docview/205440566?accountid=10910. Kevin E Lawson, "Marginalization and Renewal: Evangelical Christian Education in the Twentieth Century", *Religious Education* 98, no. 4 (2003): p437-453.

²⁸¹ Search undertaken 14/12/17. I recognise the gender bias of this sample, which partly reflects my own knowledge of missiology.

²⁸² Robert L Gallagher and Paul Hertig, *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009).

Table 3:References to Missiologists

Author	Religious Education Journal (US) (1906–2017)	British Journal of Religious Education (1978–2017)	Christian Education Journal (US) (1999–2017)
Lesslie Newbigin	4 articles 7 book reviews 1 editorial	6 articles (1 by Newbigin) 6 book reviews 3 editorials	1 article 1 book review
David Bosch	No matches	No matches	2 articles
Kirsteen Kim	No matches	No matches	No matches
Orlando Costas	2 articles 1 book review	No matches	3 articles (1 by Costas)
Darrell Guder	No matches	No matches	1 article
Wilbert Shenk	No matches	No matches	No matches
Stephen Bevans	2 articles	1 article	1 book review
Dana L. Robert	2 articles 4 book reviews	No matches	No matches
Robert Schreiter	4 articles 2 book reviews 1 essay review	No matches	1 article
René Padilla	No matches	No matches	1 article
Kwame Bediako	2 articles	No matches	No matches
Andrew F. Walls	No matches	4 articles 2 book reviews	1 article 1 book review 1 editorial
Paul Hiebert	No matches	No matches	5 articles 1 editorial
Charles Van Engen	No matches	No matches	No matches
Daisy Machado	No matches	No matches	No matches
Peter Phan	3 articles	1 article	No matches
J. Samuel Escobar	No matches	No matches	No matches

My suggestion here is not that Christian education theorists have no interest in the mission of God. Rather, it is firstly that Christian education theorists appear to not have been in solid

dialogue with missiologists in recent years. I suspect that the reverse is also true.²⁸³ A mapping of the recent foci of missiologists in relation to Christian education could serve to highlight this further. The marked exception to this gap is the study of how religion is transmitted by educational and mission organisations in non-Western countries and cultures. It is also not the case that Christian educators in general are disinterested in the contextualisation of Christian faith; quite the opposite. This is partly why the lack of reference to noted missiologists is surprising.

The aspect which concerns this study is the extent to which Christian educators have examined how to help congregations learn for and from their (local) mission. Along with John Littleton's assessment regarding learning communities, I see little evidence of empirical studies of educational practice in congregations with a mission focus. Together, these two factors, if accurate, would indicate a gap between the concerns of theorists and the needs of congregations.

3.6 Schema—Congregational Praxis

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a theoretical framework for the empirical study, including a survey of relevant literature in relation to the research question, *How are churches reframing Christian education in order to be effective in growing faith and engaging in mission in Australian society in the 21st century?*

We began by considering the emphases of Christian education in the Western church in recent decades. I suggested that these included foci regarding Christian practices, discipleship, the learning culture or climate of a faith community, the church as an interpretive community, the importance of intentional teaching, and the connection between faith formation/education and the *missio Dei*.

Then I provided an overview of Christian education in the Uniting Church in Australia, describing the institutional decline of Christian education and the repeated responses to refocus or redefine the church's priorities. The fusion of mission and education within church structures and roles was

²⁸³ Wendi Sargeant has noted the lack of reference to Christian education in "emerging church" literature. Wendi Sargeant, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015). See also Chapter 17 of Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012).

noted. I also drew upon social research to indicate some characteristics of Uniting Church members as learners.

Together, these two sections name facets of Christian education worthy of further attention in the study, and also shed light on some potential difficulties for Christian education.

Sections 3 to 5 provided a basis for the areas of enquiry that comprise the empirical study, grounding them in both theoretical and practical concerns:

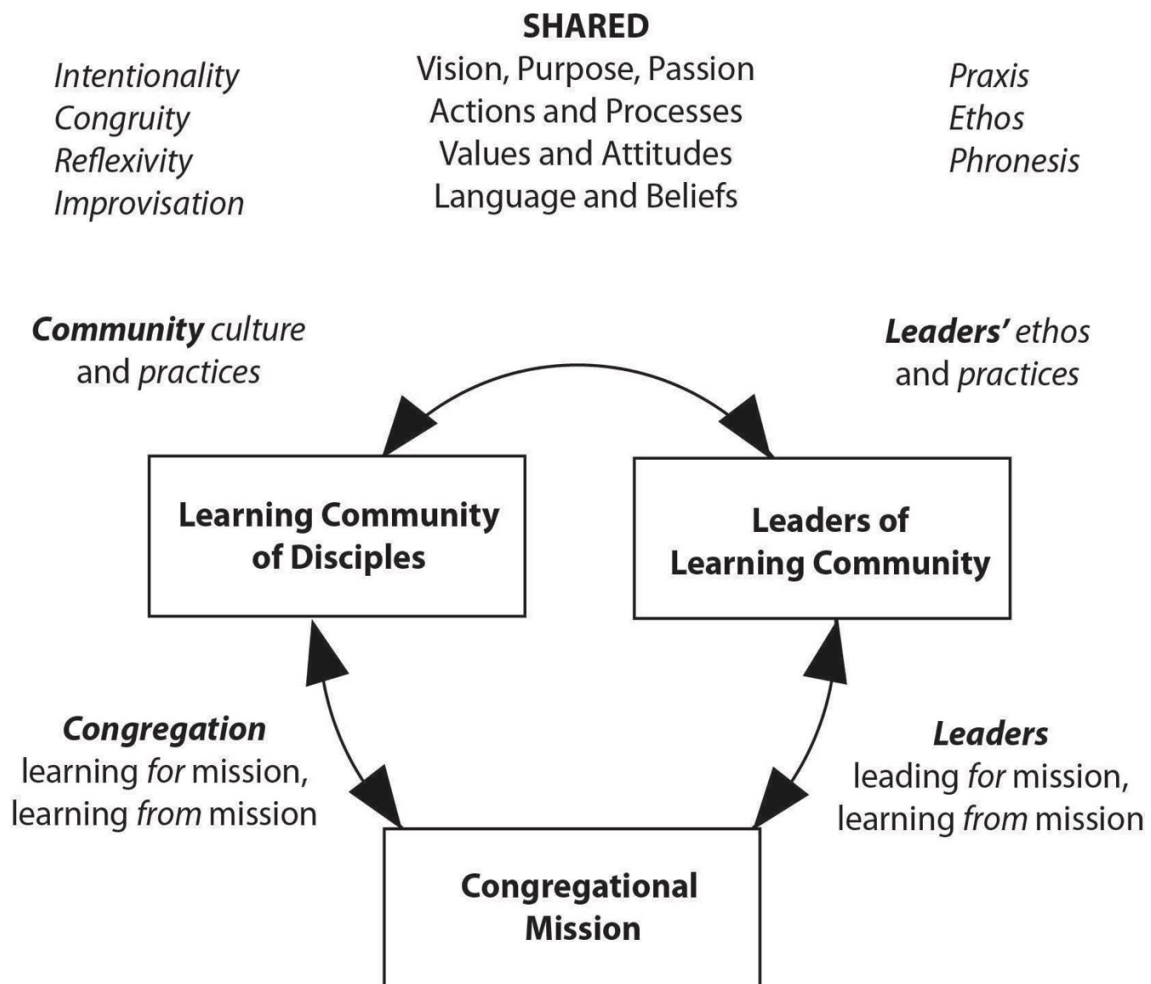
1. Congregations as *learning communities* with a learning culture, plus both formal and informal intentional teaching processes;
2. Congregational leaders as both *effective teachers* and *systemic leaders* of learning communities;
3. Christian education that is focused on holistic, *lifelong discipleship* and grounded in the congregation's participation in the *mission of God*.

These three lenses provide a framework for examining congregations, including sub-questions such as:

- *What kind of culture and practices exist in UCA congregations as learning communities?*
- *What kind of roles, ethos and practices do ministers and key leaders exhibit as leaders of learning communities?*
- *Do congregations and leaders exhibit shared vision, values and practices in relation to formation and education?*
- *How do leaders and congregations learn for and from their engagement in mission?*
- *Are leaders and congregations engaged in intentional, re-creative work to ensure the effectiveness of formation and education?*

To summarise, the following diagram is an expansion of the earlier Figure 3 and represents the framework undergirding the empirical study. Some aspects of the diagram require further explanation in the coming chapters (e.g., *phronesis* and *ethos* in relation to *praxis*). Any of these illustrated factors or processes may or may not be present in particular congregations or leaders being studied. As a schema, however, it provides a mental map of the kinds of capacities, intentions and processes being explored. Given the complexity of congregational life and leadership, it is not possible to undertake an in-depth analysis of all of these factors. But as an analytical frame, it helps direct attention to particular kinds of questions while excluding a range of others.

Figure 5: Research Schema



4. RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

4.1 Interview Approach

a. Overview

The qualitative research consisted of semi-structured interviews with the key ministry leader or leaders drawn from a diverse sample of twenty-two Uniting Church congregations across Australia. The analysis focuses on a subset of interviews with sixteen people in thirteen locations. The sampling approach is explained in Section 4.2.

Mockler argues that qualitative research requires a congruence between authenticity in design, process and analysis.²⁸⁴ The approach was intended to create congruence between the research question, the research method and the interview process. The interview approach is based on assumptions about the research topic, research methodology, the research subjects (congregations and their leaders), and the researcher as interviewer. The first two areas have been addressed previously in Chapter 2 and are summarised here with some additional comments.

b. Research Methodology

Interview knowledge is produced in a conversational relation: it is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic.²⁸⁵

In Chapter 2 I described the research project as taking place at the intersection of social science research, educational research and practical theology. Identifying this circumscribed several aspects of the methodology. The social research approach is *constructivist*, seeking to understand the worldview of the research subjects from their individual perspectives. The approach is also *interpretive* as it seeks to make sense of the factors and processes that are involved in (re)shaping Christian education today. This includes consideration of leaders' and congregations' agency in relation to intentional formation and education. I noted Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: people are

²⁸⁴ N Mockler, "Being Me: In Search of Authenticity," in *Creative Spaces for Qualitative Researching*, ed. J Higgs, A Titchen, D Horsfall and D Bridges (Rotterdam: Sense, 2011).

²⁸⁵ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), p17f.

actively engaged in (re)constructing the practices that constitute their community life. The practical theology lens sees meaning-making as an interpretive theological task grounded in everyday life. Practice has a hermeneutical dimension linking it not only to the sources of faith but, more importantly, to the ongoing activity of God, which is not only within praxis but prior to and beyond praxis. The research approach not only recognises this but seeks to shed light on it from the participants' experiences of God at work.

The methodology draws on aspects of grounded theory but also adopts a theoretically structured approach to the interviews based on the conceptual schema in Figure 3. While seeking to remain open to participants' diverse views of theology and practice, I am drawing particularly on Bourdieu with regard to *habitus* and practice.

In Section 2.6 I located the qualitative research within an overall Shared Praxis method of doing practical theology.

c. Research Topic

In Chapter 3 I outlined the three main foci regarding Christian education—*learning communities of discipleship, leadership and mission*. To these we can add a fourth focus of postmodernity, or more specifically, the question of whether and how Christian education needs to change in changing times. These considerations shape the content and structure of the research interview as well as the later analysis.

The schema in Section 3.6 provided a representation of the factors and processes that might (or might not) be illuminated through the research. This highlighted the question of the relationships between the three main foci along with characteristics of formation and education that may be present. The schema also heralds forthcoming discussion about the nature of practice and praxis (see Chapter 6).

d. Research Participants

To see ministry leadership as educational leadership is not to see it only as certain capacities or tasks. In any analysis of ministry and leadership, a person and their work are inter-related. Character, values, life experiences, worldview, personality, faith and theological perspectives are integral to how a person lives their Christian faith and engages in ministry and leadership. In

Studying Teachers' Lives, Goodson et al. suggest that one cannot understand the social, political and ideological forces that shape schooling without paying attention to "how teachers [see] their work and their lives."²⁸⁶ Drawing on Dewey's view of the primary value of personal experience, Butt et al. suggest that teachers' knowledge has a biographic nature, both as a teacher and as a learner, hence autobiography is an essential approach to understanding teachers' praxis.²⁸⁷ Gary Knowles speaks of the "teacher role identity" being "strongly related to biography" and that this is demonstrated in teachers' accounts of their practices.²⁸⁸

Pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin draws on Anton Boisen's notion of understanding people as "living human documents" to reframe pastoral counselling as an encounter of narratives between the pastoral carer and the person who is the subject of care.²⁸⁹ Gerkin goes on to say that understanding a person's inner world is a hermeneutical task as it requires attention to their particular use of language. In *Widening the Horizons*, Gerkin expands this thesis into a *narrative hermeneutical method* of doing practical theology.²⁹⁰

Practical theology ... involves a process of the interpretive fusion of horizons of meaning embodied in the Christian narrative with other horizons that inform and shape perceptions in the various arenas of activities in which Christians participate.²⁹¹

He describes the intersection of personal, communal and biblical narratives as both a widening and a fusion of horizons, more than a "simple synthesis."²⁹² Differing worldviews do not easily cohere, so tension, contradiction and paradox are to be expected. We can expect to hear differing and unresolved accounts of people's stories. One needs to pay careful attention to how a person or a community functions to make sense of pluralistic narratives. Prus notes the importance of paying attention to the meaning of language within particular communities as "the essential

²⁸⁶ J Gary Knowles, "Models for Understanding Pre-Service and Beginning Teachers' Biographies," in *Studying Teachers' Lives*, ed. Ivor F Goodson (London: Routledge, 1992), p4.

²⁸⁷ Richard Butt *and others*, "Collaborative Autobiography and the Teacher's Voice," in *Studying Teachers' Lives*, ed. Ivor F Goodson (London: Routledge, 1992).

²⁸⁸ Knowles, "Models for Understanding Pre-Service and Beginning Teachers' Biographies", p106.

²⁸⁹ "Each individual living human document has an integrity of his or her own that calls for understanding and interpretation, not categorisation and stereotyping. Just as the preacher should not look to proof texts to be twisted into the meaning sought for, so also the individual human text demanded a hearing on its own merit." Charles V Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p37.

²⁹⁰ Charles V Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p61.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p61.

enabling mechanism for all meaningful human knowing and acting."²⁹³ Languages frames human activity, not only descriptively but purposefully.

There is a parallel between the researcher's task of interviewing and the leader's and congregation's task of doing practical theology as part of their lives and ministries. In a similar manner to Groome's critical dialectic, Gerkin suggests that drawing on past narratives requires both respect and suspicion, just as evoking the future hopes requires both anticipation and suspicion.²⁹⁴ Any fusion of horizons in the present involves critical work. Gerkin sees this hermeneutical task taking place within the Judo-Christian meta-narrative, alerting us to the reality of God's activity which invites our response.

The research interview process invited ministers and lay leaders to provide a subjective, autobiographical account of their experiences of educational leadership and of church-as-learning-community. The interview was not designed simply to elicit a personal oral history, but rather was intended to evoke a reflective narration of thinking and experience from an individual's perspective. The semi-structured interview allowed for the conversation to follow both the shape and the substance of the leader's personal narrative, honouring their stories. This inevitably uncovered differences between the researcher's assumptions and language, and the leader's language and worldview.

Figure 4 represented the worldview of the interview subject as overlapping but not identical with the worldview of their congregation/s. While the interview questions needed to address both the leader and the congregation as research subjects, the interview process could not easily separate both representations. An additional research process would have been needed to provide another frame of reference within each congregation. With my approach, the researcher can only examine the leader's statements in context for congruence or difference.

²⁹³ Robert Prus, "Studying Human Knowing and Acting: The Interactionist Quest for Authenticity," in *Doing Ethnography Studying Everyday Life*, ed. Dorothy Pawluch, William Shaffir and Charlene Miall (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005), p11.

²⁹⁴ Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* p65ff.

e. Researcher as Interviewer

Interviewing is an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge. Interview knowledge is produced in a conversational relation; it is contextual, linguistic, narrative, and pragmatic.²⁹⁵

In Section 2.4 I noted Bourdieu's delineation of three kinds of reflexivity. Here I focus on the relationship between myself as researcher and the interview subjects and their contexts. I approached the interview process as a person who, prior to 2011, had worked in Christian education in the Uniting Church in a range of contexts for just over 30 years. I therefore examined the discipline from within its body of practitioners. Having worked in several Australian states and undertaken various national roles, I was reasonably well-known across the Uniting Church as a person with experience in this field, and hence known to some of the research participants.

I deemed that the interviewees would assume of the interviewer a significant degree of knowledge of the Uniting Church itself and of the fields of congregational ministry and Christian education. In addition, the study was partly funded by the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly. This information was disclosed to participants as part of the invitation process.

Thus, the interview was approached as a *professional peer conversation*. This is different from an interview in which participants might be explaining their thinking and practices in either basic or abstract terms to an interviewer who was not well-versed in their profession.²⁹⁶ Through mutual conversation, issues and perspectives were able to be expanded, questioned, clarified, revised and/or confirmed.

f. A Semi-Structured Interview

The research involved semi-structured interviews of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The questions were framed in relation to the overall research question and the four focus areas outlined in Section 4.1b above. The interview was based on an Interview Guide (see Section 4.3), yet the interview process was allowed to vary, with additional questions asked or comments made

²⁹⁵ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* p17f.

²⁹⁶ It should be noted that Carr and Kemmis express caution in referring to teaching as a discrete profession in the way that medicine or law might be seen. The same would be true for Christian ministry. Hence the term "profession" here is seen to incorporate church workers, lay or ordained, in leadership of congregations, and may be seen to include some voluntary lay congregational leaders. Carr and Kemmis, *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*.

by the researcher.²⁹⁷ Due to variations in terminology and understandings regarding Christian education, as well as the theological and contextual diversity of the sample, I altered or reframed some questions during the interview to suit each subject's perceived frame of reference.

The dialectic nature of the research method was intended to foster reciprocity. Reciprocity implies give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It operates at two primary points in emancipatory empirical research: the junctures between *researcher* and *researched* and between *data* and *theory*.²⁹⁸ The extent to which such reciprocity is either desirable or possible depends upon multiple factors. Lather suggests two features of such a reciprocity that are relevant here:²⁹⁹

Interviews conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner, that require self-disclosure on the part of the researcher;

Negotiation of meaning... recycling description, emerging analysis, and conclusions.

Silverman notes that open-ended interviews are a common technique in these kinds of studies.³⁰⁰ Like Kvale and Brinkmann, he indicates that such a process is a collaborative work between the interviewer and the subject, with the subject as an active participant. According to Byrne, "Open ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees' views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions."³⁰¹ Potentially, the *peer* nature of such an interview also provides a disposition towards mutual learning. The value of such a semi-structured approach is the access provided to a subject's professional expertise at a level deeper than may necessarily be provided to an interviewer seen as an independent outsider.

Disadvantages or risks include:

- Participants' perceptions of the interviewer's depth (or lack) of expertise or professional ranking, hence limiting the conversation;
- Perceived outcomes of the interview in relation to their professional standing;

²⁹⁷ Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

²⁹⁸ Lather, "Research as Praxis", p263.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p266.

³⁰⁰ David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011).

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p167.

- Capacity for professional jargon to mask their intentions or understandings.

Kvale and Brinkmann categorise twelve aspects of qualitative research interviews.³⁰² With regard to my interview approach, I note the following aspects:

- *Deliberate Naiveté*: Despite being a semi-structured and professional conversation, I approached each interview as an ‘appreciative inquiry’, genuinely expecting to learn and be surprised.
- *Focused*: The questions were theme-focused, but not invariant.
- *Ambiguity*: Responses were not clarified with forensic rigour.
- *Change*: The interviewees were required to think and as result were actively reflecting on and (re)formulating understandings during the interview.
- *Sensitivity*: At several points some participants’ reflections became deeply personal. The degree of this was unexpected but the safety of the conversation seemed to allow for it.

4.2 Sampling Method and Criteria

a. Peer recommendation

In February 2012, I contacted a range of UCA Assembly, Synod and Presbytery staff in education and mission roles to request recommendations of congregations and leaders for the study.³⁰³ The staff were provided with an explanation of the study and the criteria below. Most requests were conducted by email, but a few were verbal. Staff were asked to nominate congregations *and* their leaders who were deemed to be highly effective across the eight areas listed.

In 2013 there were 2078 Uniting Church congregations and 2,475 ordained ministers.³⁰⁴ Peer recommendation requests were issued to 60 UCA staff with 26 responses received. The 26 respondents nominated a possible 73 interviewees. I consulted with indigenous leaders and

³⁰² These are *Life World, Meaning, Qualitative, Descriptive, Specificity, Deliberate Naiveté, Focused, Ambiguity, Change, Sensitivity, Interpersonal Situation* and *Positive Experience*. Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*.

³⁰³ See Appendix 5.

³⁰⁴ Powell and others, *2013 Uniting Church Census of Congregations and Ministers*. Data regarding the size of the Uniting church prior to the 2013 internal church Census was not readily available. This figure is provided post-sampling to give an indication of the approximate size of the church.

multicultural workers to ensure that nominations of both indigenous and ethnically diverse communities were received.

Criteria for effectiveness in Christian Education

A US study of effective Christian education across seven mainline denominations in the 1990s proposed eight marks of maturity in Christian faith.³⁰⁵ As an interdenominational study, it emphasised “practice—acting on one’s beliefs, or the *outcomes* of faith” rather than adherence to particular theological doctrines.

1. Trusting and believing in God
2. Experiencing the fruits of faith
3. Integrating faith and life
4. Seeking spiritual growth
5. Nurturing faith in community
6. Holding life-affirming values
7. Advocating social change
8. Acting and serving

While the Christian Research Association had studied factors that influence faith development, at that point there was no comparative set of Australian criteria. Given their interdenominational nature, these characteristics seemed a reasonable basis as the set of criteria for peer nomination of leaders and congregations who were effective in Christian education.

The terminology used in these criteria is quite broad: they are not a tight or rigid set of terms. This allowed for some diversity of interpretation by the UCA staff making peer recommendations. In terms of the research approach, this was deemed acceptable, since the research subjects

³⁰⁵ Eugene C Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage* (Abingdon Press, 1993), p36,37.

themselves would be interviewed about their understandings of the nature of effective Christian education.

b. Sample construction

The 73 possible interview subjects were classified according to criteria of representativeness described below. A further consideration in sampling was the amount of travel required to conduct interviews across Australia given travel and time constraints.³⁰⁶

The 73 nominations were analysed in relation to multiple selection criteria with the aim of creating a short-list of up to 30 prospective participants.

- *Geography*; including at least one person from each Australian state and territory
- *Gender*; both women and men in the sample
- *Race*; an ethnic-cultural mix that reflects the character of the UCA, including those of Anglo and European background, Aboriginal person/s, Pacific and Asian cultures, and if possible, African
- *Age*; a range of ages of people in active ministry roles
- *Community type*; variation of city, suburban, regional and rural experiences
- *Church size*; some variation in the size of the congregations in which the person is currently in ministry
- *Theology*; variation in people's theological perspective to reflect something of the range of the UCA's constituency
- *Mission Focus*; variation in what congregations deemed to be their primary mission focus; for example, community service engagement, evangelism, ministry in schools or universities, particular cultural-ethnic groups, church planting, community development, social justice or well-being initiatives

³⁰⁶ The travel budget provided by the Uniting Church was significant but not unlimited. The geographic location of participants and their availability needed to fit within a workable travel plan. I would make one trip to each state outside my state of residence to interview several subjects.

Invitation priorities were then determined. Prospective participants were approached sequentially based on a probable travel schedule. Invitations to participate in the research were issued by letter with a covering letter provided by the Uniting Church's national General Secretary.³⁰⁷

Some prospective interviewees did not respond and some declined to be interviewed.³⁰⁸

Invitations were issued until a sample deemed to be of suitable size and scope was achieved. This consisted of 22 locations and 25 participants as there were three married couples in ministry placement together. It needs to be noted that this sample was less diverse in terms of gender than originally intended. Many more men than women were recommended by synod and presbytery staff and achieving gender balance alongside the other criteria was difficult. Alongside this it should be noted that in 2013, 68% of active ministers in the UCA were male and 32% were female.³⁰⁹ Cultural diversity was another issue, noted below.

Interview Participants

Interviews were conducted between March and June 2012. While twenty-five participants were interviewed, for the purposes of this thesis, the sample size was reduced to sixteen people for four reasons.

- The amount of data across the number of interviews was deemed to be too large to be manageable; hence, some interviews were set aside for possible follow-up research.
- In two instances where the interview participant was not a qualified ministry agent, the substance of the interview lacked sufficient depth and breath for comparative analysis.
- Interviews with two of the participants whose first language was not English proved problematic in terms of language and culture. It became clear that more culturally specific terms of enquiry would be needed for the interview to return sufficient depth of information. As a result, I decided to decrease the focus on differences in ethnicity within the overall sample.
- To achieve balance in the final sample, two interviews were omitted to maintain sufficient diversity of church location and size. Two larger capital city congregations were omitted on this basis.

³⁰⁷ See Appendix 5.

³⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the latter included two women ministers whose ethnicity was not Caucasian, thus reducing the sample diversity.

³⁰⁹ Powell and others, *2013 Uniting Church Census of Congregations and Ministers*.

The final sample consisted of thirteen interviews, including sixteen participants—ten males and six females. All participants agreed to be identified for the purposes of the study, as well as for wider educational purposes.³¹⁰

Table 4: Research Participants

Name/s	Congregation or Presbytery Name	Location
Michelle Cook and James Hughes	Mapoon Uniting and Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress	Mapoon, QLD
Karyl Davison	The Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project	Bunbury, WA
Simon Dent	Clare Uniting Church	Clare, SA
Steve Francis	Nedlands Uniting Church	Nedlands, WA
Kerrie Lingham and Charles Gallacher	Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale Uniting Churches	Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale, VIC
Sean Gilbert	Christ Church Uniting Church	Wayville, Adelaide SA
Anne Harley	Mount Louisa House of Praise Uniting Church	Mount Louisa, Townsville, QLD
Ian Hickingbotham	North Ringwood Uniting Church	North Ringwood, Melbourne, VIC
Andrew Johnson	Hope Uniting Church	Maroubra Junction, Sydney, NSW
John Squires and Elizabeth Raine	Wauchope Uniting Church and Mid-North Coast Presbytery	Wauchope, NSW
John Ruhle	The Gap Uniting Church	The Gap, Brisbane, QLD
Wendi Sargeant	North Lakes Uniting Church and The Lakes College	North Lakes, QLD
Tom Stuart	Mid-Lachlan Mission Area	Parkes region, NSW

³¹⁰ See Appendix 5.

4.3 Interview Question Guide

The following questions formed the framework for the semi-structured interview. The questions were trialled with three different subjects and then revised.

1. Tell me about the congregation that you serve? What are some of the key characteristics of the congregation and the community to which it belongs?

2. What kinds of things do your congregation do to help people grow in faith and discipleship?

Which activities or processes are age-specific and which are across age groups?

Which are formal and which are informal?

3. What language do you and your congregation use to talk about growth in faith and discipleship? e.g. Christian education, faith development, formation, spiritual growth, Christian discipleship, other?

4. I'm interested in how you see the relationship between growth in Christian faith and discipleship and the mission of the church. How are these things related to one another?

Do you see the mission of the church shaping the ways in which your congregation fosters growth in Christian faith and discipleship? If so, how?

Do you see the particular social and cultural setting of the congregation shaping how it forms disciples? If so, how?

5. The terms 'post-Christendom' and 'postmodern' are sometimes used to refer to the changed circumstances in which the church finds itself. Are either of these terms meaningful to you? If so, how do you see their effect on the church's task of developing faith and discipleship?

6. What is your role as a leader in helping the congregation foster growth in faith and discipleship?

As a leader, how is your theology of Christian education related to your approaches to Christian education/formation/discipling in a congregational setting?

i.e. How are your beliefs about what discipleship means related to the ways in which you educate and form people for discipleship?

What do you see as some of the essential characteristics or capacities of effective educational leaders in congregations?

7. Let's return to some of the terms that are used to talk about how we help people grow in faith: e.g. Christian education, faith development, formation, spiritual growth, Christian discipleship, other?

I'm interested in how you understand some of these terms and how you see them being related to one another. Tell me what they mean to you.

Do you see any changes taking place in how the church undertakes these practices?

What kinds of changes do you think are necessary for the church to be effective in forming disciples?

8. What evidence would you look for in assessing whether or not a congregation was effective in fostering growth in faith and discipleship?

9. What are the signs that a congregation values and supports growth in faith and discipleship?

4.4 Interview Coding and Themes

The coding process was based on the research design, with the research questions providing an overall structure for the coding. I drew primarily on Johnny Saldana's *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* to determine the coding approach.³¹¹

The coding of the interviews initially looked quite broadly at the narratives to explore not only what congregations do to form and educate people in faith but why they do these things. Hence, the data coding proceeded from an open-ended approach that might identify attitudes and actions, to a more focused clustering of data that could uncover possible associations between the main structural factors—*leadership, learning communities* and *mission*.

The data analysis process was as follows:

- a. **Pre-coding:** to begin by asking “What do I think the data is telling me overall?”;
- b. **First Cycle coding:** an open-ended, initial coding framed within the interview structure;
- c. **Second Cycle coding:** amalgamation, renaming and reorganising the initial codes;
- d. **Categories and Themes:** organising the codes into categories and identifying themes.

a. Pre-coding

While some pre-coding steps identify categories from prior studies or from the design of the study itself, this process did neither. Prior to coding, I made a “blank sheet” brainstorm of themes that seemed to have arisen across the interviews. This was a list of key themes that seemed intuitively evident; a “summary memo” of impressions from across the data. The list was neither rigidly categorical nor thematic, but a mixture of both.

This allowed me to consider what coding methods would be utilised and how they would relate to the research questions. Secondly, by giving the themes descriptions and linking them to specific

³¹¹ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (London: Sage, 2013).

memorable narratives, I sought to ground and clarify this initial overview, as any apparent patterns needed to be based on actual descriptions.

Thus, the Pre-coding themes would provide an in-progress reference as to whether the First Cycle coding was aligning with my overall impressions of the data and, hence, whether a different approach was needed or not.

For example:

- i. *Congregations identify a primary role as educating or discipling communities, either within the congregation or the wider community, as a core priority and goal for their life and mission.* (e.g., North Ringwood’s School of Ministry, Christ Church’s Effective Living Centre, Maroubra Junction’s Discipleship for Young Adults; Mid-North Coast NSW, Nedlands)
- ii. *Congregations act as “open systems” of discipleship, regularly bringing in outside people and resources, seeing active connections with the wider church and wider world as vital for nourishing lively faith.* (e.g., Christ Church, Queenscliff, Mid North Coast NSW)

The full list of twenty themes is included as Appendix 6.

b. First Cycle Coding

Coding of the interviews was undertaken digitally using *nVivo* by QRS International. While *nVivo* allows for quantitative analysis of qualitative codes, the aim was not to obtain a quantitative analysis in the end. Rather, any quantitative indicators would simply assist the identification of qualitative factors.³¹²

³¹² See Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*.

Primary Codes

Structural Coding was applied to classify the interviews according to the key areas of enquiry and interview framework itself.³¹³ Thus, the coding method was partly concept-driven.³¹⁴

- i. Defining Christian education
- ii. Learning Community
- iii. Leadership
- iv. Mission
- v. Postmodernity

Subcodes³¹⁵ were created for *Leadership* as follows

- Minister as Leader
- Church Leadership (i.e., church council, other staff, key lay leadership)

The following Primary Codes were also added during the First Cycle of coding in order to mark comments that might not neatly fit into the above categories.

- v. Church Culture
- vi. Problems

The coding process involved creating **Simultaneous Codes**³¹⁶ as **Subcodes** in relation to the above Primary Codes—participant statements could be marked with more than one code.

³¹³ Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* p84ff.

³¹⁴ Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*.

³¹⁵ Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* p77.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p80ff.

Within the above categories, the First Cycle involved **Initial Coding**,³¹⁷ a relatively open approach that sought to identify *attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, values* and *actions*, in order to uncover the following kinds of information:

- What teaching, learning and other faith-forming *activities* did leaders and congregations undertake?
- What theological *beliefs* do leaders and congregations express in relation to what they mean by formation, education, spiritual growth, discipleship and engagement in mission?
- What *values* express how leaders and congregations see the nature and importance of faith formation and education in community?
- What *feelings* and *attitudes* do leaders and congregations express in relation to one another in their common life of faith and mission?

Hence the Initial Coding was a hybrid of coding types. For example:

Structural coding: see above;

Descriptive coding³¹⁸: *Bible study, Prayer, Hospitality, Worship, Finance, Resources, Church facilities*;

Values coding³¹⁹: *Initiative, Open and inclusive community, Participation, Conversation and dialogue, Belonging, Relationship-building*;

Emotion coding³²⁰: *Joy, Hopeful, Passion, Knowing love or grace of God*;

Process coding³²¹: *Teaching, Discerning, Equipping, Ongoing learning, Modelling, Preaching, Listening, Articulating ethos, Conversation and dialogue, Initiative and Experimenting, Action and reflection*.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p100ff.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p88ff.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p110ff.

³²⁰ Ibid., p105ff.

³²¹ Ibid., p96ff.

The approach was to code paragraph by paragraph, rather than line by line, in order to identify relatively quickly the incidence of broad categories of data. **Simultaneous** coding was applied during these steps since participants regularly spoke about multiple kinds of information in the one response to a question.³²² The semi-structured nature of the interview also resulted in interconnections between categories being explored both by the interviewer and the interviewee. Some merging of subcategories took place during this step—for example, ministers speaking about their own sense of authenticity, vulnerability and the freedom to express their questions or shortcomings.

First Cycle coding results are included in Appendix 7. While the codes were changed considerably in the Second Cycle, the higher frequency of codes across interview sources was revealing even at this stage. The tables below indicate the most frequent response categories across interviews.³²³

Table 5: Learning Communities - First Cycle

LEARNING COMMUNITIES	No. of Sources
Relationship-building	11
Free to explore and question	7
Hearing people’s voices	6
Open, inclusive community	6
Participation	6
Belonging	5
Conversation and dialogue	5
Intentionality	5
Permission-giving	5
Prayerfulness and worship	5
Small groups	5

Total no. of interview sources = 13

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Note that in three instances, two subjects were interviewed together. Each interview is counted here as a single source.

Table 6: Minister as Leader - First Cycle

MINISTER AS LEADER	No. of Sources
Teaching	9
Articulating ethos or theology	8
Conversation and dialogue	8
Authenticity, vulnerability, freedom	7
Equipping others	7
Openness to God or growth	7
Starting with people's questions, needs	7

Total no. of interview sources = 13

Table 7: Mission - First Cycle

MISSION	No. of sources
Congruence between church and mission	7
Serving the community	7
Articulating mission	6
Church facilities	5
Mission in everyday life	5

Total no. of interview sources = 13

At this stage I also completed a word frequency query across all interviews, represented here as a word cloud of words of 4 letters or more.³²⁴ The frequency query did not seem to generate any additional codes worth pursuing at this point. See Figure 6 on the following page.

³²⁴ Saldana advises "if the interactions are significant dialogic exchanges of issues and jointly constructed meanings—then the researcher's contributions could be appropriately coded alongside the participants." Ibid., p16.

Figure 6: Word Frequency Query



c. Second Cycle Coding

The First Cycle of coding had generated a large number of sub-codes, many of which had overlapping meanings. The Second Cycle of coding had several objectives:

1. *To reduce the overall number of codes by amalgamating similar codes into larger categories.*

For example, under *Minister as Leader*, the sub-code *Initiative and experimenting* came to also include *Intentionality, Organiser, Intuition* and *Idealistic*.

2. *To seek greater categorical consistency in terms of language.*

Given the diversity of interview subjects and their language, rather than using *nVivo* coding, my approach was to create code categories that made sense to me as the researcher. At this point I could examine whether the codes that I had created for leaders around particular values; for example, *relationship-building, authenticity* or *discerning*, were similar to or different from the codes for similar values expressed with regard to the congregation as a learning community. This was a step towards theme identification.

3. *To seek to clarify distinctions between **actions**, **attitudes** or **values**, and **beliefs**.*

Such distinctions would never be clear, for good reasons, even though the motivations for particular kinds of agency are of interest in this study. Nevertheless, to subcategorise the nature of a Minister as Leader of a learning community in this instance was to gain insight into their *ethos* as much as their educational strategies. To what extent is a minister's leadership style or approach different from her or his teaching style or approach?

4. *To seek to cluster **actions** and **attitudes** or **values** where appropriate.*

Following on from above, it will be seen that the result was to create *style and approach* code clusters for both leaders and for congregations. The reasons for this will be explored in the ensuing discussion about congregational praxis and the practices of forming and educating disciples. For the moment, suffice to say that while leaders named many educational or formational activities or processes, the attitudes, values or beliefs that they associated with them gave the activities *purpose* and *ethos* within the life of the congregation.

The Second Cycle coding gathered existing sub-codes into broader categories, resulting in three tiers of codes. It became evident in the process that there was, in fact, a loss of detail in relation to the frequency and type of *learning activities*. My pre-coding exercise had suggested that there was a significant incidence of intentional planning of formal learning activities: special teaching series in worship, Bible study and discussion groups, book clubs, spiritual retreat days, learning programs for children and young people, visiting speakers, topical short courses, leadership development and more. However, this had not been identified as a single characteristic or even a cluster of information but was spread across the sample. Rather than re-code the data, I decided to address this issue throughout discussion of the findings. Hence, the multiple instances of formal learning activities are not tabulated separately below. They are addressed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

The Second Cycle coding tables that follow provide a list of sub-categories and the most common sub-sub-categories by number of sources. Responses indicated by six or more interviews are listed.

Due to the method of coding paragraphs of varying lengths (rather than lines), a total summary of category references per interview does not provide a global frequency measure of any strong

quantitative significance. For example, one interview subject may have mentioned a particular topic multiple times, such as the importance of prayer, prayer groups and teaching people to pray, whereas another subject may have mentioned prayer only once. Frequency in this instance may be indicative of importance, but not in any strict quantitative sense. A distribution table of the most common category references *across* interview sources is more helpful; namely, how many interviews (sources) spoke of a particular category. The tables indicate which categories and sub-categories were most often named according to the number of sources, with six sources and above listed. The interview subjects (by location) who most commonly referenced these categories and sub-categories are also identified.

Table 8: Learning Community - Second Cycle

LEARNING COMMUNITY	Sub-categories	No. of sources	No. of references	Most references
Worship and prayer		11	71	Mapoon, Queenscliff, Mount Louisa, Mid-Lachlan, Maroubra, Clare
	Creative, participatory worship	8	30	Mapoon, Mid-Lachlan, Queenscliff
Learning styles and approaches	Prayer and contemplation	8	27	Queenscliff, Maroubra
		13	188	Mapoon, Maroubra, Queenscliff, Nedlands, Wayville, North Ringwood
	Bible study	8	31	Mapoon, Nedlands
	Hearing people's voices and stories	8	21	Mid-Lachlan
Church leadership	Small groups	7	19	Maroubra
	Action-reflection	6	21	Maroubra, Queenscliff
		8	45	Clare, Queenscliff, The Gap
	Quality relationships	6	13	Clare
		13	254	Maroubra, Queenscliff, Mapoon, The Gap, Clare, Mid-Lachlan
		11	81	Mapoon, Maroubra, Queenscliff, North Ringwood, The Gap, Mount Louisa
Congregational culture	Participation	11	57	Queenscliff, Maroubra, Mapoon
	Relationship-building	11	59	Queenscliff, Wayville, Maroubra, Bunbury
	Open, inclusive community	9	31	Mid-Lachlan
	Conversation and dialogue	8	43	Mapoon, The Gap, Clare, Maroubra, Nedlands
	Intergenerational			

Total no. of sources = 13

Table 9: Minister as Leader - Second Cycle

MINISTER as LEADER	Sub-categories	No. of Sources	No. of References	Most references
Leadership styles and approaches		13	194	Mapoon, Mid-Lachlan, Mount Louisa, Queenscliff, North Ringwood, Mid-North Coast
	Initiative and experimenting	11	49	Mid-Lachlan, North Ringwood
	Visionary	11	52	Queenscliff, North Ringwood
	Permission-giving	9	45	Mount Louisa, Mid-Lachlan
	Relationship-building	8	27	Bunbury
	Listening, discerning	6	17	*
Personal growth or openness		12	127	Wayville, Queenscliff, Clare, Mount Louisa, Mid-Lachlan, Maroubra
	Openness to God or growth	11	88	Wayville, Mount Louisa, Mid-Lachlan, Maroubra, Queenscliff, Clare
	Authenticity, vulnerability, freedom	11	44	Clare, Wayville
	Ongoing learning	8	23	Queenscliff
Teaching styles and approaches		13	286	Mid-North Coast, North Ringwood, Clare, The Gap, Queenscliff, Mapoon
	Adult education	12	63	Wayville, North Ringwood, Mid-Lachlan
	Minister as Teacher	11	104	Clare, The Gap, Mid-North Coast, North Ringwood, North Lakes, Mapoon
	Learner-centred dialogue	11	61	Bunbury, North Ringwood, Mapoon, Queenscliff, The Gap
	Equipping others	9	55	North Ringwood, Mapoon, Mid-Lachlan, Maroubra
	Preaching	7	33	Clare, The Gap
	Mentoring and modelling	6	14	*

Total no. of sources = 13. *A blank cell in the right-hand column indicates that no single interview case contained 6 or more references to the category.

Table 10: Congregational Mission - Second Cycle

CONGREGATIONAL MISSION	Sub-categories	No. of sources	No. of references	Most references
Major mission focus		11		Most leaders indicated one or two significant mission foci for their particular congregation/s
Congregation as locus of mission		13	63	Queenscliff, Maroubra, Bunbury
	Church as a community centre	10	22	Queenscliff
	Congruence between church and mission	8	22	Queenscliff
	Church a welcoming community	6	9	*
Discipleship as mission		9	34	Mid-North Coast, Mapoon
	Mission in everyday life	8	18	Mid-North Coast
Local community focus		13	65	Mid-North Coast, Clare, Nedlands, Queenscliff, Bunbury
	Serving the community	8	24	Mid-North Coast
	Starting where the community is at	7		*
	Evangelism	6		Nedlands
<i>Missio Dei</i>		9	18	Clare

Total no. of sources = 13. * A blank cell in the right-hand column indicates that no single interview case contained 6 or more references to the category.

Table 11: Defining Christian Education

DEFINING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	No. of sources	No. of references
Spiritual formation and transformation	12	58
Christian living	8	47
Discipleship	8	27
Intentional education programs or processes	7	20

Total no. of sources = 13

d. Categories and Themes

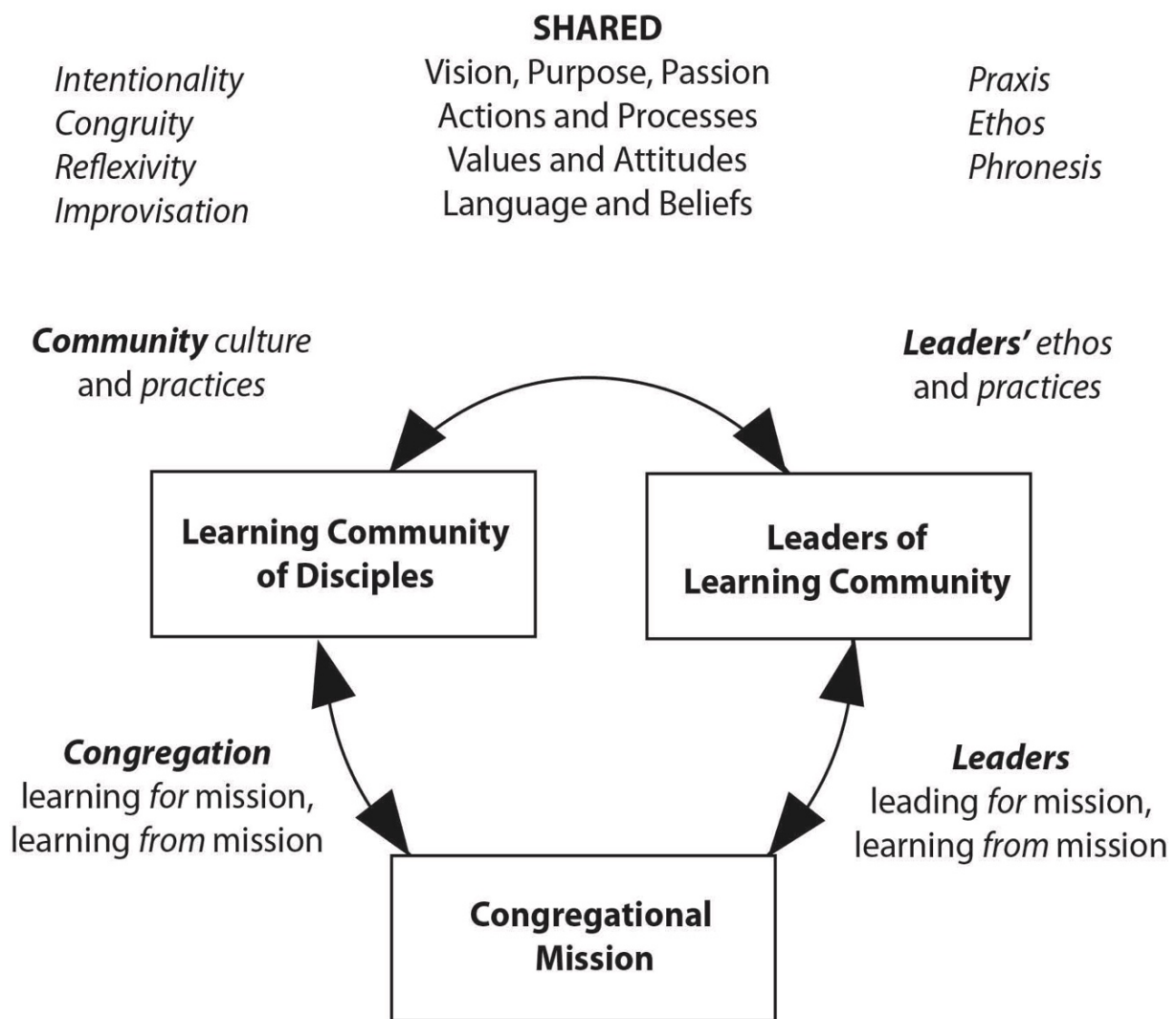
The Second Cycle coding provided the categorisation for developing and exploring themes in the interviews in the chapters that follow. The move from categories to themes involves more nuanced descriptions of categories and an examination of possible associations among them. Chapters 5 to 8 explain the key themes. The process is described in the Introduction to Part Two which follows.

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

How are churches reframing Christian education in order to be effective in growing faith and engaging in mission in Australian society in the 21st century?

The schema from Section 3.6 (repeated here) indicated possible factors and associations among the focus areas of the research. The schema depicts the three primary arenas of inquiry. I reiterate here that this is not a model of what *is*, but a way of envisaging what *might be*.

Figure 7: Research Schema



The initial three themes provided by the research framework—*learning communities*, *leadership* and *mission*—are here expanded into four chapters. The additional Chapter 6: Communities of Practice, allows for discussion of teaching and learning activities and also provides a distinction

between communities of *learning* and communities of *practice*. This has resulted in some categories related to specific teaching and learning activities being relocated to Chapter 6 for discussion.

This stage of the research involves moving from categories to themes. Sub-themes are explored within each of the four chapters based on the Second Cycle coding categories. Hence, a Third Cycle, not of coding, but of coding analysis and theme development, took place when the interviews were revisited alongside the categories in Tables 8–11. Revisiting transcripts can result in a fresh reading and re-evaluation of how participants' statements fit one or more existing categories, as well as consideration of how categories relate to one another or even overlap.

This resulted in some adjustments which are taken up in the following chapters.

1. It became more evident that an individual ministry leader's *ethos* and a congregation's *culture* are difficult to separate discretely. This is not so much a limitation of the interview process as a recognition of the complex nature of social relationships and organisations.
2. There is also an overlap between the culture and approach of the collective church *leadership* (minister, key leaders and church council) with the culture of the *congregation*.
3. Given the multiple coding of many sections of interviews, choices were made about which particular categories to highlight as sub-themes in order to provide a coherent, analytic narrative. As previously noted, a thematic rendering across multiple interviews creates a degree of distance from the substantive detail of each case. Each interview subject and location contain much more information than can be explored within this study. As a researcher, I seek to find a balance between the distance of themes and the particularity of each case. At the same time, I recognise that I gain tacit knowledge in the interview process that makes the coding process partly intuitive.
4. Each of the four chapters highlights three or four interviews for the sake of providing a thematically *thick* description, while referencing others in less detail. The choice of interviews is based partly on coding frequency, but also on overall themes.

These chapters contain interpretation and critical analysis of congregational *praxis*, corresponding with Movements three and four of the research inquiry hermeneutical loop (Figure 2). The inter-related nature of the primary factors (represented by the four, chapter themes) means that within each chapter theme there is clear reference to other themes. For example, there are references to leadership within the chapter on learning communities.

Interview transcripts have been edited slightly to remove pauses and repetition for the sake of clearer flow, along with some minor grammatical changes in some instances for the sake of clarity.

The structure of each chapter is as follows:

Section 1. Theme Introduction

Section 2 to 4 or 5. Interviews

- a. Introduction to Congregation and Interviewee/s
- b. Interview quotes
- c. Critical dialectic regarding sub-themes

Section 5 or 6. Critical dialectic regarding overall theme

Note that Section 1 in Chapters 6 and 7 differ as they contain exegetical biblical studies related to the Chapter themes. The biblical material, from the Gospel of John, and the Book of Acts, is introduced as part of the dialectic hermeneutic between current practice and normative sources of faith. Acts chapter 2 provides a basis for examining the practices of the early church in relation to Christian practices in the church today. John chapter 15 is a source for considering the connection between discipleship, community, the Spirit and God's mission. Together they address both the *being* and the *doing* of the church as a community of disciples.

Additional quotes from each interview are referenced and located in Appendices 8 to 20.

5. COMMUNITIES OF LIFELONG LEARNING

A congregation's culture can support critical reflection in education, or it can impede it. Its practices can involve people in forms of action which raise important issues that, subsequently, are taken up in education, or they can draw people into deadening cycles of conventionality.³²⁵

Lifelong learning has become a catch-phrase among Uniting Church educational leaders over the last decade. There is a fresh recognition, supported by NCLS data, that the Uniting Church is an ageing church; hence, it ought to take the faith development of children and youth more seriously.³²⁶ As people nowadays live for decades after retirement, the spiritual growth of older adults is seen as a new challenge. Lifelong learning has been also applied in a vocational sense, encouraging church ministry agents to take their professional development seriously. Learning for life can be seen to be about education for each generation in particular and for all generations learning together. Combining *learning communities* and *lifelong learning* might seem obvious; yet learning communities can be narrowly focused. In this study we are seeking the heart of what fosters (re)generative growth through shared commitments and practices that actively encourage all members within diverse communities to learn and live in Christian faith.

Previously, I noted the strong focus on Christian community among past Christian educators. More recently, John Roberto, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Ross, Diana Butler Bass, Boyung Lee, Deborah Junker, Mai-Anh Le Tran and Denise Janssen have re-emphasised the centrality of communal learning, imagination and practices for Christian identity in post/late modernity.

This chapter and the next will make some distinction between *communities of learning* and *communities of practice*. Communities who learn together rely on common practices, yet the why, what, and how of learning in particular social settings require more detailed consideration. While there is an obvious distinction between teaching and learning, my emphasis on learning is partly driven by the terminology of the field in question, and also by a desire to broaden the church's understanding of what it means to teach. Richard Osmer has a particular interest in what it means for the church to be a "Teaching Church." His emphasis as a Presbyterian is partly ecclesial and

³²⁵ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* p118.

³²⁶ *Church Life Profile for Uniting Church*.

partly about the intentionality of teaching. As noted in Section 3.4, Osmer uses four *frames* for examining the teaching ministry of congregations:³²⁷

1. **Practices:** “the ways a congregation is a community shaping a way of life embodied in its practices”
2. **Curriculum:** “the ways a congregation is a school that educates its members”
3. **Leadership:** “the ways a congregation is a learning organisation”
4. **Pilgrimage:** “the ways a congregation is composed of individuals at different points in their faith journey”

Recently, John Littleton has undertaken an extensive literature review regarding learning communities, particularly in religious settings.³²⁸ He suggests three themes in the literature: “a *community of faith* model, a *learning organisation* model and a model based on core characteristics of *learning communities*.”(italics added).³²⁹ In his view, in the community of faith model “the whole life of the parish was the focus for education in the Christian faith.”³³⁰ The *learning organisation* model drew particularly on Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* and other writings.³³¹ Thirdly, Littleton suggests a strand that “summarised and customised the core learning-community characteristics to a community of faith model”.³³² While having the *community of faith model* as its central focus, this strand occasionally drew on approaches from other contexts to complement and illuminate aspects of the educational focus based on the whole life of the parish community.³³³ He defines such a learning-community approach as an “*holistic, collaborative and theologically reflective learning process*.”³³⁴ This helpful schema forms the basis

³²⁷ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* 62. These frames are used for three case studies of congregations—in the US, South Korea and South Africa. Drawing on an analysis of the New Testament writings of the apostle Paul, Osmer identifies *catechesis* (passing on Scripture and tradition), *exhortation* (moral formation and education) and *discernment* (interpreting daily life eschatologically) as critical dimensions of teaching and learning.

³²⁸ Littleton, "Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes".

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p23.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p23.

³³¹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

³³² Littleton, "Enhanced Faith Learning in Parishes", p26.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p26.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p46.

for Littleton's study, which involved mixed methods research in Anglican parishes in Adelaide. It was undertaken during the same period as my own national research.

Congregations in this Chapter

This chapter examines four congregations:

- ***Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale*** Uniting Churches on the Bellarine Peninsula in regional Victoria;
- ***The Gap*** Uniting Church in suburban Brisbane, Queensland;
- ***Clare*** Uniting Church in the mid-north of South Australia;
- ***Mapoon*** Aboriginal Congregation, north of Weipa in far north Queensland.

The four main sub-themes in my qualitative analysis are included in each section, in order that similarities and differences may be noted.

- Worship and Prayer
- Congregational Culture
- Learning Styles and Approaches
- Church Leadership

5.1 Queenscliff–Point Lonsdale Uniting Churches, Victoria

Rev Kerrie Lingham and Rev Charles Gallacher

www.unitingqueenscliff.org.au³³⁵

The Bellarine Peninsula, situated on the western edge of Port Phillip Bay in Victoria, is a popular beach-holiday destination. These two congregations (referenced from here on as *Queenscliff* for ease of reporting) are situated three kilometres apart on the eastern tip of the Peninsula. Both towns are retirement and holiday communities with high income, elderly populations. About two-thirds of dwellings in the area are holiday houses. The population swells five times over in the summer. Rev Charles Gallacher and Rev Kerrie Lingham are a married couple sharing a full-time ministry placement. They commenced ministry here in 1998; 2018 marks their twenty-first year with these congregations. The Queenscliff church premises sit on the main street and are the primary hub of church activity. The manse is next door and fronts on to the esplanade. Sunday morning worship alternates periodically between Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale with approximately sixty people attending. Each Wednesday evening there is a shared meal at Queenscliff attended by thirty to forty people followed by contemplative, creative worship. The congregations have emphases on spiritual practices, social justice, creative arts, hospitality, an Op Shop (The Vestry Shop) and community engagement.

a. Worship and Prayer

The worship and prayer life of these congregations could be characterised as contemplative, creative and communal. Seven years into their ministry here, Charles and Kerrie led a critical shift in congregational life. Despite considerable resistance, the Church Council agreed to move from weekly morning services at both Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff to one morning service moving between the two venues at three-monthly intervals. This allowed for the instigation of the Wednesday evening meal and different style of worship, which became a lively source of community, hospitality and spiritual nourishment—a source of regeneration. From their

³³⁵ Appendix 8, Reference 1. Queenscliff - Point Lonsdale Uniting Church website. <http://www.unitingqueenscliff.org.au> (accessed 27 July 2012)

contemplative, creative worship grew an initiative of providing indoor and outdoor prayer and reflection installations for the spiritual nourishment of the wider community.

Charles:

Wednesday is where the energy is. It's ... a contemplative service. We're "Nurturing a Sense of the Sacred." A regular part of it is a period of silence, reflection on the reading. We still have some music, ... often recorded ... We still use some of the Lectionary readings from the previous Sunday and perhaps some of the prayers ... Poetry, candle lighting ... and communion ... It's usually half an hour to forty minutes.

[The Church] is open [during the week] so that tourists or locals or Vestry Shop shoppers can come in and engage with ... a different experience of spirituality, based more on art than on language or on actions ... A candle or a piece of mosaic or a symbolic action rather than words ... Some poetry. It's more metaphorical language rather than set doctrines. I think we need to be more open and drawing out people's innate spirituality in a framework of ... the Gospel story.³³⁶

In January, during holiday season, a labyrinth was set up outside the church within a "Tent of Hopes and Dreams" with reflective activities through which tourists and locals could contemplate what the coming year might mean.

Kerrie:

Trying to give everyone the opportunity to ponder life and to ponder God in a really safe and welcoming environment.

I'm always talking about and then hopefully creating spaces for ... prayerfulness as thoughtfulness, as taking a breather to ponder what's going on deep down. "Why did I act like that? Why did I say it like that? What's my fear that's driving that at the moment or what's my hope?"³³⁷

While spirituality, prayer and worship featured regularly throughout the conversation, Kerrie said, "Worship's not the centre." Worship too easily translates as church members gathered for a worship service on a Sunday morning. Here the attention was on community, spirituality and a range of practices of faith.

³³⁶ Appendix 8, Reference 2.

³³⁷ Appendix 8, Reference 3.

b. Congregational Culture

The relational climate of the congregations, centred particularly around Queenscliff, was described as open, hospitable and inclusive. The introduction of the Op Shop led to the church premises becoming a place of regular hospitality and the hosting of wider town events—a “seven-day-a-week community centre.” This had transformed the way that church members thought and acted as a Christian community.

Kerrie:

We try not to use the word “congregation” much anymore, ... but seeing ourselves as a community—not a community that has “This is us that are *in* and that’s them that are *out*”... You don’t belong because you go to worship. You belong because you participate in something that’s part of our life together ... We’ve got probably seventy people involved in the Op Shop. ... Some of those people connect into the worship life after a while or some other part of it, but not necessarily. But they’re there a lot and we all love each other, and we know each other well. Certainly pastorally, there’s lots of stuff happens in that... It’s more of a mosaic of groups... Our job is trying to weave the sense of spirituality through it all... We’re trying to actually take ways of encountering God to those different groups, wherever they might be—physically, spiritually, or whatever.

The ministers described a community culture where hospitality, diversity, and openness to change were intertwined. These provided the climate for experimentation and “learning by doing.”

Charles:

Where we have a diverse community, there is growth. ... Sometimes it’s just a buzz around the place about how things are going just after a particular event. ... There’s just a sense that something sacred or something significant happened there. ... There’s a sense of hope around the place.³³⁸

Kerrie:

I think the depth of our connection with people in the congregation and with each other in the congregation, because we spend so much time together, is enabling a deeper conversation around faith issues as well.

³³⁸ Appendix 8, Reference 3.

Kerrie:

One of the marks ... for us of people being formed in discipleship ... is their willingness to then experiment, [to] give up some of the things that are comfortable for us so that other people might be welcomed. So it's wriggling a bit so that other people can fit. You start and organise your life in community around openness and willingness to change so that other people can belong.

Charles:

To be inclusive.³³⁹

The Queenscliff church became a community centre hosting a wide range of activities for the town, including music concerts and guest speakers on environmental and justice issues. Support for refugees was another example of social activism. The congregation was a locus for a range of groups and activities which were not necessarily the sole domain of church members. The church hall was redesigned as a hospitality space, with a person employed to co-ordinate this aspect of mission. However, the change was not only about the building, but about community engagement. The congregation and its ministers have since helped initiate an annual multi-faith, creative arts *Sacred Edge* festival for the area.

c. Learning Styles and Approaches

The kind of learning that took place was highly relational and embedded in groups and activities, many of which were about serving others—conversational, experiential and grounded in the Christian story. The ministers encouraged both formal and informal learning—spiritual practices on the one hand and learning through participation and conversation on the other. According to Charles and Kerrie, real learning arises from experience. This was reflected in worship but also across the range of relationships and activities that were part of their open community life. The Queenscliff ministers intentionally fostered conversations as reflection on spirituality. Kerrie spoke about church as “Belonging to a community that is wanting to explore and live this story [of Jesus] at some depth.”

Charles expressed interest in learnings from “emerging church” writers and in Christian practices; “acting out the spiritual practice rather than a head understanding of who God is or who Christ is.”

³³⁹ Appendix 8, Reference 4.

A Book Group explored “reasonably heavy theological, historical, particularly emerging church type literature.”³⁴⁰ In addition, a monthly Quiet Day was held.

Deep learning was seen to arise from practice and from felt experience. This was often explored through everyday conversation.

Kerrie:

If you offer people an experience, a story, where they actually feel something, they then feel much more able to talk about that, explore that open-heartedly with you. ... You’re not telling them what to believe; you’re just opening up the conversation.³⁴¹ It’s trying to take that stuff really seriously in formation. ... Letting the story uplift, give hope, give opportunity in a “felt” way which means you’ve got to put it into action so that it feels real. It’s the educative process for us.

Education’s not something different to everything else we’re doing. It’s woven into everything we’re doing, because we’re talking about reaching people who aren’t in the church.³⁴² ... That is spiritual formation that’s happened through it all.

Discipleship arises out of experiences, practicing this community, and then we can talk about [the] latest thinking on mission, whether it’s “neo-monasticism” or “fresh expressions” or any “alternative worship” or whatever. That all starts to make sense because people have experienced something different.³⁴³

As learning was often conversational in nature, language concerning faith was seen to be of vital importance. The ministers spoke of the ways their own faith had developed over time; this had changed the ways in which they conversed about God, faith and the spiritual life.

Kerrie:

Speaking differently about faith is crucial ... People have been burnt by the church. People are thinkers. They don’t want to just take on a whole lot of understandings that they just now see as fairy-tales. ... Building trusting relationships as a basis for then learning and growing together is crucial.

³⁴⁰ This included authors Pete Rollins, Phyllis Tickle and David Tacey.

³⁴¹ Appendix 8, Reference 5.

³⁴² Appendix 8, Reference 6.

³⁴³ Appendix 8, Reference 7.

Charles:

We've always been trying to break down the sacred/secular divide.³⁴⁴ To help that we've changed our theological language so that it fits more with how we would talk to these people on the day to day as well.

Kerrie:

I want to use language that opens up conversations, not language that shuts it down.³⁴⁵ ... There's not very many communities to belong to that you can really explore and be open-hearted and open-minded.

We are both passionate readers and explorers of ... mission culture and how to think about God and ... theology in this contemporary world. We both tend to throw that at people every chance we get, ... not just in preaching, but in meetings. Part of the formation is whenever we're with people is to try and keep them thinking about the core story.³⁴⁶

What we all seem to have in common is the core story of Jesus³⁴⁷, ... that sense of trying to keep that story alive and the wonder that that story points us to, the God [who] wants us to try to keep that core. ... Rather than having a program where we talk about that and then we go and do an outreach event or whatever, we try to imbue everything we do with that story, sometimes in conversations, sometimes through art, music.

I use language of "spirituality" a lot, and "transformation", getting to the core of the story. I'm very much into letting the story speak. ... "Let's worry less about doctrine and more about living the story."³⁴⁸ ... Just hang out with us. We have a sense of the mystery of God, and we love this story and that's enough." And then we talk about that, a *lot*, just in conversations.³⁴⁹

d. Church Leadership

The changes at Queenscliff were supported by a leadership culture that became increasingly permission-giving, open to change and mission-oriented.

Kerrie:

Don't think "Where do you want to be in five years?" Just do one little thing and then do the next thing and then do the next thing. Opportunities kept opening up and we kept

³⁴⁴ Appendix 8, Reference 8.

³⁴⁵ Appendix 8, Reference 9.

³⁴⁶ Appendix 8, Reference 10.

³⁴⁷ Appendix 8, Reference 11.

³⁴⁸ Appendix 8, Reference 12.

³⁴⁹ Appendix 8, Reference 13.

doing something else, whereas if we sat down and planned all this it would never have happened.

The core is the leadership trying to find ways of following the way of Jesus and nurturing our spirituality and our faith. ... It's kind of been about building relationships and seeing where it'll take us, rather than having a goal of where it'll take us... We don't have an agenda. We just build relationships.

Charles:

Seeing changes, yep, transformative change. ...

Kerrie:

And that permission-giving culture that we were talking about is part of that. ...

We've got four ministry teams and that's where activity happens. The Church Council is policy and direction, but the ministry teams have permission from the Church Council to do their thing. ... They just have an idea and put it into action ... because they know Church Council said, "If you can resource it, you can do it." That to me is a level of maturity that's quite unusual.

Charles:

There's a high level of trust.

Kerrie:

Trust in the core story that we're all living out of it.

Charles:

It's a "Yes" culture.³⁵⁰

The ministers actively shaped an environment of mutual learning among the church leadership and were prepared to experiment with new forms of leadership.

Kerrie:

We've used church council to educate a lot, too. We've alternated for the last few years, one month a Vision and Mission meeting, and one month a Business meeting. The Vision and Mission [meetings] are pure educative, visioning, planning. We always bring something

³⁵⁰ Appendix 8, Reference 10.

we're reading or a seminar we've been to or whatever to get people thinking about.³⁵¹

What we're playing around with at the moment is more that "new monastic" culture. ...³⁵²
What if you had half a dozen people who were committed to quiet reading, engaging faith, discipleship, and out of that came the ideas, the creativity? And you just carry the rest of the group along with you.³⁵³

Charles and Kerrie repeatedly stated that their time with the congregations had been a shared adventure of gradual but substantial change for all parties. The considered combination of faith practices, education for leaders and the wider community, and constant dialogical interactions added up to a smorgasbord of faith enrichment and expression.

To expand Foster's earlier quote:

The catechetical culture that nurtures and sustains a faith-forming education is not predominantly an institutional or ideological reality as much as it is a relational dynamic. Hospitable spaces for its practices of teaching and learning must be created. The relationships have to be nurtured. I believe those places and times potentially exist in many of the events currently listed on the calendars of every congregation.³⁵⁴

He went on to speak of "informal and formal conversations that bind [people] into a community of faith."³⁵⁵ The Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale congregations could be described as faith communities who were discovering an organic, yet disciplined, shared, yet open, common life. The permeable nature of the community was marked. This was not an exclusive learning community with a narrow agenda. Instead, both the membership and the learning foci were open; embracing spirituality and justice yet grounded in the Christian Story. The community demonstrated intentional practices of formation and education, permission-giving leadership, and a culture that encouraged inquiry, trust and transformation.³⁵⁶

³⁵¹ Appendix 8, Reference 11.

³⁵² Appendix 8, Reference 12.

³⁵³ Appendix 8, Reference 13.

³⁵⁴ Foster, *From Generation to Generation* p9.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p10.

³⁵⁶ Appendix 8, Reference 14.

5.2 The Gap Uniting Church, Queensland

Rev John Ruhle

thegapuca.org.au³⁵⁷

The Gap UC is situated in the suburb of the same name in Brisbane. Although only ten kilometres from the CBD, The Gap is a discrete pocket on the western edge of the city. Its location makes housing expensive. John Ruhle was the minister there from 2009 to 2015. He described The Gap as “middle- to upper-class” and fairly monocultural. However, John also said it was “a bit like a country town”, a secluded place where generations of the same families lived. The church is on the main road close to schools and a shopping village. The Gap UC aimed to be a community centre for the suburb. When I interviewed John, the morning worship service was attended by about 230 people (up from 130 on his arrival) with 30 to 40 children, and 25 to 30 people at the evening service. The congregation had a strong intergenerational focus and has employed successive ministry specialists with younger generations for decades. The property was also the site of a childcare centre operated by Wesley Mission, a UCA agency.

a. Worship and Prayer

Worship at The Gap had an emphasis on being intergenerational and participatory. John explained that learning for discipleship through worship was essential.

John said:

Sunday worship is a fantastic opportunity for discipleship and Christian education and faith formation. ... We're really intentional about having worship as an all-age thing. ... We could go to the model of having a traditional service and a family service, but we're really intentional about saying we worship together. We need our babies and our grandmas and granddads all together so that we learn and grow together.

³⁵⁷ "In all that we do, this is what we are on about. As a community of people who follow Jesus, our vision is to be Growing Life-Long Disciples of Christ. In our worship, care, outreach, administration & discipleship, our vision as a congregation is to be Growing Life-Long Disciples of Christ." The Gap Uniting church website. <http://www.thegapuca.org.au> (accessed January 2, 2018).

A worship team worked with John to organise Sunday services. Most weeks the children and young people went out part-way through the service to a Christian Education program called *Grow*. The Gap also held regular family worship services where all ages stayed for the whole service.

We'll have specific family services where we focus in on a theme and maybe do a heap of craft during the service or have puppets or do interactive things... inter-generationally.

A Certificate IV in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) provided substantial breadth to John's approach to communication and teaching in worship, with multi-sensory learning, use of symbols, stories and repetition. When I visited the church, John showed me large, constructed trees and bricks made as symbols for recent worship services. The worship space also had large banners with alliterative one-word themes for each week of the current teaching series (e.g., *Hope, Heaven, Here*).

Sunday worship is for me a key part of what we do discipleship-wise. That's why I've been really intentional about the preaching and teaching that we do and incorporating some different themes to preaching and providing opportunities during worship to create a discipleship sort of thing.

Regular *Months of Preaching and Teaching* were a highlight of morning worship. The monthly Sunday evening worship was described as creative and interactive, including videos and table discussions accompanied by tea and coffee.

b. Congregational Culture

Community life at The Gap UC seemed highly relational and active, with many activities for varied interests and ages groups: men's group, ladies' group, evening fellowship, potting group, walking group, men's tennis, and more.

Discipleship happens within those groups but it's not as intentional. It's sort of fellowship and relationship building... hopefully there's as much a missional and a discipleship aspect in that as there is in what we do in worship on a Sunday. ... Who we are as people of faith affects who we are every day of the week.

The intergenerational emphasis of the congregation included weekly worship, a family camp, and cross-cultural exposure experiences. "Family" was a metaphor for congregational identity and also for wider mission.

We're here for families. The congregation made a really intentional decision five years ago ... and they refurbished the hall and spent a heap of money for playgroups and got grants. ... We're here for community families, but we're also here for our congregational families. I put on a Families Worker a few years ago when they couldn't afford it, and we've grown into that position.

There was also a sense of belonging to the wider community and serving all generations.

The congregation is very much focussed on being a part of the community. What we do on a Sunday is really important but what we do every other day of the week is just as important. There's playgroups four days a week. There's "Fit After Fifty" classes four days a week. There's Kindy music classes three or four days a week, craft groups, potting groups, walking groups, men's groups, whole range of community stuff.

The church had built a strong relationship with the local state primary school. They supported the School Chaplain, were involved in teaching Religious Education, and ran a *Kids Hope* mentoring program. The whole school came to the church for special worship services at Christmas and Easter. John also participated in the school through visiting, mentoring and teaching religious education weekly.³⁵⁸

It's looking beyond ourselves. We're not here for ourselves, you know. We're here for the community. ... And as we look beyond ourselves, well, internally we've grown and grown and grown.

c. Learning Styles and Approaches

In addition to teaching in worship services, The Gap UC offered regular, programmed learning opportunities for different ages, encouraging biblical and theological learning with open dialogue. There were adult home groups for conversation, Bible study and prayer. These groups were largely self-directed. As a congregation they were purposeful in providing for young people—*Grow* on Sunday morning for children and youth, Kids Club, youth group, Day Camp for children and September Camp for youth. The church also encouraged participation in regional presbytery activities.

Months of Preaching and Teaching were held twice a year, accompanied by the opportunity to read and discuss a study resource. The series were promoted well in advance.

³⁵⁸ Appendix 9, Reference 1.

You focus in on a theme for the four weeks—*Generosity, Spiritual Gifts, Discipleship, Prayer, Creation. Hope*, when we look at *Heaven, Hell, Here and Hope*. ... There'll be two, twenty-minute preaching and teaching spots in a service where people can engage. I'll often use a resource. On *Hope*, I used Tom Wright's *Surprised By Hope* ... People from the congregation bought the book. ... On the Monday night I'll offer an opportunity for people to come and talk about the sermon. During the month on *Hope* we had fifty people turn up on a Monday night.³⁵⁹

The Monday evening programs consisted of short blocks rather than the expectation of longer term commitment.

Twice a year we have... months of preaching and teaching... A month on the Gospel, a month on an Epistle... In August we're having a month ... on *Suffering*, so *Grief, Grieving, Grace and Growth*. In October we have a month on Hebrews. ... [We] use the *Lent Event* material for Lent, and then we do different themed things for Advent as well.

The symbol for these teaching months was a large hot-air balloon hanging in the church. This served not only a reminder of what was happening, but as a metaphor for learning together.

"Let's hop in the hot air balloon together. Let's have a look at these topics. Let's grow together, and as we do, we're seeing new horizons. And we see our faith and the world in a different way." ... We've got questions, and we've got things we're not sure about. That's great. Bring all those questions to this place, and we'll work through it together.

Experiential or action-reflection learning was also encouraged. At the time of the interview, the children's and youth worker was Richard, an Aboriginal minister from North Queensland. In 2011, Richard took a group, forty-five people, from three to eighty-three-year-olds, *Walking on Country* at Ingham and Palm Island, telling the story of his people, their culture and the land.

It's about relationship building, but it's about "Where is our faith? What does it mean to be Indigenous and Christian? What does it mean for us to be Christian and non-Indigenous in this country?" We went up there not to build anything. We didn't go up there to take anything. We were there purely for relationship. ... And the stuff that came out of it, just fantastic... This year people said, "We want to go again." So we're doing two *Walking On Countrys*.

³⁵⁹ Appendix 9, Reference 2.

Through John's connection with *UnitingWorld*, the Uniting Church's agency for international church partnerships, some of the congregation had been to East Timor. A visit to North India was planned for September 2012.

For John, this reflected an "all of life" understanding of discipleship.

Faith doesn't start and stop on a Sunday morning. Discipleship doesn't start and stop. What we do in all of life, if you're at the gym, all the relationships and the conversation that we have, if we're at playgroup, if we're at music class, if we're at craft, that's all discipleship for me. It doesn't get compartmentalised to "Well, we do discipleship or we do Christian education *now*." How does that seep into every part of everything that we do?

Learning was both experiential, such as through cross-cultural encounters, but also both didactic and inquiry-based.

I present people some really meaty theological stuff... The congregation trusts me enough to know I'm not going to blow anybody out of the water. ... I present, "This is what people on this end of the argument think. This is what people on that end of the argument think. Here's a balanced view that I think might live in the middle somewhere." ... ³⁶⁰ I get seventy-year-olds saying, "I've always wondered about that?" or "I've never been game to ask this question, but you've given me permission to ask the question." And I go, "That's what we're here for. I'm not here to give you all the answers, but we're here to journey through this and learn together."

Within the theological foundations of the Uniting Church, John recognised the importance of providing people with permission to explore, ask questions, and think critically.³⁶¹ This included being willing to admit that even as the minister, he didn't have all the answers.³⁶²

d. Church Leadership

The church's organisational system was based on encouraging people to serve in their areas of gifts and passions, often in teams, in a permission-giving environment. Mission teams and leadership groups gave oversight to a wide range of groups and activities, giving people the freedom to initiate and create within the overall vision and direction of the congregation.

³⁶⁰ Appendix 9, Reference 3.

³⁶¹ Appendix 9, Reference 4.

³⁶² Appendix 9, Reference 5.

We're very intentional about having our mission teams. There's a Worship team, an Outreach team, a Discipleship team, a Care team, and the Finance and Admin. ... Our ministry team are resource ministers, but the engine room of who we are and what we do as a congregation comes from those teams.³⁶³

John saw ministry and leadership as being about encouraging people's giftedness and passion. He identified his own ministry focus as Christian education.

There are ministries that have stopped and died since I've been here, things that have run for years and years and years. [We] didn't have the people with the giftedness and the passion that wanted to keep it going, and I said "Well why are we doing it? Just let it stop." But there's been so many *new* things that have grown up or things that have been here that have just flourished, because I say to people "Use your gift."³⁶⁴

The Gap had "signature programs" which included the *Grow* Christian Education program, the *Months of Preaching and Teaching*, *Kids Hope*, and *Walking on Country*. A Discipleship Team gives oversight to Christian education, including *Grow*, with its own co-ordinator and team of leaders. According to John, the Church Council was "big on teams" and "big on permission-giving."

A five-year strategic plan guided the resourcing and growth of the congregation. This was reviewed regularly and shaped the organisational structure of the mission teams. The church leadership fostered a culture of people using their gifts, giving permission and working well together.

The Enneagram has transformed how our Church Council works, how people use their gifts, how we understand each other, how conflict is resolved.

We should be doing things that are failing. If we're not doing stuff that fails from time to time, well we're not trying hard enough, or we're not taking enough risks. ... If the only things you ever say "yes" to are things that are a guaranteed certain winner, you're not taking much of a risk. I just encourage people to have a go.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Appendix 9, Reference 7.

³⁶⁴ Appendix 9, Reference 8.

³⁶⁵ Appendix 9, Reference 9.

An example of this volunteering was a qualified church member offering to lead a seven-week Marriage Enrichment course. John's response was:

"Go for your life. It fits within who we are, reaching out to families, reaching out to the community. You've got the gifts and the abilities to make it happen."

Hence, the minister's contribution was to allow such a culture to flourish by encouraging others.

I love the resource ministry model. I see myself as a resource minister. I'm not here to do everything by any means. Part of my job is that when I go, hopefully people go "Oh, what was John doing anyway?"³⁶⁶

Clearly John's role, attitudes and expectations were important, however the narrative here was of a congregational culture that developed over time. John didn't portray himself as prodding inert church members, rather he painted a picture of people who enthusiastically offered to serve.

For me a healthy congregation is one that's serving, one that's growing within their own life and discipleship.³⁶⁷

The goal is that we're in the community sharing God's love and grace with people, sharing the Good News and sharing the story of the difference that Jesus makes in our life.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Appendix 9, Reference 10.

³⁶⁷ Appendix 9, Reference 11.

³⁶⁸ Appendix 9, Reference 12.

5.3 Clare Uniting Church, SA

Rev Simon Dent

www.facebook.com/clareuniting³⁶⁹

Clare is a rural regional centre, 140 kilometres north of Adelaide. In 2011 the town population was 3,278. Clare is a local hub for education, health and local government services as well as retail services. As well as being a farming community, the region is noted for wine-making and attracts tourists. The demography is varied with farmers, retirees, regular and transient town workers, and some people attracted by cheaper rural housing.

The Uniting Church is one of seven churches in Clare and is committed to working ecumenically. Rev Simon Dent was the minister from 2005 until 2014. The congregation also employed a children and family worker. In 2012, the congregation had two morning services—a traditional service with twenty to thirty people and a contemporary service with about 120 people. The congregation was mainly comprised of the older farming community, along with some younger families from the area.

a. Worship and Prayer

As with many rural churches, Sunday worship was a focal point as the weekly gathering for the community. For Clare UC, it was important that worship had an intergenerational emphasis, combined with an emphasis on biblical teaching and the expectation of transformative encounters with God.

One of the foundational things for faith development for our children is sharing in worship with their families. Once a month we will have a worship service where the children stay in and there's a ... family focus. It's not exclusively about the children, but there are obviously children components that they would connect [with], and the goal ultimately is that the whole service itself will be helpful for the whole community. ... If our children can see their parents worshipping, they will have a sense that this is not just something that we do, it's actually a part of our life together.

³⁶⁹ Clare Uniting Church Facebook page. [http:// www.facebook.com/clareuniting](http://www.facebook.com/clareuniting) (accessed 15 May, 2018).

On two other Sundays there was a time during worship for children who then left to attend a group learning time called *Sparks*. There was also a monthly *Sparks* worship time led by adults.

Simon emphasised worship as a place for growing disciples through preaching and teaching. It was hoped that through worship, people would encounter the God of grace, a Jesus risen and present, and the Spirit who draws people to participate in God's mission.

Primarily in terms of discipleship, the preaching and teaching ministry is quite foundational in giving our community a sense of being a part of something which is much bigger than themselves, and yet the Spirit is drawing them into participation in that. So, a proclamation that says that the future of the world and the future of the church is not in the church's hands, but in Jesus's hands, and recognising that Jesus now is present in the church calling us to share with that. We start primarily with ... the mission of God. ... "What are the opportunities that God is giving us to share in that?"

The biblical texts and themes for worship were usually linked with Lent, Easter and Christmas. At other times they were based on Teaching Series chosen by the church leadership. These series could be based on books of the Bible or theological or discipleship themes.

We will look at what our leadership has discerned in a sense of how we're called to participate in what Jesus is doing. ... At the moment we've got a series called "Connect," which is taking up four areas of what the church is called to do in participating in Jesus's ministry.

Simon recognised that in his rural congregation, many people were comfortable with traditional worship, and that it was mainly the younger people who were "looking forward to new expressions of what worship is." Hence, one aim of worship was to deepen the discipleship of established churchgoers.

In addition to Sunday worship, the church ran a weekly *Mainly Music* program attended by about 25 families with young children.

It is difficult to frame worship as a vehicle for preaching and teaching without seeing the minister's role and approach as pivotal, and for Simon this was the case. He spoke extensively about his theological perspective and how he sought to emphasise who God is and what God was doing in the lives of Christians and in the wider community.

Being an ordained minister now for just over six years, [it's] ... only in the last couple of years I've had a real freedom to actually discern what is my particular calling, ... to preach and teach the gospel and to enable our community to help discern what the Spirit is calling us to be engaged in in the community.

There's a danger in our preaching that we'll focus exclusively on what the church is called to do. ... A lot of the focus on my preaching is just recognising that God himself is the God of mission. He's the one present doing his work.³⁷⁰

A lot of it is fundamentally about the grace of God so that we can be renewed in our faith.³⁷¹

b. Congregational Culture

The learning culture of Clare Uniting Church was oriented towards growing disciples across generations to participate in what God was doing in the world. In recent years this led to a clear priority on ministry with families, within and beyond the congregation.

One thing that our church at the moment is really focusing on is ministry to young families in the community. We've had a program that enabled us to employ somebody to lead our church in reaching out to young families. ... It's more about discerning who Jesus is amongst us, but also just reflecting and looking at the community and what the current needs are and see what our current resources are there as well.³⁷²

Youth ministry was also considered to be important. As well as a youth group meeting on two Sundays a month, the young people were invited to lead their youth ministry. They held a monthly youth group, yet the ministry focus was more on developing young leaders as disciples and engaging them in mission.

The culture of any congregation changes over time. Simon indicated that a stronger emphasis on empowering members for ministry came as a result of his own crisis in ministry a couple of years prior—a point of desperation that led to a kind of release. Simon recognised that he had been acting as if everything depending on him as THE Leader.

I consider that moment as, in some ways, a new conversion for me, where somehow my theology moved from my head to my heart, where I recognised again with a renewed passion that I can actually do nothing to bring redemption for anybody, and it's only ever what Jesus does, and he's the one that has taken responsibility for us.

Now I have a freedom in that and I'm so passionate for ministry in the church, passionate to preach the gospel, passionate to help other people to discover the grace of God, that God is the one of mission, he calls us to be a part of that.

³⁷⁰ Appendix 10, Reference 1.

³⁷¹ Appendix 10, Reference 2.

³⁷² Appendix 10, Reference 3.

As a result, Simon concentrated more directly on his own gifts of preaching and teaching, leading to a broader focus on equipping others for their individual gifts and ministries. The shift wasn't about sharing the workload of ministry; it came from a deeper recognition of God's grace actively working in the lives of the congregation. This resulted in a change in Simon's relationship with the congregation and brought further developments in the leadership culture.³⁷³

c. Learning and Teaching Styles

Simon explained that discipleship at Clare UC was Christ-centred. Faith was seen to be formed through worship, small group study and prayer, and personal spiritual disciplines.

The Spirit of God is present amongst us in our own lives. Discipleship is first and foremost about listening for who Jesus is amongst us and living in that. That's a whole range of things from personal discipleship, the traditional methods of Bible reading and prayer, silence, fasting, all of those sorts of things, as well as the more corporate expression of that in our community.

There was an emphasis on grace, not only as forgiveness, but also as empowerment for living.

Sometimes we think exclusively of the grace of God's unconditional favour for us. I don't necessarily think that goes far enough. ... It's actually the power of God in us ... to walk in the way that Jesus is enabling and empowering us to walk as well. ... Our ultimate goal of any ministry or mission is ultimately for people to come into a life-giving relationship with Jesus and be sharers in what he's doing.

The congregation's teaching ministry included teaching missions; these are series that explored a particular theme or resource, often recommended by the minister. This usually includes resources for small groups, which Simon called "little discipleship communities," and sometimes daily devotional materials. Series included *The Cross-Centred Life*, *Connect (Connect with the Word, Connect in Worship, Connect in Community, Connect in Mission)*, *Engage* and *The Prodigal God*.

Some of our home groups are family groups. ... People bring something to share for tea. ... There will be an intentional children's teaching time, ... lots of activity or some sort of fun on a particular theme. Then children either will go and do homework or go to bed. ... The adults will do a more formal study. ... That has worked quite well. ... If our children can see that faith development ... a vital relationship with Jesus is important to their parents, that will impact them about how they go about doing their Christian walk as well.

³⁷³ Appendix 10, Reference 4.

Outside of these series, groups were free to discern and choose their study and sharing emphases.

In any community you're going to have such a diverse view of what's important, what the gospel is, what discipleship is. ... There's a degree in which you need to allow your people to discern what's right for them.³⁷⁴

While there was a definite intentionality about teaching through preaching in worship, a desired outcome was that people would be more open to learning and discerning from the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit in everyday life.

Another aspect of the preaching and teaching ministry is to encourage our people to recognise that God still speaks to us. ... Each time we come together ... on a Sunday to hear the proclaimed word of the Scriptures, I'm always hopeful that it's a time where there's an expectation that God will be speaking to the people through the sermon³⁷⁵ ... so that when people go home ... they read their Scriptures with a sense of openness to actually hear God's word speaking to them through the Scriptures as well.³⁷⁶

d. Church Leadership

Simon spoke about the role of church leaders in discerning what God was doing and in becoming more open to reshaping the church for the sake of mission. This openness led to a culture of "permission-giving."

There are so many things that the church could be doing. Often there is such a scatter-gun approach to mission that means that you don't really have a corporate focus which provides a real sense of energy, identity ... what the church's particular mission is. Discernment is very much fundamental to that.

There's been quite a bit of permission-giving from the broader congregation to the leadership, recognising that because ministry is not fundamentally about needs ... [or] survival. It's been fundamentally about the reality of Jesus amongst us and what Jesus is doing.³⁷⁷

More flexible and open structures were seen to be an embodiment of the church's beliefs and hope.

³⁷⁴ Appendix 10, Reference 5.

³⁷⁵ Appendix 10, Reference 6.

³⁷⁶ Appendix 10, Reference 7.

³⁷⁷ Appendix 10, Reference 8.

You also need to be able to provide a good structure in the church so that the way that the church operates is a reflection of the hope that we have. ... It's one thing to say that Jesus is on a mission. ... It's another thing to actually live as a community as though that were actually a true thing.³⁷⁸

The preaching and teaching ministry ... enabled us to see that mission was ultimately about what God was doing. There was a freedom then for us to say, "If God's doing it, let's change our structure so that we can be a part of that as well."

Outcomes of the *Engage* series included the appointment of a Family Worker and a redevelopment of the church entrance and office reception to be more visitor-friendly.

Our reception area is similar to what you might see in a doctor's surgery or an office. ... So they come in and ... this is a contemporary space that doesn't communicate [that] church is about what used to happen in the fifties.

Simon saw a balance between the discernment of leaders and that of individuals and groups.

I think there's a degree in which you need to allow your people to discern what's right for them, but also recognising a corporate identity and a corporate message that the church is proclaiming needs to be heard in the midst of all of that. ... If the church entrusts itself to Jesus and what Jesus is doing, there is a sense in which it doesn't always have to be in control of the leadership. ... The Spirit's speaking to small groups as well, and that's one aspect of the whole broader mission that Jesus is doing.

Here, both discernment and permission-giving arise from the same conviction that God's Spirit has been given to each person, and each person has gifts and abilities.

Traditionally our church has been a community that has been very much minister-centric. They've looked towards the minister to give them a sense of direction and hope. ... My approach to ministry is largely ... about Jesus being the centre of ministry and recognising that the whole church has been given the gift of sharing in that.

³⁷⁸ Appendix 10, Reference 9.

5.4 Mapoon Congregation, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Congress, Queensland

Rev Michelle Cook and Mr James Hughes

Mapoon is an aboriginal community of about 250 people 90 kilometres north of Weipa in far north Queensland. It was the site of a Presbyterian mission from the 1880s. In 1963 the Queensland government forcibly removed the residents to allow aluminium mining in the areas. In recent years, new housing was built and the people previously from Mapoon returned to the area. Due to the rebuilding, Mapoon houses are well-spaced with surrounding bushland. The town itself is beside the water. Mapoon is currently managed by its own town Council. There is a local pre-school and primary school, and young people go to Weipa or beyond for high school. The main employers are the local council, health services, the education department and grant-funded land and sea care. The area has a mix of clans, traditional land owners (Tjungundi), neighbouring tribes and Islander people.

There is a small faith community under the umbrella of the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). Michelle Cook and James Hughes, both Anglo Australians, had a shared ministry, although their roles differed. Michelle is an ordained minister (deacon) and James is a youth worker. At the time of the interview, Michelle was the minister to the Mapoon congregation and also conducted leadership training for the Yalga-Binbi institute run by the UAICC. James worked for that UAICC across the communities of Mapoon, Napranum and Aurkuun. He had worked in the area since 2004. While this interview speaks about Mapoon, the ministry with youth and young adults described here included those from Napranum and sometimes Arurkun. Michelle commenced at Mapoon in 2011, having previously served with the Weipa congregation. Ministry was previously undertaken by the minister from Napranum. James and Michelle concluded their ministry at Mapoon at the end of 2013.

a. Worship and Prayer

The weekly worship of the faith community was intergenerational, interactive and intentionally educative. This was central to faith formation. Worship took place on Sunday evenings, preceded by attendees being picked up by car. There was no church building. Worship was held in an undercover area of the local school. The congregation consisted of about twenty-five children up to age twelve years, and five to ten adults, mainly women. As the ordained minister, Michelle had

a key role in leading weekly worship and this was often shared with James. With a congregation of predominantly children and youth, a key formational aim was to build faith through Scripture, story, song, activity and ritual.

Michelle:

The main focus is the worship services and trying to help people do faith development through leading worship or participating in worship or organising a Bible reading for worship ... as well as pastoral support for people.

Michelle and James experimented with finding a pattern that would be both interactive and instructional—teaching the basics of the Bible and faith, developing a sense of community through participation, and encouraging both faith inquiry and faith expression. This included exploring the same theme or Bible text over a four-week period.

Michelle:

The first Sunday of the month we're doing a Messy Church thing, trying to encourage parents to come with their children as a soft entry in to church... The older ... ten and eleven-year-old kids come and help work out what craft we might do, and then [they] are the leaders on the tables for the craft, ... do the interactive learning about the Scripture passage, tell the Scripture passage, sing some songs and do prayer time.

On the second Sunday of the month we're doing a fellowship night. We sing a lot of songs. People can share stories or we do some more personal experience type things. ... Part of that idea is to get some of the adults in the congregation to share their testimonies.

The third Sunday of the month we do a more intentional Bible study. So, where are the connections? What is this Scripture passage?³⁷⁹

Then next week will be Holy Communion... The last couple of months... I've gone through different ways of understanding communion through different stories from the New Testament.

Involving young people in planning and leading worship was seen as contributing to their faith as well as to their confidence in expression and leadership; fostering active expression rather than passive reception so that, as Michelle said, "they can actually share what God's been doing in their

³⁷⁹ Appendix 11, Reference 1.

lives in a more public setting.”³⁸⁰ All ages loved to sing, and extemporaneous prayer was also a vital part of worship.

Michelle:

When we do intercessory prayers, they will come up with ideas. ... They usually think of lots of people to pray and we write them down in a book, so that we can look back on them.

Youth ministry also had a focus on worship and prayer when they met as a group or travelled to events. Through wider church events and visits, young people were exposed to worship and music on a broader and larger scale. Worship was also a setting in which the connection between faith and culture was expressed and affirmed.

b. Congregational Culture

Church and *culture* have particular meanings here. Due to the Presbyterian Mission’s history, attitudes towards the church remained ambivalent. Many of the local Christians were Pentecostals. Identification with the UCA as a denomination was not high. Some of the older people still considered themselves Presbyterians. The Uniting Church’s presence was known through the UAICC, Frontier Services patrol ministry and community services. James and Michelle were well-known by the town as “church people.”

Church culture intertwined with the life of the local community in terms of relationships, local customs and daily habits. To be in ministry here is to step daily between church and community roles and be immersed in the local indigenous culture. Michelle and James had broader pastoral roles in the Mapoon community—supporting community services and their staff, running a community playgroup, connecting with the school (including religious education) and pre-school (James is a qualified pre-school teacher), driving the local bus, and at weddings and funerals.

James’ and Michelle’s roles provide insight into the dynamic between faith and culture. In church as well as in the Mapoon community, Aboriginal elders were to be respected for their wisdom and leadership. Michelle’s and James’ involvement with the local community built mutual trust and was also educative for them about the local people, their culture and their traditions.

³⁸⁰ Appendix 11, Reference 2.

James:

Culturally we need to listen to elders. ... all the time about how church runs and how we're going and what they think needs to happen in regard to church and what we need to do, ... how we need to act, whether we need to help somebody.³⁸¹

A lot of the other activities we do other than church ... involve cultural activities such as... collecting yams or going to the swamp or going fishing. ... They're activities that people like to do and we can help out with, because we have transport and ... we're willing helpers. People trust us and are prepared to show us a lot of things, teach us what we need to know. That has a very strong cultural basis in it as well.

Michelle and James were seeking to form a congregational identity that reflected and respected Aboriginal culture, that shaped faith for young people, while also respecting and broadening the faith of older people. This was reflected in their approaches to Christian education. Ministry involved a multi-faceted strategy of personal, social, cultural and spiritual growth—not only concerned with the church but also with the wider community.³⁸²

Michelle:

[An] incarnational, integrated understanding of discipleship. It's not about "How do we make sure that someone's preaching at church or leading music at church, but how are we developing people to make differences in their community and in their own lives?"³⁸³

James:

For some of these communities, change is vital, you know. Change, there *must* be change. ... The only way it can happen is people. People need to change their lives. By changing their lives they'll change their communities, they'll change their families.

Michelle:

The only way that the people can change is through the work of God ... We try and encourage the congregation in Mapoon and the youth group to be thinking about what spiritual resources they have to make the right choices in their lives, the "God choices."³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ Appendix 11, Reference 3.

³⁸² Appendix 11, Reference 4.

³⁸³ Appendix 11, Reference 5.

³⁸⁴ Appendix 11, Reference 6.

James:

Part of what we do is say “There is another way. God is another way. You can live a very full and exciting and happy life.”³⁸⁵

c. Learning and Teaching Styles

The Mapoon ministry had a priority on younger generations, building basic foundations for faith and forming disciples. Teaching and learning about faith was highly participatory and conversational and took place intentionally through faith practices such as worship, prayer, music and Bible studies.³⁸⁶

Teaching was grounded in the biblical narrative, which was read, discussed and enacted.

Michelle:

We would get some of the kids together after school one day, talk about the Bible reading, say “Well how would we act this out?” They act it out. I take photos, or a video and then we edit it together and put them speaking over the top.

Faith expression raised questions about Aboriginal culture in relation to Christianity. Michelle and James encouraged people to see these as integrated.

Michelle:

In July, August, which can be Lectionary-wise, the Creation thing, we’ll do some cultural creation sort of stuff. ... We might sing songs and then the kids will get up and start dancing and shake a leg and then look at us like “Are we allowed to dance this way?” and we go, “Yes, yes. Go, keep dancing.” So, trying to encourage people to express themselves in a ... cultural way without feeling like you can’t do that in church.

James:

We don’t want to separate people’s faith from people’s culture. ... The culture of the people is connected to the faith of the people, and always has been, and always will be. ...

³⁸⁵ Appendix 11, Reference 7.

³⁸⁶ During my visit, James and Michelle led a Bible study as part of young people’s preparation for baptism.

For us and for the Congress, that's never been the case. Faith fits in very well with culture.
³⁸⁷

James also led Bible-based discussions with young people to increase their understanding and ability to explore the text.

James:

It's become less and less of a "Let's do all these activities" thing. ... It's also going deeper in and saying ... "What is this faith that we're talking about? Can you understand the Bible in a different way?" If you don't read it literally, how might you read it? Do you go to English classes at school? Do you understand about metaphor? Do you understand about different ways of expressing yourself, maybe through poetry? ... How can we see this in the Bible? ... They've certainly been enthused by the whole thing.

This integration of faith and culture extended to taking young people on local outings, visiting other communities, travelling to Cape York, all allowing valuable time for conversations. For some teenagers, youth group also provided a positive alternative to less healthy options with their peer group and in their town.³⁸⁸

James:

We've done a whole lot of stuff together as a youth group, which has given those kids an identity, a purpose to act in those situations where they may not be able to act usually. They wouldn't have had a group of people to stand around them and stand with them and do those things.

James acted strategically in developing youth leadership through exposure experiences, taking people to Synod camps, the UCA National Christian Youth Convention and UAICC gatherings. He built a partnership with Scotch Oakburn College, a UCA school in Launceston, resulting in two-way visits between Tasmania and North Queensland. Further visits took place with a Korean congregation and another suburban church in Brisbane. The engagement with a different culture and the resulting peer friendships had an impact on young people's views of themselves and others.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ Appendix 11, Reference 8.

³⁸⁸ Appendix 11, Reference 9.

³⁸⁹ Appendix 11, Reference 10.

Michelle:

James got the kids that he decided showed some leadership potential... and they met every week for the five, six weeks beforehand to practice speaking about their lives. ... "What am I scared of? What do I really love to do? What are my strengths and weaknesses?"

James:

Cape York kids stood up and spoke in front of seven hundred private school kids in Launceston. "This is me. This is my life. This is what I like to do. I'm really glad to be here." And [that] created such a bridge that it's continued on.

The flip-side was that when the Mapoon young people took their visitors into the mangroves to look for mussels, suddenly *they* were the experts. Similarly, when Mapoon youth attended wider church events, they were amazed that others wanted to know about their lives.

Michelle:

There are people who aren't black that are going to just want to know who you are, and that's why we say, "Go to NCYC." ... "What do you mean?" "No, they want to know." "Oh, they want to know about me? About me?"

James:

They don't believe us. But when they get there, that's exactly what happens. People really want to know about their lives, really want to listen to them, really love them for who they are. ... And even though they don't believe us to start with, the reality of the Christian community comes and 'hits them hard.'

Mapoon young people were not only exposed to people from different cultures but also their Christian faith. Speakers and musicians at Queensland *Summer Madness* Camp and the National Christian Youth Convention made a big impression on them.

d. Church Leadership

Church leadership at Mapoon was an evolving work-in-progress, relying on Michelle's and James' examples, their encouragement and equipping of local people. Due to young people leaving town for study and work, sustaining leadership was a challenge. James spoke of the exposure and exchange visits with young people from Mapoon and Napranum as intentional leadership development.

James:

I thought very carefully about the young people that I would take. ... They weren't necessarily the kids that stood out the most, but they were kids that really showed a commitment to growing themselves. ... It opened up their horizons so much. It opened up their confidence so much because suddenly they were meeting these white kids who they would never ever meet in any other context, kids who are really interested in them and really wanted to show them a good time and help them as much as they could and wanted the most for them in their lives that they could possibly achieve.

Michelle:

I think that's part of leadership development, ... not being so defensive about their own culture, and protective about that, but open to others in a way that respects themselves as well as respecting other people.

While growing leaders included instruction in Christian faith, it was often about *being* with young people—modelling faith, providing stepping-stone experiences and encouragement. This included empowering young people to ask questions and make choices about their lives.

Michelle:

"Incarnational." That's really how I understand my leadership style, to be present, and to model what I'm expecting. ... Then it's about ... "scaffolding," ... giving some ways to get to a place, and then eventually taking some of the supports away so people will do it by themselves.³⁹⁰ ... It's learning by doing... and shaping your life by experiencing your life. ... It seems to work better here by having some sort of activity that works it out rather than a persuasive argument.

James:

"What do you guys want in your lives? What do you see as your aspirations? OK, that's great. How can we get there? Because we *can* get there. You see problems. Let's figure out ways to get over those problems."

The indigenous cultural environment had a strong communal dimension. In correlation, young people also grew to learn that the church was a rich community beyond their local experience.

³⁹⁰ Appendix 11, Reference 11.

Michelle:

It's not like *my* individual personal relationship with God, but *our* personal relationship with God. ... And it's not just here that there are people of God; there are people of God all over the place.

James:

Like it's *you* decide to follow Jesus, but you don't follow Jesus alone. You become part of that community of faith, of that family of God.

5.5 Congregations as Learning Communities

The theme of this chapter is about how a *community generates learning* and how *learning generates community*. Community fosters new learning; new learning transforms community. Congregations engage in a wide range of formal and informal teaching and learning activities, yet this question is about more than particular programs.

Learning communities can be seen as a learning culture that is both collective and individual, a group actively exploring a shared interest or passion, and a community working intentionally on how they best learn.³⁹¹ Byrnes' list of characteristics of learning communities includes the following:³⁹²

- commitment by participants rather than control of them
- valuing of participation at all levels
- experimental and innovative practice
- double-loop learning
- encouragement of people to become resources for each other
- review of models and practices

³⁹¹ Janette Hill, "Learning Communities: Theoretical Foundations for Making Connections," in *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments*, ed. David Jonassen and Susan Land (New York: Routledge, 2012).

³⁹² Byrnes, "We Don't Need Another Hero!", p66f.

- responsive to learning as much as knowledge
- increasing awareness of the spirituality and symbolic aspects of the organisational life and its leadership

Some of the above are relational qualities, some concern attitudes towards learning itself, and others are about the nature of learning processes.

a. Community generates new learning

Across the sample, church leaders often used relational language to speak about the culture of their congregations and their own ministry roles. Categories arising from the interview analysis included participation, relationship-building, open and inclusive community, conversation and dialogue, and emphasis on intergenerational community. Leadership cultures of openness, trust and permission-giving were described. The narratives portrayed healthy and empowering relationships being built purposefully and gradually.³⁹³ Community-building is perpetual because people grow and change over time, and people enter and leave communities.

At Queenscliff, Kerrie and Charles highlighted how the congregation's hospitality led to greater diversity and a broader sense of communal identity. This in turn fostered more open conversations about faith. While Simon described the church journey at Clare in more theological terms, he acknowledged that interpersonal openness, vulnerability, trust and encouragement were keys to a community life that empowered people to live and serve as disciples. In Mapoon, James and Michelle recognised that the faith and leadership buoyancy of young people was formed through planned and spontaneous peer group interactions. At The Gap, *pilgrimage* and *journey* were metaphors of growth and movement used by John to describe the common life of faith.

Analysing the church in systemic terms, Hawkins and Shapiro recognise that relationships are critical.³⁹⁴ Reflecting Foster, Shapiro describes the "art of conversation" as a core attribute. The simplicity of that phrase belies the breadth of behaviours and attitudes that made it possible.

³⁹³ For a learning community to be generative, it needs, as Charles Foster claimed, a *relational dynamic*. Foster, *From Generation to Generation*.

³⁹⁴ Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership*. Shapiro, *How Your Congregation Learns: The Learning Journey from Challenge to Achievement*.

Learning-community practitioners and Christian educators provide rich suites of processes for building community life; not just a general warm fuzziness, but steps towards forming necessary attributes of learning organisations. For Kline and Saunders, step three of *Ten Steps to a Learning Organisation* is to "make the workplace safe for thinking."³⁹⁵ Is it OK to ask a question? Do you feel free to express a contrary opinion or give voice to a doubt?

Queenscliff and The Gap exemplified safe environments in which adults were free to doubt and question. At Mapoon, youth and children were encouraged to discuss faith and explore the Bible openly, in contrast with some cultural norms. In Clare, a positive relational environment was undergirded by the belief that the Spirit both gifted and called each person to make a contribution, to give voice to what they were hearing and asking.

b. Christian Community is always “on the way” with God

A faith community can be generative of new learning if it fosters and values the relational qualities that welcome *formational* growth (enculturation) and *transformational* growth (conversion). In both senses, a learning community is always becoming a community.³⁹⁶

Christians speak of becoming “Christ-like” in character. The unfolding journey of faith is not only relational but also spiritual. The Church is a people “on the way,” not just because history is incomplete, but because the Church is called both to be and to become God’s people. To say that becoming community has a spiritual dimension is not to say that it is other-worldly or transcendent. Growing in effectiveness as a learning community through deeper, more authentic relationships involves progressive attention to human attitudes and behaviours, and to communal identity and purpose. For Christians, this is in some way directed towards the mission of God.

Boyung Lee says that the church is a particular kind of corporate entity with a communal identity.³⁹⁷ The people of God are a *Covenant* people and the *Body of Christ*. From her Korean perspective, Lee questions whether a Western, individualist view of the church as a collective of people who “get along well together” is a sufficient basis for a community of faith. The reality that

³⁹⁵ Kline and Saunders, *Ten Steps to a Learning Organization* p91ff.

³⁹⁶ James Fowler spoke of *becoming* Christian rather than *being* Christian. James W Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000).

³⁹⁷ Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations Through Community* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013).

we belong firstly not to one another but to God creates, in Lee's terms, a *communalism* that highlights our individuality, challenging the dominance of power of some over others. Both individual and community are relativised through our identity as the people of God.

The Church is distinctive as a learning community not only because it has divine purpose but because it is in a living relationship with the Triune God. For the people of God, Christian community is not simply a theological concept; it provides the relational basis for the common life of worship, witness and service. Learning communities differ according to how they are formed.³⁹⁸ Is their membership and activity tightly directed or loosely negotiated, mandatory or voluntary? A congregation is not a school class, limited to learning about certain subjects at particular locations and scheduled times. Rather, a faith community of disciples share a mutual life grounded in shared beliefs and values, a common (hi)story, corporate rituals and customs, communal places, and a shared purpose. Learning community theories emphasise communal qualities that encourage shared learning, which benefits both individuals and the whole. The Christian Church finds itself with a calling and larger purpose than this: the *koinonia* of the faith community is a participation in the life of God in the world. The learning agenda of a faith community includes the whole of each person's life, the whole of the community's life, and the whole of God's purposes. There is a global, even cosmic, curriculum for education in which community members are called to be active learners, not passive observers.

For Newbiggin, the life of the church is a participation in that which it proclaims and that which it is becoming. "Community," "communication" and "communion" all have the same root—the Latin *communitas* and *communis*, meaning "common" or "common life."³⁹⁹ In their development of a communicative theology, Scharer and Hilberath speak of *communio* to refer to "the special sacramental community that constitutes the church in its diverse forms."⁴⁰⁰ They seek to connect the nature of the church with the way it communicates. "Whether or not the transmission of the *communio* is successful, both synchronically (within contemporary people) and diachronically (with one's mothers and fathers in faith), depends ultimately on the church's culture of

³⁹⁸ Hill, "Learning Communities: Theoretical Foundations for Making Connections".

³⁹⁹ "Community", *English: Oxford Living Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/community> (accessed February 20, 2018).

⁴⁰⁰ Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative: Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), Footnote p175.

communication.”⁴⁰¹ For these authors, the gift of community received in being/becoming the church should have a corollary in how it communicates faith both within and beyond itself. This “gifted We” is “a sacrament, a sign and instrument for the innermost union with God as well as for the unity of humankind.”⁴⁰² Speaking specifically of teaching and learning opportunities, they affirm that faith is experienced when the “gift character of the We”, community as a God-given gift, is embodied.⁴⁰³

In Scharer and Hilberath’s terms, communication is the link between revelation and faith, experienced in community. The authors’ overall concern is how people learn theology within the ecclesial context of the Roman Catholic Church. They contrast a solid, hierarchical, traditional, dogmatic church system with how God’s revelation is received and takes root more organically in local communities of faith. Their desire to free up the system could be seen in stark contrast to the breakdown of denominational education systems described at the start of this thesis. Yet, to make the comparison with Foster’s analysis again, a similar point is being made: the nature of God is such that revelation is often communicated via *communitas* that by the Spirit’s presence are places of communion.

c. Fluid Church

Pete Ward suggests in *Liquid Church* that the church’s “ability to be an effective agent for mission in the culture” requires a shift in thinking and practice from “seeing church as a gathering of people meeting in one place at one time—that is, a congregation—to a notion of church as a series of relationships and communications.”⁴⁰⁴ Ward proposes a shift from “solid church” to a more fluid, relational understanding of church grounded in the *perichoresis* of the Trinity.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p81.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p95. “The fact that in the group another person is able to open him—or herself up to me, that we are able to open up to one another, that we are able to suffer and rejoice together and enrich one another, all of this we experience time and again as gift.” Ibid., p94.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p93.

⁴⁰⁴ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), p2.

⁴⁰⁵ He bases his argument on Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of “liquid modernity.” Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2000). Bauman sees that capital, labour, production and social systems have become fluid. There is a resultant loss of local community and a rise of capitalist-fuelled individual consumerism. In a liquid society, what constitutes community has become less clear. Does community come before or after individual choice?

A fluid church is a cluster of relational networks that overlap solid church structures but are not bound by them. These relationships are what people often value about the church, and how it connects with its neighbourhood.

Liquid church will take these relational contacts and treat them as the glue that binds the church together. Networked, informal contact between individuals and groups will replace monolithic meetings and formalised friendship.⁴⁰⁶

Connection to each other and to Christ will be enabled by an emphasis upon communication rather than gathering. The body of Christ will be re-envisioned as a series of dynamic relational contacts. ... The fuzzy edges of the network will represent the growing point of the church.⁴⁰⁷

Liquid Church describes the Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale journey as if Ward had been studying it. He sees church as something that must always be changing in relation to culture and at the same time critiques consumer-driven church. Like Kerrie and Charles, Ward also speaks of holding onto the Christian Story. For community to generate new learning, ongoing attention must be paid to the relational dynamics that make adventurous learning hospitable. The corollary is that learning may be generative of renewed community; of what it means to be the church in our time and our place. These four congregations had an emphasis on learning how to “be church”; being open to change in order to be more faithfully the people of God here and now. Generativity required fluidity. *Communio*, *communication* and *community* are all dynamic terms. What kind of learning (re)generates Christian community?

d. Double-loop learning

A shrinking congregation’s members consider themselves supremely welcoming and hospitable; their common purpose is to maintain their tight-knit life of fellowship. This is no caricature. Senge’s focus on the generativity of an organisation begs the question of the church’s purpose. Despite the above emphasis on relationships, the engine driving generative learning is not affinity or friendship. Senge speaks of shared vision as “a force in people’s hearts ... of impressive power.”⁴⁰⁸ A learning congregation is oriented towards its sense of God-given purpose. Learning is

⁴⁰⁶ Ward, *Liquid Church* p46f.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p48.

⁴⁰⁸ “Shared vision is vital for the learning organisation because it provides the focus and energy for learning. While adaptive learning is possible without vision, generative learning occurs only when people are striving to accomplish

not merely an instrumental aspect of its common life, rather it is generated in, from and for the life of God through the Holy Spirit. While the climate for generative learning is highly relational, the impetus for generative learning is the Holy Spirit prompting, shaping, driving, enlivening the people of God to respond to grace by seeking to be faithful.

Byrnes notes that “adaptive learning is about coping, whilst generative learning is about creating.”⁴⁰⁹ She summarises this as “collaborative *generative* learning in order to confidently move towards an uncertain future.”⁴¹⁰ [italics added] In other words, the state of being a learning community is always aspirational—working collectively on becoming a community and on learning to face tomorrow’s challenges. Some attributes of a learning organisation are communal while some are required particularly by leaders. For Senge, generative learning includes personal discipline (mastery) to continually clarify vision and focus energy, questioning and revision of our thinking patterns (mental models), building shared vision, dialogical team learning and a focus on systemic thinking.⁴¹¹ *Single-loop* (adaptive) learning is “learning about strategies or tactics for achieving one’s own objectives,” -- dealing with the problem in front of you.⁴¹² *Double-loop* (generative) learning takes a deeper, wider look at what is happening, both at the situation at hand, and at how the problem was addressed. Why was this seen as a problem in the first place? What values and assumptions shaped the way that we addressed the problem? What are we unwilling to consider or discuss?⁴¹³

Heifetz, Linsky and Parks contrast *technical* problems with *adaptive* solutions.⁴¹⁴ “Technical problems ... can be solved with knowledge and procedures already in hand. In contrast, adaptive challenges require new learning, innovation, and new patterns of behaviour.”⁴¹⁵ Despite the

something which matters deeply to them.” Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* p206.

⁴⁰⁹ Byrnes, “We Don't Need Another Hero!”, p64.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p76.

⁴¹¹ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

⁴¹² Donald A Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), p256.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston : Harvard Business School Pub., 2005). Ronald A Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Ronald A Heifetz, Martin Linsky and Alexander Groshow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

⁴¹⁵ Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* p10.

differences in terminology, these authors are saying similar things. Part of double-loop learning is learning to learn more effectively, as the Hawkesbury group did.⁴¹⁶ However, there is a larger generative purpose in Christian learning about how to better form and educate people in the holistic being and doing of Christian community engaged in the mission of God.

The ministry leaders of these four churches indicated that they were working actively on how their congregations might grow in faith—not simply planning better programs but thinking reflectively with congregational leaders about the why and how of formation and education. The following quotes are small indications of fuller conversations.

Kerrie, Queenscliff:

It's all a journey for us, and because it's such an experimental place now, anyone can have an idea and it'll be in action in no time at all. And we're, it's just like we're all learning together and we're constantly thinking about and changing perspectives and it's very organic.

John, The Gap:

What have I experienced that has really worked? What have I learnt? ... To me the great thing about university was it taught me how to learn. It didn't tell me everything I needed to know, but it meant I know how to get to the answers, or I know where to go. Same with church stuff.

Simon, Clare:

We will look at what our leadership has discerned in a sense of how we're called to participate in what Jesus is doing. ... So, a sense of flexibility and not just being stuck on one particular mission model.

James, Mapoon:

I think a congregation needs to look ahead a lot, needs to look at how do we work today so that in ten years' time, the people that we're working with today are going to be in a position where perhaps they can feed back.

⁴¹⁶ See Section 3.3.

Michelle, Mapoon:

It's learning by doing, ... shaping your life by experiencing your life, rather than how I learn, which is by reading something. ... "That's a good idea. I'm going to apply it now." ... But it seems to work better here by having some sort of activity that works it out rather than a persuasive argument.

For the leaders and the congregations in this study, there were indications of double-loop learning that was (re)generative for them and their communities. Such learning was not necessarily continuous, conscious or consistent. Yet, there was evidence of people seeking to learn to better form and educate people in faith, to improve the relational qualities of the community for the sake of learning, to free up the congregational system towards mission, and to adapt formation and education in the light of local culture.

Following a study of religious education in one US Catholic parish, Fleischer concluded

The learning dynamics at work in St. Gabriel's parish provide one glimpse of how systemic religious education can thrive in the context of a mission-oriented, ministering community. Perhaps our own communal praxis as religious educators should include more concerted efforts at developing the praxis rhythms of learning organizations, so that our faith communities may truly become the transformative contexts of ongoing religious education, conversion, and action.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷ Barbara J Fleischer, "The Ministering Community as Context for Religious Education: A Case Study of St. Gabriel's Catholic Parish", *Religious Education* 101, no. 1 (2006): p104-122.

6. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Since the 1980s, a range of theologians and educators have described the life of the church as consisting of certain practices, both communal and individual.⁴¹⁸ Chapter 5 centred on what kind of community culture might encourage lifelong learning in faith. This chapter addresses the question of how a learning community is also a community of practices—practices that enable learning and practices that are the outcomes of learning, and sometimes both of these at the same time. Practice provides the link between formation/education and mission as it concerns the shape and purpose of the life of a faith community.

Just as Chapter 5 suggested that a learning community needed to work intentionally on how it [re]formed and sustained itself as a generative learning community, this Chapter suggests that there is a correlative need for a community of practice to be intentionally (re)forming practices for the sake of its mission. I will suggest that *the (re)formation of Christian faith practices is core to Christian education praxis. A generative learning community in this respect is a Spirit-dwelt community of generative practice(s)* with both inner and outer dimensions.

Roger Owens says:

[The] church's participation in God is Christ's practicing himself as the embodied practices of the church, in the Spirit, for the world. Moreover, this practicing, this participation, has a peculiar visibility because it is the Jesus of the Gospels who practices himself in the church; this visibility of the form of Jesus in the church shows the world the shape of its own *telos* in God⁴¹⁹.

We can consider practices and praxis through the lenses of philosophy (Aristotle, Macintyre), anthropology/sociology (Bourdieu, de Certeau), learning theory (Lave, Wenger), practical theology (Cameron, Miller-McLemore, Root), pastoral theology (Purves, Cahalan, Graham), systematic theology (Owens, McGrath), ecclesiology (Ward, Healy), faith formation and education (Webb-Mitchell, Dykstra, Bass), research methods (Scharen) and ethnographic studies (Butler Bass, Shapiro and Faris, Fulkerson). Here I want to distinguish between practical theology as a way of

⁴¹⁸ Section 3.3 provided a brief introduction to practice and communities of practice, while Section 2.4 to 2.6 located the current study in relation to practical theology.

⁴¹⁹ L. Roger Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), p16.

doing theology in congregations, practical theology as an activity of faith, as Miller-McLemore calls it, practices of faith themselves.⁴²⁰

Why might a focus on practices being important for a congregation? Formation and education are grounded in the experience of God in the habitual life of God's people. These practices in part constitute the life of discipleship, a passing on of the Way of Jesus from one generation to the next, a present experience of the Spirit in the lives of believers and a participation in the mission of God. According to Osmer, the tasks of practical theology include the transformative power of normative practices. Good practice, whether defined in the past or the present, provides normative guidance which can transform the present practice of communities towards a desired future.⁴²¹ For Osmer, "good practice is more than a model; it is epistemic. It yields knowledge that can be formed only through participation in transforming practice."⁴²²

Practices are described in varying terms with differing meanings—spiritual disciplines, faith practices, marks of discipleship, even as "Christly gestures."⁴²³ There are a range of classical spiritual disciplines that can be traced back through Christian history, including those which formed a rule of life in monastic communities; for example, the Rule of St Benedict from the 6th century.⁴²⁴ Spiritual disciplines have included prayer, one's bodily dispositions (fasting, for example), attitudes and character (humility, obedience), devotion to the faith or tradition (reading or singing of Scripture), behaviour in Christian community and service of others. Faith practices are also seen more broadly as the church's ways of living in the world, as in some way living faithfully among God's Creation. Drawing on Dorothy Bass, Diana Butler Bass suggests that there are three

⁴²⁰ In Section 2.4 I noted the distinctions between practical theology as a discipline, practical theology as a research method, and practical theology as congregational activity, drawing partly on Miller-McLemore. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology* p5.

⁴²¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p153.

⁴²³ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁴²⁴ The Benedictine Rule includes personal prayer habits, personal attitudes, life in community, daily work and care for the weak. Jerome Thiesen, "The Rule of St Benedict: Introduction" (The Order of St Benedict), <https://www.osb.org/gen/rule.html> (accessed February 21, 2018). "The Rule of St Benedict" (The Order of St Benedict), www.archive.osb.org/rb/text/toc.html (accessed February 21, 2018).

broad categories of practices: *moral*, *ascetical* and *anthropological*.⁴²⁵ The table on the following page provides a comparison of some of the ways in practices, habits or disciplines have been named in recent writings.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ **Moral**: such as hospitality, healing, dying well, stewardship, doing justice, and caring—stress communal formation in virtue. Example: Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra—based on Alisdair MacIntyre. **Ascetical**: such as contemplation, silence, and union with God—spiritual exercises—emphasising deep connection with God and personal Christian maturity. Example: Sarah Coakley—based in Christian mysticism, Foucault and Hadot. **Anthropological**: eating, meeting and greeting—the things that Christians do as they live in culture. Example: Kathryn Tanner—based on Bourdieu, de Certeau. Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church, the Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), p65f.; Introduction to Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*.

⁴²⁶ Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*. Craig R Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1999). Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007). David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006). Tim Shapiro and Kara Faris, *Divergent Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017).

Table 12: Faith Practices, Habits or Disciplines

Growing in the Life of Faith Craig Dykstra	The Godbearing Life Kenda Creasy Dean & Ron Foster	Christianity for the Rest of Us Diana Butler Bass	Practicing Our Faith Dorothy Bass	Dissident Disciples David Augsburger
suffering with and for our neighbours	communion: bread breaking	beauty	shaping communities	radical attachment (core Christology)
carrying out specific acts of faithful service and witness	compassion: pain taking	justice	household economics	stubborn loyalty (solidarity in community)
interpreting together the Scriptures and the history of the church's experience	teaching and nurturing: wave making	healing	healing	tenacious serenity (willing obedience)
telling the Christian story to one another	witness: claim staking	testimony	testimony	habitual humility (unpretentious personhood)
confessing, forgiving and becoming reconciled	dehabituating: rhythm breaking	contemplation	keeping sabbath	resolute nonviolence (the way of the Cross)
worshipping God together	worship: praise making	worship	singing our lives	concrete service (concern for others)
tolerating failures and encouraging one another's vocations		discernment	discernment	authentic witness (faithful presence)
giving generously and receiving gratefully	Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations Robert Schnase	diversity	honouring the body	subversive spirituality (dissident discipleship)
praying – together and by ourselves	extravagant generosity	reflection	forgiveness	Divergent Church Tim Shapiro & Kara Faris
providing hospitality and care to others, strangers, enemies	intentional faith development	hospitality	hospitality	shaping community
listening and talking attentively	risk-taking mission and service		dying well	conversation
struggling together to understand the context in which we live	radical hospitality		saying yes and saying no	artistic expression
criticising and resisting the powers that destroy humanity and creation	passionate worship			breaking bread
working together to maintain and create life-sustaining social structures that accord with God's will				community engagement
				hospitality

Section One of this chapter consists of an examination of the early church in the Book of Acts in order to ground the discussion about practices in the nature of the church and the work of the Holy Spirit. The practices of the early church are inseparable from its experience of the Gospel, its life of fellowship and its apostolicity. Even in its infancy, the common life of the *ekklesia* consists of the (re)formation of practices.

Congregations in this Chapter

For the purposes of analysis, I have reported in detail on three of the thirteen congregations, chosen to represent quite differing faith communities:

- **Maroubra** Uniting Church, known as Hope Uniting, close to the CBD in suburban Sydney, New South Wales
- **Nedlands** Uniting Church, close to the CBD in suburban Perth, Western Australia
- **Mount Louisa** Uniting Church, in suburban west Townsville, north Queensland

Due to the varied nature of these congregations' practices, the sub-themes of each section in this chapter differ. In relation to practices, this chapter pays attention to:

- when interviewees spoke explicitly about disciplines or practices
- when interviewees described formal learning programs or activities
- when interviewees mentioned particular practices (such as those named in the literature)
- when interviewees described other regular habits associated with growth in faith or discipleship

6.1 Practices of the Early Church

a. The Day of Pentecost

After Peter's proclamation on the day of Pentecost, the book of Acts goes on to describe the life of the emergent Christian community which gathered up new believers who responded to the outpouring of the Spirit and the apostle's testimony.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47 NRSV

The familiar text sounds too good to be true—the golden age of the church! Luke's theological history certainly contains hyperbole. God decisively and dramatically ushers in the age of the Spirit, transforming doubting, frightened disciples into bold, empowered apostles. “So those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” (Acts 2:41 NRSV) Pentecost is a day of signs and wonders which continue through the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit.

The description of the believers' communal life has a number of features:

- the teaching of the apostles
- daily fellowship
- daily worship and regular prayer
- shared meals and breaking of bread
- selling and sharing of possessions
- joy
- the goodwill of the wider community
- growth through the sharing of the good news

Some commentators justify this idealised behaviour as a product of the belief of Jesus' followers in his imminent return.⁴²⁷ The end is near! Sell the farm! Spread the word! There is a stronger case that the evolving community life represents an active application of Jesus' teachings as an expansion of his mission rather than its closure. While the Pentecost narrative speaks of the news of Jesus Christ being shared with Jews from across the known world and the fulfilment of Hebrew hopes, the book of Acts commemorates and celebrates the spread of faith to the Gentiles.⁴²⁸ The manner of life of the early church reveals a communal gospel-and-culture dynamic that embodies the apostles' message about Jesus.

b. *Ekklesia* and *Oikos*

The initial practices of the earliest church were based around the Temple and the Jewish home, yet as the church spread beyond the Jewish community, the extended household *ekklesia* became the identifiable fellowship of Christian faith. Wayne Meeks states that these *ekklesia* “typically consisted of a number of small cells meeting in various private houses.”⁴²⁹ While the Temple remained central for the early Jewish Christians, Christian practices were formed in emerging household faith communities. These households were different from our modern congregations in several important respects. A brief study of them will illuminate some key aspects of the practices of the early church. This sets the stage for some comparisons with my sample of Uniting Church congregations.

Acts Chapter 2 depicts Jewish pilgrims descending on Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks. Many become converts and stay on to learn more about Jesus from the apostles. Where do they stay? New Testament scholars have built up a picture of these house churches—at times referred to as *ekklesia*, or assemblies, and at other times as *oikos*—the Greek word for household from which we derive both the word *economy* and the word *ecumenism*. These early household churches were located in different cultures across the Roman empire; they were not uniform. The following description is based on what is known about Jewish households, with some wider references.

⁴²⁷ William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1973).

⁴²⁸ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁴²⁹ Wayne A Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p110.

Rita Finger describes the structural and social levels within Jerusalem, the city on a hill.⁴³⁰ The Temple, the royal household and the wealthy elites were situated at the top of Jerusalem. Most householders (scholars, scribes, merchants, civic officials, craft-workers and shopkeepers) lived in high-density housing between the upper city of temple and palace and the lower fringe where the poor, prostitutes, tanners and outcasts resided.⁴³¹ While the rich lived in large villas, "Palestinian homes tended to be more irregular, with one room attached to the next in random fashion."⁴³² Rooms might be added on any side or even to the roof. Houses adjoined each other around a courtyard, connected to the street by a narrow alley. Animals and goods were stored around the courtyard, which served as a shared communal space for cooking and social interaction.⁴³³ In such an environment, neighbours interacted on a daily basis. Household comings and goings were visible to all.

Wayne Meeks indicates that the initial spread of Christianity was not among the most wealthy nor the most impoverished people. Nevertheless, these early believers spanned social, cultural and economic differences.⁴³⁴ Luke refers to converts of high social standing both in his Gospel and in Acts.⁴³⁵ Esler concludes that Luke's community of readers included both the wealthy and the poor. The Luke-Acts narrative describes and reinforces the dramatic impact of the good news and the Spirit's coming in removing cultural and social barriers and reshaping the habits of community life.

c. The Patterns of Household Living

[The] household was much broader than the family in modern Western societies, including not only immediate relatives, but also slaves, freedmen [*sic*], hired workers, and sometimes tenants and partners in trade or craft.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁰ Reta Halteman Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p118.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p117-123.

⁴³⁴ Wayne A Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁴³⁵ Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, Monograph series: Society for New Testament Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p184.

⁴³⁶ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* p75f.

Paul and Luke spoke regularly of Christian fellowships based in households, and Paul named either the head of the house or a prominent member in his correspondence.⁴³⁷ Some of these patrons may have been people of some financial means—a business person or merchant, perhaps a city official. Regardless of household size, its life had an order and structure. There existed a hierarchy of leadership, in some cases patriarchal and in some cases clearly not.⁴³⁸ This included husbands and wives, parents and children, grandparents, owners and slaves, hosts and guests, and within this faith movement, also Jews and Gentiles. Households were able to host newcomers to the faith as well as travelling apostles, not just for a Tuesday night Scripture study from 7.30 to 9.30 pm, but as part of the fabric of their daily home life. Acts 2 in particular portrayed them as a 24/7 hub of faith in everyday life, a bubbling cauldron of spirited discipleship.

The features of these *oikoi* of faith have been compared with households in the Jewish-Roman world, as well as with voluntary clubs and guilds, with synagogues, and with philosophical schools.⁴³⁹ The early home churches shared some characteristics in common with each of the above yet had their own distinctive character. The *ekklesia* met in homes as free associations who shared a common interest; not everyone in the household was necessarily Christian. Like the synagogue, there was teaching, a ritual life of prayer and worship, and the passing on of this nascent faith as *paraenesis*.⁴⁴⁰

d. Transformed Relationships

To understand the radical nature of discipleship, we need a sense of how the Gospel reformed daily life in these household settings. On the one hand, these communities became radically inclusive. Unlike a vocational guild, a fraternal society, or even a philosophy club, the Christian communities, on the imperative of the Gospel, were to welcome Jew and Gentile, owner, slave and freed person.

⁴³⁷ Simon - Acts 10, Mary - Acts 12, Lydia - Acts 16, Jason - Acts 17, Titius and Crispus - Acts 18, Philip - Acts 21, Mnason - Acts 21, Stephanas - 1 Corinthians 1, Aquila and Prisca - 1 Corinthians 16, Nympha - Colossians 4, Onesiphorus - Timothy 4, Appria and Archippus - Philemon 1.

⁴³⁸ Margaret Aymer, "Acts of the Apostles," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol Newsom, Sharon H Ringe and Jacqueline E Lapsley (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

⁴³⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*.

⁴⁴⁰ For a description of *paraenesis* or moral sayings, see Wayne A Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p75-90. and Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* p125-130.

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:27-28 (NRSV)

Distinctions of class, race and gender were enveloped and relativised in one's new identity in Christ. This is not simply a kind of level playing field. Egalitarianism can only be grounded in the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, which provides the basis for the community to be a close fellowship, a united body, one household of God. Imagine the difference in terms of equality between everyone having one vote versus everyone being adopted into one family.

If the Christian assembly (*ekklesia*) distinguishes itself in Roman society by open *welcome* regardless of social status, as a household (*oikos*) it is marked by seeking to follow a *disciplined* Way. In a sense, there is a distinction here between gathering as a community and living as a community. This Way is revealed in Jesus' teachings and embodied in his living, dying and rising. To live as a Christian community is not only to gather for worship and teaching, but to learn and discern how faith shapes the whole of life. Throughout the New Testament, the coming of Jesus reshapes people's moral lives through revised allegiances, social relationships and cultural norms.

The new equality imparted by the Gospel immediately challenges the hierarchy of household and social relationships. Throughout the Epistles, we see Paul, Peter and the early Christian communities struggling with what it means for husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and slave-owners, wealthy and widow, to be in different relationships with one another.⁴⁴¹ What is it OK to eat? Are women allowed to speak whenever they wish and wear whatever they wish? Should slaves still obey their masters? How should husbands treat their wives? The intimacy of the household of faith means that these aren't issues that you can hide behind a veneer of respectability at the Temple.

⁴⁴¹ Kenneth Bailey illustrates this well with his detailed cultural analysis of 1 Corinthians. Kenneth E Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, October, 2011).

Esler highlights both the centrality and the controversy of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles throughout Luke and Acts.⁴⁴²

From the Jewish point of view, Jews ate with Gentiles in the Christian community only at the price of denying their ethos and their faith.⁴⁴³

The Lucan emphasis most likely reflects the presence of both Gentiles and Jews in Luke's own Christian community, his primary audience of readers. If so, Luke highlights meals in the Gospel and in Acts to address directly the existing tensions in his community. Table fellowship comes to represent separation from the synagogue and the emerging sectarianism of Christianity. For Meeks, this disciplined Way evolved as "beliefs and norms were applied in a continual process of admonition and exhortation" espoused in the Epistles and no doubt transmitted verbally.⁴⁴⁴ He goes further to say that the documents of the early church are exceptionally concerned with behaviour. "Making morals means making community."⁴⁴⁵ The Christian Way is shaped in the context of conversions to Christian faith—transformed outlook, attitudes and actions. A "radical resocialisation" is required.⁴⁴⁶ Conversion and discipleship go hand in hand: the faith community is working actively to enculturate new believers.

e. Transformed Habits

We see the habits of this radical Way embodied as patterned practices—going to the synagogue, eating meals together, breaking bread together, prayer and song, generosity and care for the needy. Meeks draws on Alasdair MacIntyre (and therefore Aristotle) to see the early Christian practices as the embodiment of virtue. The habits of the early church schooled its members in new ways to live, "the sense of who we are, because this is what we *do*", but also communicated why they were important through a "grammar of Christian practice."⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p105.

⁴⁴⁴ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* p82.

⁴⁴⁵ Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* p5.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p30.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p110. As well as identifying practices such as baptism, eucharist, hymn singing, times of prayer, fasting, expressions of gifts of the Spirit, admonition, hospitality and giving, Meeks suggests that "ambivalence" between the demands of the gospel and the demands of society was also a kind of Christian practice—namely, learning to live with the demands of the old world and the new at the same time.

This Way of living is none other than the continuation of the ministry of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit through proclamation, signs and wonders, not only by the apostles' words and actions, but through the formation of Christian community. Luke reveals that community is not simply a support mechanism for individual Christians as they seek to serve God. Rather, their common life is a testimony to God's self-giving love and to the fruits of Spirit-filled living. Richard Hays says, "Luke here portrays the church after Pentecost as the fulfilment of two ancient ideals: the Greek ideal of true friendship and the Deuteronomic ideal of the covenant community."⁴⁴⁸ Here Hays is referring specifically to the kind of mutual regard and economic sharing described in Deuteronomy 15. The Way of the early Christians is both spiritual and practical.⁴⁴⁹

In a review of interpretations of Acts, Reta Finger notes a tendency to either spiritualise or dismiss the story of the early church's economic co-dependence.⁴⁵⁰ She questions whether the bias of modern middle-class readers dismisses the serious challenges posed by the early believers' sharing of their possessions. At the time of the early church there was no state welfare and no burgeoning middle class. Finger suggests that people who were disconnected from their familial support either by geography, belief or circumstance had little alternative than to curry favours or throw themselves on the mercy of others. An open community which truly welcomed and generously shared with outsiders, particularly the least and the lost, would have gained credence specifically through the practicality of its radical hospitality and service. Hays says that Jesus and the church have a *homologous* relationship: Jesus is a "paradigm for the church's ministry".⁴⁵¹ To speak of practices of the Way, then, is both about incarnational embodiment and eschatology—present witness and proleptic sign.

⁴⁴⁸ Richard B Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p123. Hays sees Luke as having a Deuteronomic foundation, linking Jesus to Moses, as "a prophetic liberator of his people." See p117. Hays sees the life of the early church as the "first fruits" of Jesus' prophetic declaration in Luke 4. See p124. As a covenant community, the church becomes a visible sign that God's promises to Israel are being fulfilled.

⁴⁴⁹ Hays goes so far as to say that, "the power of the apostles' testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is linked directly by Luke to the community's economic sharing (Acts 4:32-35). The testimony is credible because the evidence of God's power is palpable in the community's life." *Ibid.*, p125.

⁴⁵⁰ Finger, *Of Widows and Meals: Communal Meals in the Book of Acts*.

⁴⁵¹ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* p120, 122.

f. Inclusivity and Discipline; Intimacy and Transparency

The early church is characterised by two emphases which seem to exist in tension—inclusivity and discipline—freedom of association and obedience to the Way of Jesus. I suggest that it is the intimacy of the households of faith that gives these communal qualities both their moral impetus and their evangelical appeal. Since the ancient Middle Eastern households exist in close proximity to one another, the transformed lives of the first Christians are not hidden from their immediate neighbours. While the Story of Jesus is being told to those who will listen, and the Way of Jesus is visible to neighbours, there is nevertheless a clear sense that those who follow this Way will be different from the world. Christianity comes to be seen as a sect because the Way requires ultimate allegiance to Christ and not the Empire.

In summary, any contemporary rendering of discipleship practices should recognise that their setting involves (almost) daily, intimate fellowship. Secondly, the Christian community is demonstrably inclusive and thus challenges social and cultural stratification. Thirdly, the Way of discipleship is transparent; it is distinctive but not sequestered. Intimacy and transparency go together. Finally, the book of Acts opens the age of Pentecost; the practices of the early church are Spirit-breathed, its fellowship Spirit-indwelled, and its mission Spirit-led. At the heart of the narrative is the transforming initiative of God producing a people of one body, one mind, one heart and one faith. According to Powell, “Luke emphasises joy as a primary characteristic of the early church’s life and mission.”⁴⁵² The life of the early church is not disciplined drudgery but a vibrant life overflowing.

⁴⁵² Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* p210.

6.2 Hope Uniting Church, Maroubra, NSW

Rev Andrew Johnson

hopeuniting.org.au⁴⁵³

Hope Uniting Church is in Maroubra, a multicultural suburb ten kilometres south east of the Sydney CBD and close to the University of New South Wales. In the late 1990s, the church built a residence for student accommodation and subsequently provided housing for up to eight university students annually. Andrew Johnson had been the minister since 2008, combining congregational ministry with chaplaincy at the university, part-funded by the Synod. He is a former youth worker. The congregational and university ministries dovetailed through Andrew's chaplaincy.

During Andrew's time, the ministry with students gained a clearer focus on discipleship and intentional Christian community. Their membership within the worshipping congregation was a consistently vitalising dynamic for all ages. In essence, Maroubra UC created an intentional learning community of young adult disciples within its larger faith community. The congregation numbered about sixty people, half of whom were current or recent university students, and one-quarter of whom were long-term residents in their late seventies and eighties. At the time of the interview Maroubra was about to combine two weekly worship services (morning and evening) into one morning service.

a. Formed in Community

While *community* might not seem to be a practice, for Andrew, community was the seed-bed in which practices might grow—congregation as community, the intentional household, small groups and campus ministries. The aim at Maroubra was to form young adults as disciples of Christ through a process of intentional leadership development in the few short years in which they were at university. Young adults were invited to become part of an intentional Christian community, not

⁴⁵³ "For Hope Uniting, worship isn't just about Sundays. We seek to be a community shaped by faith practices such as prayer, reading Scripture, offering hospitality and living generously. These practices are for every day, as we seek to be followers of Jesus. "Worship at Hope," Hope Uniting Church website, Maroubra. <http://hopeuniting.org.au/worship/> (accessed January 2, 2018.)

simply among themselves, but resourced spiritually and materially within the congregation.

Andrew said, “We try and offer support and guidelines and resources and pastoral care, and they find a way to live together and study together and work out what faith means in this context.”

This relational aspect of discipling recurred throughout the interview. Relationships were formed with the congregation, in the student house, in Bible study and prayer groups, through mentoring, service and cross-cultural experiences. The congregation kick-started the changed emphasis towards more intentional discipling by recruiting a young church couple as live-in mentors.

They surprised themselves ... by being, actually brilliant at relationship. ... They're actually still really good at engaging students. ... That turned it around and set a bit of a precedent for how the community might operate.

Andrew spoke of establishing a covenant with students, however the terms of this were flexible.

Students who resided in the church housing agreed to participate in faith development and service activities, although the nature of their involvement was self-determined.

We actually want people who are committed to exploring their faith and we're not going to tell you what that looks like. We can provide options, ... worship-leading in the congregation, ... working with a student group here on campus. Other people are involved and have been involved in working in local homeless shelters, things like that. ... Our commitment is to work with you in relationship to find out what does that mean and continue exploring that, which makes for a far more dynamic engagement than just “Here's the rent, and we do an inspection every six months.” ... That's really been exciting for the congregation. And reminds us... that's what we're all called to be doing.

This flexibility recognised students' study loads and social lives; however, they were encouraged to have a meal together as a household at least weekly. Most of the young people also chose to become involved in Maroubra's weekly worship service and were warmly included by the congregation. Since all of the students were new to Sydney, the campus ministry provided not just a home base but also a supportive Christian community.

Some habits of community living were based around being a shared household. Living away from your parents, learning to cook, getting along with housemates, cleaning house, managing study; all of this is part of the maturation of young adults. There is perhaps a simple parallel here to early

church faith households—life together combined with participation in a faith community. Not surprisingly, some people would decide after a year that the experience was not for them.⁴⁵⁴

The strategy had been a vital boost to the congregation and challenged them to learn to maintain a multi-generational life, transforming their identity.

What the student accommodation has done is provided a bedrock for the congregation that means there's always some energy or always some form of community and it's up to the congregation how it wants to engage with that. ... There are not many congregations that could say [that] fifty per cent of its people would be between eighteen and twenty-five.

Those who stay in the area are really committed to the congregation and provide really good role models for people coming through. ... That's really unusual for a Uniting Church in this area.

The university ministry also worked to build community among students, particularly those from overseas. This included students from the church accommodation project.

Part of the change that happened was when we tried to reinvigorate the student community, and when we engaged in relationship more with them in the accommodation program, they engaged with us more on campus.

A further, integral aspect involved encouraging young adults to join a small group either in the congregation or at the university. As we will see below, forming of intimate friendships and trust was seen to be a foundation for growth in spiritual disciplines, whether worship, prayer, Bible study or service.⁴⁵⁵

Small groups were seen as a basic building block of being the church, regardless of the shape of the institution. In the university setting, these groups would often be culturally diverse.

My first and foremost task ... has to be to form people with enough resource in their own faith, and in small groups of people who can support each other, that if the church fell over tomorrow they would still have some supportive community—house church, small groups, a wider network of people. ... It's helping people find an authenticity to their faith. How would you continue to ask authentic and real questions of faith even if there wasn't an institution around you?

⁴⁵⁴ Appendix 12, Reference 1.

⁴⁵⁵ Appendix 12, Reference 2.

Hence, this relational base was seen as the environment in which essential spiritual disciplines could be explored, modelled and ultimately become habits that students would take with them when they moved on.

Discipling has to always come back to relationship. ... [Programs], as important as they are and provide the content for a lot of things, have to take place in the context of relationship, where we are exploring together being shaped as people who follow Jesus.

b. Formed in Scripture

Bible study was one of three core disciplines identified by Andrew, along with prayer and belonging to a small group. A confessed “Bible geek,” Andrew saw teaching from the Bible as part of his ministry calling. The intent, however, was not simply to impart Bible knowledge, but to equip young adults with habits for studying the Bible that would sustain their faith in the longer term. On campus, their small, conversation-based study groups of six to twelve people were a contrast to the lecture-style teaching approach of other Christian groups.

How do we give people critical tools to get past some of the clichéd understandings of Bible? ... We’ve just finished about a six- or seven-week series on salvation, where we might have started looking at some traditional models of salvation from Christian tradition. But the questions that the students bring really determine where those studies will go once you’ve built a framework on that. ... [a] shift from having a set Bible study where content would be delivered to one where there is almost an open-ended process. ... People are given a framework to work in and then allowed to run with it. And it’s really quite dynamic and far more interesting from my point of view.

If you want to talk about salvation, we need to talk about what that means in the context of meeting with Muslim people who are kept in detention in Villawood because they’re fleeing from Afghanistan, which we as a country invaded. What sort of responsibility do we have? How does salvation work in that context? ... What does it mean to talk about living as the people of God being called into community in church after your experience of being with the church in Tonga and staying with desperately poor families who seem far more hospitable and alive to some sense of the Spirit than we’ve experienced before?

For some overseas students, this was a first opportunity to learn about Jesus. For others, often from a conservative Christian background, the aim was to build firmer understandings while also introducing broader perspectives. The conversational approach encouraged people to engage actively with the text and to relate it to issues in their own lives.

We try and provide a group that is open to exploring the depth of biblical and spiritual disciplines in a wide-ranging way. ... I think at our best we try and provide a range of perspectives. You know, not just a liberal or a conservative one, but progressive ones and traditional ones and a whole range of things.⁴⁵⁶

For Andrew, part of the importance of the Scriptures for faith is that they reveal a God who transforms individual lives and who also calls people to be part of God's transforming work. Bible study was a way of becoming open to the call of God.

If God is in the business of transformation, then my expectation is, God is going to be transforming me, transforming the world around me.⁴⁵⁷ ... When the Scriptures were opened up to me to show that that's actually what's in the Bible, that transformed everything for me. ... To have that offered to me and to be able to offer that to others, to see that the Bible is also calling that out of us, I guess it feels incredibly exciting.

c. Formed in Prayer

How do people actually learn to pray? This question shaped the approach to spiritual formation with young adults.

A couple of prayer groups going at the moment to explore "What does prayer look like? ... How are we grown into the exercise of prayer?" One of the prayer groups here is ... three students and myself who meet each week to explore prayer. And while I offer some resources about that, it's learning simply to pray together, which means developing a certain intimacy of what's going on in our inner lives and what do we bring to prayer and what are we expecting out of it and what are our hurts and our hopes. ... You know you can give them a book on resources in prayer, but to go on that journey with them is really important.

Being formed in prayer was seen as experiential learning in a safe community. This required vulnerability on Andrew's part, and gave people the freedom to not only explore the shape of prayer, or approaches to prayer, but also to ask theological questions.⁴⁵⁸

If you haven't got some resources on prayer to fall back on for yourself, then as soon as you hit that first grey patch of life when the black dog comes visiting or whatever happens, what are you going to fall back on? ... prayer not only being a value but vital to how you make sense of life.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Appendix 12, Reference 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Appendix 12, Reference 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Appendix 12, Reference 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Appendix 12, Reference 6.

d. Formed in Mission

Andrew articulated a fourth pillar of discipleship as integrating with community life, Bible study and prayer. While wary of the language of “mission,” he described a process of learning and discerning from encounters with other people which led to hearing God’s call to participate in what God is doing in the world. Such learning was experiential, relational and often across boundaries of culture, class or circumstance.

Knowledge about faith isn’t actually going to change your life very much. We recognised we needed to work on. ... “What are the missional experiences that we can have? What are the experiences that help us get a more rounded or open picture of Sydney and of life where some of the things we actually study and pray about together might become a bit more hands-on and real?” Simple things... visiting Wayside Chapel up in King’s Cross who do incredible work with homeless people, with people with mental illness and various addictions. ... Some of our students and some of our older people would go up there and ... volunteer.⁴⁶⁰

At Easter 2012, about twenty people from the congregation travelled to Tonga to visit the Methodist Church. Group members included young adults, a four-month-old baby (Andrew’s son) and others of varying ages up to eighty. The aim was “connecting with Tongan families in our church, connecting with church being expressed in different ways, and [connecting with] the congregation that really wants to explore justice and the idea of community.”

Fantastic experience. Really good, watching people grapple with culture shock, being in a completely different place. What does it mean to talk about poverty when you’re living with people who are ... [by] socio-economic standards ... incredibly poor and yet who showed more hospitality in one week than we’ve probably shown in our lifetime, with a church that was incredibly vibrant, really connected to its local community? It’s the centre of the local community there, involved in schooling and education. That really opens up questions about almost everything.

That was a really positive experience in exploring what it means to be the church in a really hands-on sort of way.⁴⁶¹ I think more than any educational program in the traditional sense that’s been really important—relationships and engagement with people on the ground.

⁴⁶⁰ Appendix 12, Reference 7.

⁴⁶¹ Appendix 12, Reference 8.

Learning materials were sourced for briefing and debriefing with the congregation and in the university small groups setting.

It becomes sort of fodder for the small groups, the prayer groups, the Bible study groups to keep talking about ... It becomes part of the worship services for the few months afterwards. It always becomes a conversation point ... What does it mean to keep building relationships with the church that we stayed in?⁴⁶² ... It continues to be a conversation point about "What does "home" mean? Where do you draw identity from? What does it mean to be church? It's just part of everything we do now.

This exemplified an ongoing loop of learning *for* and *from* mission engagement.⁴⁶³

The experiential nature of learning took place through relationships with those being visited—whether in Tonga, at Villawood Detention Centre or at the Wayside Chapel—as well as through relationships among the visitors themselves.⁴⁶⁴

Selfishly, it really gives us a gift of seeing the world differently. So it's part of [those] experiences that broaden our view on the world and maybe broaden our experience of how God is active around us and therefore how are we called into living out our response to God.

e. Radical Discipleship

Andrew described a way of being church together through intentional, inter-related practices, rather than simply through a series of programs or activities. Not only did such practices predispose us to hear from God, but they were the vehicle for discernment. This was the essence of being a faith community.

What does it mean to envisage being called to be in community together and exploring and being excited about the possibilities and actually believing that it's God who is doing the calling, that it's not just something we do out of convenience.⁴⁶⁵

Discipleship was not seen as a particular mission agenda, but a response to God's call to mission arising from living a disciplined life in community.

⁴⁶² Appendix 12, Reference 9.

⁴⁶³ Appendix 12, Reference 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Appendix 12, Reference 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Appendix 12, Reference 12.

Discipleship is the struggling and seeking to follow Jesus, so discovering the disciplines that help us be attuned to that, the Scriptures, the prayers, the waiting upon God, the worship we do together, and that the mission comes out of that. The mission is about saying “If these are the disciplines we’re grown into, how does that then shape our relationship with people around us and how are we drawn deeper into those relationships?”

These disciplines were outward as well as inward—relationships and experiences that would challenge perspectives, stretch thinking and provide new stimulus for learning. The church sponsored wider faith and learning experiences, with benefit both to the individuals and to the congregation.

They don’t need to be doing our stuff and just being with us all the time. They need to get out there and explore other places and see what other people are doing. Being able to say “... Down in Victoria, AG is doing some really interesting stuff. We’re going to spring half an airfare for you. Why don’t you get down there for this conference this weekend. We know Wayside’s doing some good stuff. We’re going to take you up there.”⁴⁶⁶

This way of being church was framed as *radical discipleship*, with Andrew acknowledging the influence of Rev Dr John Hirt. God’s transforming work was grounded in becoming a community attuned to what God was saying and doing, not only in the church but in the world.

If I understand it that God’s mission is at play in the world and our task is to try and find when we’re called into that and asked to participate in it, well how do we do that except through listening to each other and listening to the community? ... Discipleship leads us to engagement with people and relationships particularly on the edges of society.⁴⁶⁷

This encapsulated the radical discipleship agenda at Maroubra Uniting and at the university.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁶ Appendix 12, Reference 13.

⁴⁶⁷ Appendix 12, Reference 14.

⁴⁶⁸ Appendix 12, Reference 15

6.3 Nedlands Uniting Church, WA

Rev Steve Francis

www.nedlandsuniting.com⁴⁶⁹

Nedlands Uniting Church, a multi-age, multicultural congregation with about 350 members, is close to the University of Western Australia and only seven kilometres from the Perth CBD. In 2012 they were offering three worship services each Sunday—an 8:00 am contemplative service attended by 20 to 30 elderly people, a 9:30 am service with about 200 people, and an evening, more experimental service for families. Sunday morning also included a children’s ministry attended by about 50 children. The congregation also had a youth group and young adult groups. At the time of the interview, Rev. Steve Francis had been the minister since 1991, over twenty years. His wife was the part-time children and family worker, and the congregation employed a part-time youth worker. The congregation was also the base for the university chaplain.

A significant dimension of the Nedlands congregation, through its connections with the university, was a multicultural ministry to predominantly Asian people, many from China, centred on Friday evenings. Between 70 and 100 people attended weekly for worship, prayer and Bible teaching (in English and Mandarin), two children’s programs and a youth group. This ministry attracted tertiary students and overseas faculty from the university, as well as other newcomers and visitors.

Nedlands is a regional congregation, with 30% to 40% of members travelling more than 10 kilometres to attend. It sees itself as an *evangelical* congregation, with a more conservative stance to biblical interpretation and an emphasis on evangelism. In 2011, the year prior to my visit, they had 22 baptisms, 19 of which were young adults aged 18 to 30 years.

⁴⁶⁹ Nedlands Uniting Church website. <http://www.nedlandsuniting.com> (accessed 19 September 2017).

The following practices reflected one of the four, goal areas of the congregation, which Steve described as:

Growing people who worship, growing in their leadership, and growing in their spiritual development and formation ... We want to be quite intentional about it, and in a sense the whole church council is invited to reflect on that, and to think about how well we're doing or how we're not doing.

a. Forming Faith in Worship

Sunday worship was the feature at Nedlands, with an emphasis on excellent music and preaching and teaching, seen as core practices for nurturing disciples.

We take Sundays very seriously. All our preachers put a lot of work into their preparation for a Sunday. Our slogan is that it needs to be the best hour of the week for people ... We have podcasts and we encourage people to take the worship service and particularly the sermon as a significant time of growing and listening.

I want to take scholarship seriously, and I read commentaries and I read theologians. I want to take real life seriously ... and put my pastor's hat on, and say "What's it like for a thirty-year-old without a job? What's it like for a mining executive who's hardly ever home? What's it like for a person who has big questions about God in their life, or who's just had cancer?" So, I put my academic hat on. I put my pastoral hat on, and ... I put my ear to Scripture, and ... what the Spirit is trying to say to me, and often I find I'm quite passionate in the end.

Nedlands celebrated the main seasons of the church year, but at other times there would be preaching and teaching series not linked to the Lectionary; for example, *Money, Relationships, Conflict Resolution*, or the *Uniqueness of Jesus*. Steve said that he did about three-quarters of the preaching. Preaching and teaching from the Bible was one of Steve's ministry passions.

I have a deep love for the Scriptures, really love mining into the Scriptures, and learning from them and being challenged by them and shaped by them. ... I want people to be grounded in Scripture, and believe that as they are grounded in Scripture, something transformational takes place. Their lives are being reshaped, reorientated, by God, in a way that will lead in a fruitful way to them serving God, missionally, day by day.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ Appendix 13, Reference 1.

At 9.30am on a Sunday morning, people could either come to the sanctuary for the main worship service or go into the hall for a half-hour worship time oriented towards children. Adults could then leave the children's worship time (not the other way around) and go to the sanctuary for the sermon and remainder of the service. Young adults attended the main worship service unless they were helping to lead in the children's or youth programs.

Music was valued greatly and there were several music groups involved in worship leading. Participation was seen as apprenticeship in leadership; forming habits for ministry.

[Young adults] take leadership in one of our bands on a Sunday morning. They also might become worship leaders. They may be musicians. They may be reading the Scriptures. One of our goals is to incorporate them and integrate them into the service so they become part of what we do. And it's a beautiful thing to see. Some of our worship leaders have been, fifteen years ago, kids in the primary age and they've come through the whole process and now they're leading people in worship, or they're leading people in music. That's wonderfully encouraging to see.

b. Forming Faith in Small Groups

Generally speaking, small groups may contain a cluster of Christian practices—prayer, Bible study, worship, hospitality, testimony, confessing and forgiving, healing, and more. At Nedlands, small groups were seen as another foundational setting for faith formation and education, with a variety of times, membership, formats and curricula offered. The age range of groups stretched from young adults to retirees.

We've had an emphasis for many years on small groups, and we encourage people on a regular basis to join a small group. We've just, for example, done the Lent Event. I think we had eleven small groups doing that, and that was a very unifying thing for our church.

The youth worker's role included co-ordinating small groups, and leaders met together once a term to plan, evaluate and co-ordinate. Sometimes a range of study material was recommended, at other times a common focus was encouraged. For example, there were nineteen small groups all undertaking the *Forty Days of Purpose* series at the same time.

While relationship-building and prayer were part of small group life, Bible study was emphasised at Nedlands. Steve and others had led the year-long *Disciple* program from the United Methodist Church (USA) for a number of years. He indicated that over one hundred people had completed the program and that it was "core to Christian education philosophy" in the church.

We've found that course ... to produce leaders, because in the course of doing *Disciple*, they become much more biblically literate, biblically confident. They pull a lot of the loose ends together, some of the things that they never would have connected before. And then they start to say, "Well actually, I could teach a group." ... It's been a core commitment that I've made because I've seen the value of it. And I've seen the way it produces leaders, it produces Christian people who not only want to be involved in small groups. But also, our worship leaders, for example, often come out of *Disciple*. ... I think there's a kind of foundational basis to it that it helps people think, "Well, we're called to be a people who understand Scripture and who seek to live it out." And they kind of get how Scripture can help them grow and mature and live out the Christian life more effectively in many areas of their lives, not just home groups and worship.

Teaching was seen as both evangelical and developmental for Christian maturity.

We've run twenty-one Alpha courses in the last ten years or so, and we've seen that as partly an evangelistic tool. People who are fringe, people who are friends, people who may just come to church but are really not sure what Christian faith is about, an Alpha Course can help them clarify the essentials of Christian faith. Then what we will often do is say, "Well you've done the Alpha course, do *Disciple*." We've had that two-tier approach because Alpha is more introductory to Christian faith, whereas the *Disciple* program helps people to dig deep into Scripture.

Despite the distinct emphasis placed on Christian education, Steve indicated that this was not a term used often.

Probably the words "Christian education" we don't use a lot. We would use words like "growing in your faith, discipleship, ... deepening your faith." We talk all the time about "growing your faith so it's more real." It's grounded better. It's not a head trip, but so that your faith affects the way in which you live your life. I guess because "education" can have just academic connotations, and not necessarily whole-of-life connotations.

As a minister who is also an educator, Steve recognised that practices are both classical and also contemporary.

There will always be a need for us simply to get together in small groups or in large groups or one on one, or by ourselves and open the Scriptures and allow them to speak to us. There's a simplicity to that which probably hasn't changed down the centuries. ... But on the other hand, because our culture has changed and the way that we learn has changed and so on, we have to be creative in how we do that. The *Disciple* model is an interesting example, where it calls for high levels of commitment, where it uses DVDs with very good academics, and where it encourages people to do homework, week by week. I think that mix of things works tremendously well. ... We're always trying to be sensitive to where people are coming from and to the questions they ask and to the different ways in which they learn.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷¹ Appendix 13, Reference 2.

c. Forming Faith in Community

In a reflection of Acts 2, the hospitality of Nedlands church formed relationships across language and cultural differences, leading to a remarkable growth in community and in faith-sharing. The multicultural ministry at Nedlands seemed in many ways like a church within a church. In growing from six or seven people to over seventy, it had a substantial impact on the life of the whole congregation. Initially, a few students wanted “to learn a bit more about English and a bit about the Bible.” Many from overseas were also seeking friendship and community. There were also basic needs such as furniture, visa issues and part-time employment, along with negotiating study in a foreign environment.

Many of them are genuinely interested in Christian faith. They’ve come across a Christian somewhere. They’ve heard Christians are kind people. ... Something has sparked an interest, and they want to explore it. We run... [a] ... simple Bible study, looking at usually a story from the Gospels and about how that relates to life. The effect has been ... in some cases ... has gone from, if you like, an atheist enquiring, to someone who is a committed Christian, and knocks on my door and says, “Can I be baptised?”⁴⁷²

The multicultural ministry had its own ministry team, yet they all saw themselves as part of Nedlands congregation and part of its mission to the area. The team leader and some of the team were Chinese. It was important for the ministry to have leadership from among the cultures of its members.

Steve emphasised the evangelical nature of this ministry:

I think the Christian identity thing is very important. In this church we’ve had people who’ve been Muslims and become Christians, Buddhists become Christians, Hindus become Christians. If they were sitting here, they would say that for them, the Christian faith has brought light and love in proportions that they never experienced. While we are a multicultural community, in a sense we’re not a multi-faith community. We are a church, a Uniting Church, that believes that Jesus Christ is Lord.⁴⁷³

The story of this church is that it’s an attractional church. We’re not perfect, we’ve got flaws and problems and stuff. But we are an attractional church. People find love and warmth and acceptance here; they don’t find judgements and criticism.

⁴⁷² Appendix 13, Reference 3.

⁴⁷³ Appendix 13, Reference 4.

d. Forming Children and Youth through Christian Education

Nedlands UC saw itself as a multi-age church, with faith formation and education taking place both within and across generations, while placing particular importance on children, youth and young adults. Children attended Sunday Clubs following their worship time at 9.30 am, while high-school-age young people had their own group.

One of the reasons we've grown as a church is that I think we've provided quality Christian education on a Sunday morning for children and for young people. It's been a very high standard here. Often, we have more men teaching than women ... We've seen children who come, primary school, have a great experience here. They graduate to the youth age, and they have a really positive experience of church as youth, then they become young adults, and young leaders.

Steve made it clear that, in his view, the quality of a practice requires purposeful planning and delivery.

We've always been very mindful to ... ask the best people to teach. We've had very good leaders. My wife and others have taken this role very responsibly, very prayerfully. The preparation has always been really good. We've used good curriculum We've given it a profile. We've said to parents "This is one of the best things you can do for your kids, to encourage them on a Sunday, for this to be a priority in their lives." ... In many ways, we've tried to say, "This is really core to who we are as a church, and I think God has blessed that."⁴⁷⁴

The weekly Kids Club also included a Bible teaching time, as did the Friday evening youth and children's programs. Young adults could join small groups. While Steve provided little description of the content of the children's and youth learning programs, the importance of developing and maintaining practices of quality teaching and learning was stressed.

e. Forming Faith in Mission

It would be inaccurate to suggest that all of this energy was focused inward. Nedlands saw itself as being a congregation called to mission.

We want people to do mission. We want people to be engaged in some of the mission initiatives we have with children, with overseas students, with elderly, with refugees, with the poor. We support Uniting Aid program. There are lots of opportunities to serve missionally and to reflect on that. But at the same time, we equally encourage people to grow their faith in terms of their understanding of Scripture, their understanding of God,

⁴⁷⁴ Appendix 13, Reference 5.

their experience of God. We want those two things to complement each other and ultimately, to be integrated... It's not two separate parts, there's a togetherness with the way in which we live the Christian life. ... I think the apprenticeship model I like, where people both learn the way of Jesus from Scripture, but also learn the way of Jesus by being engaged in serving people.

Steve described growth in faith, growth in leadership and growth in mission as being inter-related, with an emphasis on the essential role of Scripture in shaping this. Mission was seen to be as much in everyday life as in special programs or activities. Speaking of life in a multi-faith world, Steve underscored the evangelical nature of Christian faith and witness.

There was something quite distinctive about Christian faith that we want to own and claim, not be embarrassed about. We have a mission in the world still and I'm worried that the church can lose that uniqueness and that identity, and I think that would be a denial of who we are as God's people.

All of the above practices were seen by Steve as a reflection of the early church as described in Acts 2.

There's about five or six key ingredients, aren't there? ... They're a learning church, an enquiring church. They have a hunger to grow and learn more. ... There are people devoted to prayer and they see it's not all up to us. We need God's help and direction and power and influence. ... They were people who were generous and warm-hearted, they, you know *koinonia*. ... And they had a special concern for the poor. ... So, they weren't a club or a huddle, they were looking outwards. And they were very Christ-centred. And I think when you have those kinds of ingredients operating in a congregation, big or small, old or young, there's a chance that God may choose to grow it.⁴⁷⁵

The description of the community habits or practices at Nedlands gives evidence of their attempts to model themselves in some way on this embodiment of the gospel, yet for today's world.

⁴⁷⁵ Appendix 13, Reference 6.

6.4 House of Praise - Mount Louisa, Queensland

Rev Anne Harley

www.houseofpraise.com.au⁴⁷⁶

Mount Louisa *House of Praise* began as *Praise Chapel* in 1986 in the former Methodist Church in Western Townsville. Under the leadership of Rev Jack Frewen-Lord from 1978 to 1992, it grew substantially from a very small group to a couple of hundred people and relocated to the current property. In the following period, the congregation split twice during the Uniting Church's national debates about sexuality, in 1996 and then again in 2003. Rev Anne Harley became the minister of the small remnant congregation in 1996, continuing in ministry until 2017.⁴⁷⁷ The existing congregation had maintained a conservative stance and was a member of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC) network, a conservative group within the UCA.

When I interviewed Anne in 2012, the Sunday morning congregation averaged 80 adults and 40 children, covering all ages, but with only a few young adults. The membership was mainly Caucasian, consisting of local residents and also some people travelling across town to attend this particular style of church. Mount Louisa congregation could be characterised as theologically conservative and charismatic. A significant number of people were on government benefits—pension or disability and other allowances. Anne said there were “a lot of broken, dysfunctional, hurting people.” The church also had a part-time (0.65 FTE) Healing and Discipleship Pastor and a part-time Administrator.

The church was close to a lower socio-economic housing area and an industrial estate. There were two Australian Christian Churches (Assemblies of God) congregations nearby, one with a school. The suburb consisted of a high proportion of families with children.

When it came to Christian practices, Mount Louisa was significantly different from the two congregations previously described, due to its charismatic/pentecostal style and a marked emphasis on growing faith through immediate experience. This had several components—

⁴⁷⁶ Mount Louisa House of Praise website. <https://www.houseofpraise.com.au/> (accessed February 28, 2018).

⁴⁷⁷ "Our History." Mount Louisa House of Praise website. https://www.houseofpraise.com.au/?page_id=268 (accessed February 28, 2018).

encountering God's Spirit in worship, experiencing healing and transformation, changing behaviours and attitudes through instruction and modelling, and learning about ministry and mission by *doing*. This was seen as a combination of the practical and the spiritual.

a. Forming Faith in Worship

Anne described the weekly worship at Mount Louisa as core to their congregational life and to nurturing people's faith. Worship was lively, free-flowing and participatory, with an openness to the visible and immediate activity of the Holy Spirit.

Our name is "House of Praise" and I believe that's a mantle that God's given us. ... While there's preaching on Sunday morning, I think it's more an experience and encounter, and in a sense the Spirit of God teaching people, than formal education ... encountering, and teaching people not to just sing with their heads. ... In some ways it's great when the data projector doesn't work. ... "Learn to sing this from something deep inside you." That actually brings change.

Waiting on God, and if people feel they've got a prophetic word. ... There's a call to people for healing... In preparing the service, there's songs and there's some preaching, but there's also always [being] conscious of leaving room for God. And not saying "He's got to move *here*," but "Have I've got enough space in here, and enough time to let God do it?"⁴⁷⁸

When Anne was preaching, she also provided worship leadership (along with the music leaders), adjusting the pace of worship and inviting responses. While this was in a sense spontaneous, it was also part of the expectation at Mount Louisa, hence it formed their liturgy.

I'll jump up in a song and say, "Let's just hold on to that one," or "I feel out of that, if you want to come forward or kneel" and just let that sort of stuff just happen. ... [It] might be a call for prayer in an area or it might be "turn and pray with the person next to you." ... I don't prepare it a lot, it's more just as I feel it come, so I go with it.

Often, I'll say "OK, we don't have to worship God. We just want to bring this week to Him in praise. What's He been doing?" And I'll have a roving mic and I often get 10 or 15 who'll just jump up and [say] short sentences about what's been happening. There's certainly participation in worship.

Children were involved with music and movement early on in the worship before heading out to Sunday School. This was seen to bring a vitality to the whole congregation.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁸ Appendix 14, Reference 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Appendix 14, Reference 2.

Anne preached approximately twice a month, with mainly lay preachers involved on other Sundays. She saw it as her role to animate the message.

My preaching's a bit interactive. ... I ask them questions or might [say], "Has anyone got a story that they can share around that?" I'm very aware of connection when I preach. ... I prance and dance. I do anything to try and connect, because what's the point of just having the most perfectly prepared stuff but people are all asleep.

In terms of Scripture, the preachers followed themes or books of the Bible rather than the Lectionary. The approach was flexible, with not too much forward planning. When I interviewed Anne, they were working their way through the Book of Acts, but she wasn't sure how long it would take or whether they would cover the whole book. By contrast, the three *Forty Days* series from Rick Warren had, on different occasions, provided a whole church program for worship, small groups and devotional life.

I asked Anne about the importance of the Bible in faith development within the congregation.

That's probably the question ... I struggle with. We believe in the Scripture. I believe in the Scripture. I *believe* it's the Word of God. I believe it's life-giving. I believe it shapes our lives.

People were offered daily Bible reading and prayer materials. However, both in worship and in daily life, there was not a strong emphasis on systematic biblical teaching or preaching. The Bible was seen as essential, yet there was not an embedded pattern of learning from it.

I think what we do here's sad. Like I would like to do this better, but I'm not sure how to do that.

The weekly evening worship service centred on healing and involved their Healing Pastor. Due to the emphasis and timing, it included a range of people who did not attend the morning service.

We offer our "Words of Knowledge." There's usually some teaching about healing, faith, or how to pray, or some aspect to help people in their own lives or ministering to others. We're seeing God move in that. There are definite testimonies of people being healed. [That's] why we put [the Healing Pastor] on. You get this crossroad, "How can we move this church forward?" ... I was at a church where they had a healing ministry. If we can get some of our people a little bit more whole, a bit more secure, then they can actually exercise leadership... I think we're beginning to see that happening now and it will only strengthen us as a church.

The Healing Pastor also spent much of the week in appointments with people, either self-referred or referred by Anne for prayer and healing. Mount Louisa's healing ministry was seen as an integral part of the overall growth process.

I do believe people are growing. ... It's encountering God, a "God-experience", as much as a "head experience" that is part of the growth process. Our motto is "Experience God, be changed and make a difference," believing that people need to go through that process and then take others through that process. It's a continual circle. ... You continue encountering God, being changed by the Spirit, and then you *can* make a difference. I think there's that whole change process that's happening in people's lives that is part of their discipleship.

This cycle was not described as intentional action-reflection; rather as transformation through spiritual encounter, leading to ministry which involved *learning by doing* (with little explicit reflection).⁴⁸⁰

I talk about "spiritual growth" or "discipleship." I think it's to do with probably people's hunger or interest.

I guess part of the education is "doing it." It's giving people a go and encouraging them.

Worship was seen as the place where people were formed in being open to what God was saying and doing in the moment, and in being open as to how they might then respond. Leadership was not so much about formal training as about gifts, spiritual maturity and character. People's involvement in ministry was based upon their interests or gifts; this led to greater participation and learning from experience.

b. Forming Faith in Small Groups

Mount Louisa offered *Growth Groups* for adults, aimed firstly at relational and spiritual growth; close fellowship in which people might be open to the Spirit.

Many of them would have some Bible study stuff that they do, but that's not the whole thing. The purpose of a growth group is to grow. There's prayer. There's worship. There's sharing. We have done some of the Rick Warren stuff and found that really good. *Forty Days of Purpose*, [*Forty Days of*] *Community* and [*Forty Days of*] *Love*. I think what's been good is the church has done something together. We've encouraged everyone to be part of it. It's got a start. It's got an end, and the teaching is, at one level, fairly simple.

Anne indicated that formal education programs were not popular with the locals.

I have found formal education fairly non-effective here. And we've done things like Alpha, which I think works at other places, but we've just struggled to get numbers.

⁴⁸⁰ Appendix 14, Reference 4.

It is interesting to compare this with the Sunday School program which had been struggling with behaviour issues. The Sunday School had shifted from a curriculum-based approach to a small group model, centred on caring and relationships rather than on teaching.

I said, "I really don't care what you do in Sunday School. But I want you to sit down at the end. I want you to talk with them about their behaviour and why they've behaved [that way] and how they've related, how they've shared, how they've cared. If you want to relate that to some Biblical stuff that's fine. ... I want you to lay hands on every child and pray for them." And we've just had a huge turn-around. [We've] also challenged the parents and said, "We can't handle it if your kids come one week and don't come to the next three and there's two in a class. I want you to commit for nine weeks." That's turned Sunday School around, really positively.

There's no curriculum. They have gone and played football. And if it gets some energy out of them and we've got behaviour, and we've got kids living some of the values, we can actually start to speak into their lives.

We've got a teacher, a leader and a youth, with each class. That's part of a sort of intentional leadership training. I've tried to do some formal leadership training, and kids don't come. It's like [saying] to those Sunday School teachers, those people that are helping, ... "Your job is to bring on, to mentor those who are." ... They're not formally mentoring, but "Give them a go. Let them lead."

These practices seemed to be more about forming community and character than about learning Christian beliefs or the basics of the Bible.

c. Forming Behaviour and Character

Anne spoke about reflecting the Gospel through intentionally addressing people's attitudes and actions. When she began ministry in Mount Louisa, Anne was surprised to be confronted with a range of behavioural issues with children and youth, and also with some adults. She stated that this was to some extent a reflection of people's daily lives, including family life.⁴⁸¹

I hadn't encountered the sort of the stuff that was just all over the place until I got here, and just having to work that through and work out how to manage it. And we're not there, but it's certainly improved a lot. ... I think it's the brokenness of the people. We have behavioural standards in this church, called how do we behave: "H-O-W. Honour, Obedience and Wisdom." I've had to reach the point where "This is how we behave in this church." I don't assume that anyone knows how to behave. Kids will have drink in the auditorium. There's nothing wrong with it except then they spill it. It's just a lot more work for the cleaner. So, we don't do that here.

⁴⁸¹ The church had previously run some parenting courses to assist families with behavioural issues.

The congregational Mission Committee asked for a set of behavioural standards for people preparing to go away on mission trips. Instead, Anne chose to work on the HOW framework. This became a mantra for active behaviour management and for discipleship formation.

In Timothy, I think it says several times, ... “correct, rebuke and encourage.” ... In lots of ways it is a great way to disciple people. I’ve taken those words on board with people and gone more intentionally up to people to talk about the positives or the negatives of what they’ve done. ... I’ve encouraged my leaders. I’ve said, “Just don’t let the guys get away with that.” There’s a part of a behavioural training of the gospel rather than a factual training of the gospel. ... The behavioural training then leads to people’s involvement in stuff which I call mission...⁴⁸² They get excited about something. It’s that whole responding to God with our lives ... and not just ... knowing the Scriptures and quoting Scriptures but living those Scriptures out ... [which] leads to mission.

This sounded to me like the role of a leader on a children's or youth camp—setting acceptable standards for the whole camp and then working with camp leaders to maintain them, while maintaining a healthy community environment.⁴⁸³

My latest thing is atmosphere. Worship changes the atmosphere. What you bring, if you bring grumpiness, you infect everyone around you. Go out the door. Leave it outside and come and let’s bring some hearts that want to worship. ... You bring the right stuff, stuff starts to touch you and the whole thing begins to lift.

The congregation also hosted a Mothers of Pre-Schoolers’ program (MOPS) attended by 50 mothers and 100 children, with Anne providing mentoring and guidance to the key leaders. The portrait of Mount Louisa was of people growing in character through participation in community life shaped by moral norms within a climate of acceptance and forgiveness.

d. Forming Faith in Ministry and Mission

Anne described her role as helping to identify and nurture people’s gifts, partly through encouragement and guidance, sometimes through redirection or restriction.

God brings the people here, so He puts the gifts and the graces that are needed in this congregation, in this place, and I’ve got to nurture those. ... If someone comes to me and says, “I want to do this ministry,” I can light up.

⁴⁸² Appendix 14, Reference 5.

⁴⁸³ Appendix 14, Reference 6.

I am a practical, “do it” sort of person. ... The Holy Spirit dwells within us. ... That is amazing and extraordinary. ... The same power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us, and yet we’re clay vessels that this power dwells within. It gives this great capacity to do far more than we can even think or imagine. ... I speak that sort of stuff into the people. I’m really encouraging them out of their timidity and out of their insecurity.

Some people were guided into experiences, or occasionally, a program that might equip them for ministry, such as the Elijah House healing ministry program. Others were told to wait or to go away and work on personal issues.⁴⁸⁴ This was complemented by the healing ministry; people being released to serve.⁴⁸⁵

[The Healing Pastor] actually takes appointments. He’ll take up to six appointments a week and he’s always got ... people coming to see him. [We’re] trying to create a dynamic in the congregation that it’s OK to do. ... I am often saying to people “Come forward for ministry at the front,” and I pray with them and say, “You really need to go and make an appointment with him about this.”

This dynamic movement of recognising gifts, encouragement, and where necessary, healing and release, was accompanied by opportunities to serve locally and overseas. The congregation supported youth and adults with prayer and funds to engage in overseas mission, both short-term and longer-term. Members had recently been to Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. The church also supported Wycliffe Bible translators based in Darwin. Twenty percent of the church’s income went to mission beyond themselves.

While Mount Louisa encouraged people to be involved in mission, they didn’t provide formal training or debriefing for this.

We talk to them and pray them out. We talk to them when they get back, but not highly intentionally. Let the experience be experience. ... It’s more the mode “learn as they go” and I don’t know that it’s highly reflective.

There was not “highly programmed, processed or intentional” mentoring or learning. Those who went with mission organisations such as YWAM would participate in the organisation’s formal preparation and learning programs.

For many years the church had been the mainstay in organising a major Christmas event at The Strand on the Townsville foreshore, attended by 40,000 people, involving 60 churches and over

⁴⁸⁴ Appendix 14, Reference 7.

⁴⁸⁵ Appendix 14, Reference 8.

1,000 volunteers. All ages at Mount Louisa were encouraged to be participate. Anne was a key instigator and organiser.⁴⁸⁶

Anne recognised that sharing leadership at Mount Louisa was something of a challenge. Her story described juggling relational dynamics while being open to what God might be doing in people's lives—being attentive to the climate in which growth might take place.⁴⁸⁷

I believe God puts the people there and God speaks to them. I don't start by saying "We want to start a prison ministry." Someone comes to me and says it, and I just encourage people in their ministry. I encourage them to find someone else. Prison ministry is a little bit different because it required training and Presbytery and everything. But if they want to start, if they've got a heart for something, find someone else who's also got the heart. Don't start it on your own. Start praying together and see where that leads you.⁴⁸⁸

6.5 Congregations as Communities of Practice

The emphasis of this chapter is on exploring *the (re)formation of Christian faith practices as core to Christian education praxis*. This has both informal and formal aspects, involving enculturation and education.

a. Christian practices as intentional formation

In *Christly Gestures*, Brett Webb-Mitchell speaks of the entirety of the church's life as being educative. Using the metaphor of the Body of Christ, he then describes how we learn practices as Christ-like gestures through participation in the church's common life, including worship and sacraments, expression of virtues, and performance of gifts in service.⁴⁸⁹ Webb-Mitchell speaks of gestures as *perceptual* and *praxic*, meaning they are both seen and acquired "in the practice of the gesture itself."⁴⁹⁰ He also describes gestures as *referential language* in that their performance is representative of the Christian narrative. "The church is God's gesture to the world."⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁶ Appendix 14, Reference 9.

⁴⁸⁷ Appendix 14, Reference 10.

⁴⁸⁸ Appendix 14, Reference 11.

⁴⁸⁹ Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures*.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p95.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p107.

The emphasis here is on practices as being embodied, not spiritualised—not shallow mimicry to illustrate kernels of divine truth, but a deeper incarnation of lived faith.

The process of coming to faith and growing in the life of faith is fundamentally a process of participation. We come to recognise and live in the Spirit as we participate more and more broadly and deeply in communities that know God’s love, acknowledge it, express it, and live their lives in the light of it.⁴⁹²

Across the sample, ministry leaders named a range of common rituals, habits and virtues among their congregations’ formative, performative habits of faith. Here are three examples displaying similarities and differences: worship, hospitality and small groups.

Worship

My intention with this research was to examine Christian education, not worship, so it was with surprise and a little reluctance that I began to pay attention to descriptions of worship as central to faith formation in many of these congregations. The worship services at Mount Louisa and Nedlands were seen as *the* requisite place for spiritual encounter—as much an immediate experience of God’s grace, power or truth as a gradual experience of formation. This was also reflected at Clare. Nedlands, The Gap and North Ringwood clearly aimed to form people as lifelong worshippers. North Ringwood, like Nedlands, emphasised music, valuing all ages, and excellence in preaching. Both churches live up to high expectations when it comes to presentation. Queenscliff, Mapoon and the Mid-Lachlan were, in quite different ways, establishing new patterns for worship in the hope that these might become embedded as habits of faith. While churches in the study valued community, my sense was that worship was being crafted as a place for an *encounter-in-community* with God. In practice, liturgical form meant little if there was no spiritual vitality, or room for God to move or speak. The more common characteristics were as follows: weekly rhythm, participatory, multi-sensory/creative, multi-age, quality music, preaching as teaching, expectant of divine encounter, and mission-oriented.

Hospitality

Hospitality to exemplify practice was often mentioned in the interviews and it reflects some characteristics of being a community of practice. While many churches would probably identify

⁴⁹² Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* p40.

hospitality as one of their core values, churches' actual practices of welcoming and inclusion vary significantly. At Maroubra, hospitality began with the investment of building a residence for students.⁴⁹³ In Nedlands, a small group of Asian students were cared for through practical and spiritual means, and their numbers multiplied tenfold. Queenscliff named hospitality as a primary practice and reshaped their whole identity around this—building, events, staffing and relationships. New expressions of church at North Lakes and Eaton-Millbridge were, in quite different ways, working at how to be Christian community with people who had little or no church background. For Mapoon, two-way hospitality—as hosts and guests—resulted in a revolutionary turnaround for the social perceptions of young people. These narratives are striking because of the decisions to step beyond the typical understandings and practices of being a “welcoming church”. In each instance, the main aim and result was not assimilation, but transformation of community life. Hospitality engendered greater inclusion across differences in age, language and culture, belief, education and other social characteristics.

Small Groups

A concentration on small groups, intentional community, sharing and prayer was to be expected; after all, *fellowship* is synonymous with *church* in many places. The image from Acts 2 is of intimate *koinonia*—an all-of-life sharing that went beyond a weekly home group meeting. Maroubra's intentional community household was coupled with small groups at the university, based on conversation and prayer. Nedlands' approach was more systematic in terms of Bible study, however, the basis of this was seen as simple and timeless: open the Scriptures, share and pray. Mount Louisa's Grow Groups for adults and their groups for children and youth were mainly about spiritual vitality and positive relationships. Small groups were also seen as important at The Gap, Clare and North Ringwood. In Mapoon, much of the ministry with youth and young adults was grounded in semi-formal and informal small group formation, including Bible study, faith conversations and prayer. *Community* here represents a cluster of relational and spiritual practices more so than systematic teaching.

⁴⁹³ The house was built by the minister and congregation members themselves.

Practices are intentional, sustained and evolving. Worship, hospitality and small groups were seen as a priority in the congregations identified here—not simply as important, but requiring attention, energy and development. These are not only communal habits, but also corporate ways of learning. Lave and Wenger’s notion of *legitimate peripheral participation* recognises that people can learn through participation at the centre or the edges of such practices as “situated learning.”⁴⁹⁴ “The individual learner is not gaining a discrete body of abstract knowledge which (s)he will then transport and reapply in later contexts. Instead (s)he acquires the skill to perform by actually engaging in the process, under the attenuated conditions of legitimate peripheral participation.”⁴⁹⁵ The authors describe such a learning context as a *participation framework* whereby participants have differing perspectives according to their understanding, skill and proximity. This is the basis for learning as apprenticeship, whereby it is recognised that varied levels of participatory learning are not only allowed, they are required. Faith maturation processes can be designed within such social learning settings. Formation as habitual socialisation in discipleship can account intentionally for the diversity within a community.

b. Christian practices as intentional education

Congregations in the sample also engaged in planned, programmed teaching and learning activities. This often related directly to stated congregational visions or goals. The extent of forward-thinking, systematic planning and resource allocation was, in several instances, quite remarkable. Here we see intentional practices of education as integral to participation in the life of the congregation, and in some senses also its mission.

The following three educational emphases were common to a significant number of congregations in the sample: biblical and theological teaching; discovery learning through experience; leadership and gifts development.

⁴⁹⁴ Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*.

⁴⁹⁵ “This central concept denotes the particular mode of engagement of a learner who participates in the actual practice of an expert, but only to a limited degree and with limited responsibility for the ultimate product as a whole.” Ibid., p14.

Biblical and theological teaching

A majority of leaders gave evidence of planned, sustained opportunities for biblical and/or theological teaching and learning. In most cases, I considered this to be above and beyond the norm for Uniting Church congregations. They demonstrated not only a seriousness about the importance of increasing people's faith maturity, but also purpose and thoughtfulness regarding when and how people might best learn.

The Gap, Clare, Mapoon, Nedlands, Mount Louisa and North Ringwood all used short preaching and teaching series in worship as a strategy for deepening biblical and theological understanding and developing faith. This was seen not so much as knowledge acquisition, but as an opportunity for people to value and approach Scripture on its own terms rather than in piecemeal fashion. Such series were also designed to embed and reinforce learning through a degree of repetition or symbolic/analogic expression.

The ministers at Maroubra, Queenscliff, Mid-North Coast and North Lakes indicated that systematic biblical and theological teaching through preaching, Bible studies, a Book Club or special training events (such as for lay preachers) were vital aspects of their educational ministries. The teaching and learning environments were described as participatory and dialogical, with the minister facilitating learning, not simply lecturing.

Michelle:

People want to be *doing* stuff. Gen-Y ... don't want to just sit around and talk about what the Bible means. They want to know what it actually means for me now, not what it means in an abstract world with philosophical ideas.

A third strategy involved encouraging the use of the same Bible study or discussion material across as many groups as possible within the congregation (The Gap, Clare, Nedlands, Mount Louisa, Maroubra and North Ringwood). This approach required forward planning to synchronise teaching in worship and in small groups each year. Leaders indicated that a short-term focus was likely to increase attentiveness and attendance. Some congregations did not have multiple small groups, so teaching was more likely to be associated with weekly worship or with special events (Mapoon, Mid-Lachlan, Mid-North Coast, Queenscliff).

Discovery learning through experience

Foster speaks about *developmental* learning, *practice* learning and *discovery* learning, distinguishing between the repetition of regular practice and the ‘aha’ moments of discovery experiences.⁴⁹⁶ Here, several churches made a practice of encouraging discovery learning as integral to the rhythm of their community life.

Maroubra Uniting Church learned that encouraging people to visit The Wayside Chapel and Villawood Detention Centre took them outside their comfort zones, exposing them to people and experiences whose lives and struggles differed greatly from their own. The church visit to Tonga initiated a pattern of cross-cultural engagement, which not only raised faith questions, but led to ongoing relationships and further service.

The Gap Uniting fostered similar experiences through *Walking on Country* and overseas church exposure visits that were seen not as one-off events, but as part of the pulse of the congregation’s life. North Ringwood, Mount Louisa and Nedlands encouraged people’s participation in mission—either to serve or to evangelise—as an ongoing expression of their corporate mission. These congregations had a culture of calling and sending people, of sponsoring and supporting them, of wanting to hear their stories, questions and challenges. Discovery learning was seen as valuable in and of itself: you don’t necessarily go to help people, but firstly to learn from them. This led to further growth in faith, discipleship and mission. Both Andrew (Maroubra) and Anne (Mount Louisa) described an ongoing cycle of personal and spiritual growth leading to mission engagement leading to more growth, rather than a simple action-reflection step.

Leadership and gifts development

The sample was also characterised by churches who were intentional about leadership development, finding ways to help people discover or enhance their gifts or skills. A climate of encouragement (including permission to fail) was identified as crucial. Some churches also took processes and practices of forming and educating leaders seriously. Maroubra UC saw themselves not only developing the personal faith of young adults, but also laying the foundations of belief, practice and perspective that would equip them as leaders into the future. The ingredients for this

⁴⁹⁶ Foster, *From Generation to Generation*.

were regular spiritual disciplines, close Christian community, discovery experiences, wider leadership development opportunities and mentoring. This bears some similarity to the Mapoon approach with youth and young adults, though the settings were culturally different. Steve, from Nedlands, described an intentional process of developing people as leaders through systematic Christian education; apprenticeship based on gifts, leader support and training. For Anne at Mount Louisa, the process was organic and dynamic—recognition of gifts, release and/or empowerment, encouragement and guidance. North Ringwood and Wayville offered differing yet intentional learning programs, often hosting these in partnership with other church bodies or organisations. The Mid-Lachlan Mission Area provided *in situ* worship leader training. North Lakes, Mid-North Coast and The Gap actively encouraged participation in presbytery leadership training events, albeit with mixed success. Broadly speaking, leadership development encompassed grounding in spiritual practices, close community, discovery experiences, apprenticeship/mentoring, and occasional specific leadership training events.

c. Christian practices as participation in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ

In Chapter 2, Section 2.4, I began to discuss the question of where and how God is active in the church and its practices, particularly in its praxis of forming and educating disciples. This is a concern for the method of practical theology as well as for my own method as researcher. I also noted the differing epistemological lenses through which myself as researcher, the interview subjects, and their respective congregations view where and how God is at work in the church. Yet my interest at this point is in the descriptive and normative responses to the question. What do leaders say about how God is at work and what normative views might be brought to bear upon this?

Firstly, how did leaders speak about God's activity in the midst of their congregations (recognising that their theological perspectives differ)?⁴⁹⁷ It is interesting to compare the frequency with which interviewees mentioned *God, Jesus, Christ, the Holy Spirit or Trinity*. A word count on these terms resulted in a range from 13 mentions in one interview to 166 mentions in another! Most were in the range from 26 to 67 mentions.

⁴⁹⁷ This question could be pursued more thoroughly in any future study of this kind.

Andrew from Maroubra:

God's mission is at play in the world and our task is to try and find when we're called into that and asked to participate in it. How do we do that except through listening to each other and listening to the community? Our job is not necessarily to suddenly start the mission or to necessarily be the ones at mission, but to be the ones growing in faith to trust in God, to listen to each other with the expectant belief that God is calling something out of us to participate in that with God.⁴⁹⁸

For Andrew, God's work was construed as not confined to the church, but as actively transforming the world. The church was called outwards to become part of God's mission. God was seen to be speaking through the church's faith practices, both teaching and calling disciples. People's lives were transformed both through attentiveness to God and through boundary-crossing relationships and mission.

Steve from Nedlands:

There are lots of opportunities to serve missionally, and to reflect on that. At the same time, we equally encourage people to grow their faith in terms of their understanding of Scripture, their understanding of God, their experience of God. We want those two things to complement each other and ultimately, to be integrated ... they try and integrate their faith and their learning. ... I think the apprenticeship model I like, where people both learn the way of Jesus from Scripture, but also learn the way of Jesus by being engaged in serving people.

I want people to be grounded in Scripture, and believe that as they are grounded in Scripture, something transformational takes place. And their lives are being reshaped, reorientated, by God, in a way that will lead in a fruitful way to them serving God, missionally, day by day.

Steve expressed the view that the Bible is the means through which people encounter God's Word for the present day, deepening their faith understanding and their experience of God. In a similar sense to Andrew, Steve saw the disciplines of worship, Bible study and prayer as ways in which people could hear from God, and encounter God, leading to transformation and mission.

⁴⁹⁸ Appendix 12, Reference 16.

Anne from Mount Louisa:

Our motto is "Experience God, be changed and make a difference," believing that people need to go through that process and then take others through that process. So it's a continual circle. ... You continue encountering God, being changed by the Spirit, and then you *can* make a difference. I think there's that whole change process that's happening in people's lives that is part of their discipleship.

It's that whole responding to God with our lives, and behaving and not just getting head knowledge, not just getting head knowledge about knowing the Scriptures and quoting Scriptures, but living those Scriptures out, and living the Scriptures out leads to mission.

The Holy Spirit dwells within us, and as you think about that, that is amazing and extraordinary.

Anne's emphasis was more on encounter than discipline. God's Spirit was seen to be active in worship, in prayer, in healing, changing people and calling them to ministry. The Holy Spirit was seen as God empowering and revolutionising lives.

Simon from Clare is included here as another example from the sample:

Discipleship is primarily about participation in what Jesus is currently doing in the world, ... giving our community a sense of being a part of something which is much bigger than themselves, and yet the Spirit is drawing them into participation in that.

The goal is not ultimately to be engaged in mission, but the goal is ultimately to know who this God is, who we are as a consequence of who this God is, and what that therefore means for the way that we live our life.

Like Andrew, Simon understood that God was already active in the world, and that Christians were to become part of that, rather than seek to be the initiators of mission by themselves. Faith practices involved listening, learning and encountering the God whose grace changed people and enabled them to live as disciples. For Simon, the main impact of faith practices was to help people know that Christ had accomplished everything, and to know the Triune God in the present day.

These leaders, along with others in the study, articulated a belief that faith practices not only disposed people to learn about God, they are vehicles for people to experience God's goodness, truth, healing, empowerment and/or grace. This was evidence of the Spirit's presence in the church, not solely to bless Christians, but to call and equip them to be part of God's mission in the world. The view expressed was that the Spirit comes not just to enlighten people but as an agent of transformation. This emphasis on formation and education being linked to mission was repeatedly stated in a range of ways and is further described in the coming chapters.

In Section 2.4 I noted Andrew Root's critique of some approaches to practical theology as not giving sufficient account of the activity of God. The question here is about how we understand God's presence and activity in the practices or praxis of the church. The issue is important if we are to move beyond an instrumental (or even utilitarian) view of formation and education as secondary priorities or optional processes in the life of the church. It also addresses the problem of the terms *formation* and *education* being replaced by the term *discipleship* without any critical attention to what such a shift might mean.

Root sees that it is in the action of ministry that the divine and the human are connected. God's self-giving becomes "a deeply practical and lived reality."⁴⁹⁹ He sees *Christopraxis* as "the continued ministering presence of Christ."⁵⁰⁰ Root further defines justification as Christ's bringing life out of death in and through ministry.⁵⁰¹ It is on this basis (that practice is ontological rather than epistemological) that Root is dismissive of accounts of practice which stop at the descriptive or the hermeneutical without attending to the primacy of the work of Christ through the Spirit.

*Ministry as the act of God is the event of God's being coming to humanity; this being is always becoming because this being is always moving and active. It is, then, the event of God's moving that makes ministry an ontological encounter of the divine with the human.*⁵⁰²

This is the grounds for his claim that discipleship is participation in Christ, not mere imitation. Hence Root questions the Aristotlean approaches of authors who "assert that right action leads to right living, which leads, in their perspective, to God."⁵⁰³ His attention seems more on ministry events than on communal habits. He defines practice as God's *ex nihilo* creative actions that take place again and again through the Spirit; this is seemingly more about transformations than about formation (plural intended). Certainly, Aristotle, MacIntyre and some of the authors named here provide no account or a limited account of God's activity in relation to practice. However, I find that in emphasising ministry, Root tends to discount habitual discipleship as a purposeful way of

⁴⁹⁹ Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* px. "By ministry, I do not mean clerical or institutional functions, but a relational, personal, and embodied (even emotive) encounter of love and care, a willingness to share in the other, to join in the concrete experiences of homelessness, imprisonment, and hunger, to enter the experiences of suffering for the sake of participating in the transformation toward new life. *Ibid.*, p xiii.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p xii.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p14ff.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, p94.

⁵⁰³ Root makes this criticism of Browning, Miller-McLemore, Dykstra and Bass. *Ibid.*, p119.

experiencing life with God and participating in God's mission. Perhaps the ordinary daily life of Christians is often a more modest yet not insignificant involvement in what the Spirit is doing in the world. Practice need not be viewed as solely the product of external grace or (mere) human habit, but rather as including Spirit-dwelt growth in character or virtue.

An alternative view which seeks to retain God's initiative, while at the same time placing more emphasis on the embodiment of faith, comes from Owens' understanding of the church as a community of practices.⁵⁰⁴ Where Root seemed to be seeking to distinguish ministry events as *real experience* of God, Owens speaks of the whole of the life of the church as real embodiment of God. He relies on a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification rather than justification as the basis for the church's practices. "The Christian life is a life of visible holiness."⁵⁰⁵ Taking preaching (word) and eucharist (sacrament) as paradigmatic of the church's practices, Owens provides an account of Christ's embodiment in the church as the work of the Spirit, a continuation of the incarnation. "The distinct mission of the Spirit in the church ... cannot be viewed as abstracted or separated from how the Spirit worked in Christ's own life."⁵⁰⁶ The church's practices are embodied because the church *is* the Body of Christ. Drawing on Bonhoeffer, Owens says that "The church lives by the life of Christ, and is indeed the form Christ takes in the world."⁵⁰⁷ For Owens, the shape of the church's life is the shape of the life of Jesus in the Gospels (not only his death and resurrection). Furthermore, "the shape of participation is obedience."⁵⁰⁸ Owens draws on Catholic scholar Herbert McCabe's sacramental theology to explain how Christ is present in the church yet distinct from it. Echoing Newbiggin, McCabe speaks of the church as "the community which sacramentally foreshadows the life for which God has destined man (*sic*)."⁵⁰⁹ As Owens notes, McCabe explains Christ, the church (the body of Christ) and the sacraments as God's embodied communication with the world towards God's purpose of full communion with Creation.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁴ Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices*.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p10.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p25.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p89.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p92.

⁵⁰⁹ Herbert McCabe, *The People of God: The Fullness of Life in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p xii.

⁵¹⁰ Summarising McCabe, Owens says, "Human unity will be achieved in the eschatological future when our communication, our shared bodily life, is most fully human, lived in perfect fellowship with one another and with God." Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* p110.

Here is a resonance with Scharer and Hilberath's communicative theology (see Section 5.5). Christian practices, therefore, are sacramental participation in the ministry of Christ insofar as they are teleological—signifying what is to come and joining in Christ's work of bringing all things to communion with God. Religious educator Pierre Babin, in a commentary on the work of renowned communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, explains that in relation to Christ and the church, it is not that the church is the medium and Christ is the message. It could be said that Christ is the message and the church is the medium of his communication or effect. In Christ, medium and message are one.⁵¹¹

Owens wishes to distinguish the practices of the church from any general anthropological or sociological account of practices, "because participation is not in being in general but in the being of God's active, triune life."⁵¹² Perhaps this over-identifies Christ with the church (Christ has no body but ours), but Owens, echoing Hauerwas, sees the purposeful witness of the church's life as helping reveal to the world that it belongs to God. Creation (the world) has its own *telos* of union with God, and while God calls a particular people, God remains free to pursue God's purpose for all of Creation.⁵¹³ "The church now, in its corporate life, shows the world its own future as that toward and through which it is being drawn into God's own life."⁵¹⁴

From Root's real experiences of justification in Christ, to Owen's ecclesiology of participation in the Trinity, we move briefly to Richard Osmer who, like Root, draws on Moltmann's understanding of *Christopraxis*. The difference here is that Osmer speaks about what it means to be a teaching church. He locates the teaching ministry of the church within the frame of congregations finding "their own particular stories within the Theo-drama of God's creation, redemption and glorification of the world."⁵¹⁵ While grounding Theo-drama in the Trinity, praxis is discussed in relation to Christ's work or mission. Osmer says that praxis is "the comprehensive way of life of a

⁵¹¹ Pierre Babin and Mercedes Jannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁵¹² Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* p131. Drawing on Robert Jenson, Owens says, "It is the Spirit's freeing an actual human community, created and existing in time, embodied in its structures and social practices, that secures the church's *embodiment* as it exists in time as Christ's body in anticipation of the end." *Ibid.*, p151.

⁵¹³ The activity of God is the activity of bringing to union and completion in himself the various and distinct elements of the cosmos that possess being." Here Owens relies on the work of Maximus the Confessor from the seventh century. *Ibid.*, p177.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p188.

⁵¹⁵ Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* p203.

community, and *practices* as the discrete, tradition-bearing patterns of action that give concrete shape and form to its praxis.”⁵¹⁶ Osmer distinguishes between *core* and *mediating* practices, and draws the former from Moltmann’s understanding of Christ’s fivefold office expressed in congregational *Christopraxis*.⁵¹⁷

Christ’s Fivefold Office	Christopraxis	Congregational Core Practices
Prophetic	<i>Marturia</i>	Preaching, testimony, evangelism
Priestly	<i>Diakonia</i>	Eucharist, burden-bearing, social outreach
Transfigured	<i>Doxology</i>	Sabbath-keeping, praise, recreation
Royal	<i>Didache</i>	Catechesis, exhortation, discernment
Open fellowship	<i>Koinonia</i>	Baptism, affirmation of spiritual gifts, hospitality

This obviously echoes Maria Harris’ description of the New Testament church and the narrative of the book of Acts.⁵¹⁸ Osmer says that Moltmann sees *Christopraxis* as “the praxis of a community that participates in Jesus’ mission of redemption,” and that this mission is “not only in terms of the dialectical *contradiction* of the cross and resurrection but also in terms of the way Christ’s messianic life *anticipates* and *corresponds* to God’s promised future.”⁵¹⁹ Like Owens, Osmer sees practice as teleological, as growing participation in the divine drama of creation, redemption and consummation. Finally, Osmer sees the importance of such a normative account of Christian practices as providing congregations with the means to assess their own praxis.⁵²⁰

In considering how the practices of the church relate to its nature and purpose, we return to the work of Nicholas Healy, noted in Section 2.4. Healy emphasises God’s call rather than its visible expression as providing the distinctiveness of its identity.⁵²¹ While his emphasis on God’s initiative is clear, he sets up a distinction between the visible and the invisible church. This difference between the concrete and cosmic not only explains the contingencies of the church, it also serves as a reminder that God is in the whole world. As Owens notes, Healy doesn’t discount the concrete

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p222. In saying this, Osmer acknowledges the work of Reinhard Hutter in *Suffering Divine Things*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p222, 225.

⁵¹⁸ See Sections 2.5 and 6.1.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p221, 220.

⁵²⁰ This schema provides the basis for a *dramatological* model of catechesis. Ibid., Chapter 9.

⁵²¹ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*.

nature of the church, rather he questions whether or when we can recognise God within it. God does work through the church; we just can't be sure when or how.

There is more to be said about the core ecclesial praxis of forming and educating disciples for the sake of the mission of God. At this stage, based on the above analysis, I note the following.

- In the present context, Christian practices can be seen as formational and educational. They are integral to what it means to be the church as means of growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification), as means of grace and as the shape of obedience to God.
- Practices are not simply receptive disposition, or imitation, but participation in the ministry and mission of Christ through the Holy Spirit. In this sense they may be seen as sacramental, not participation earned, but as Spirit's gift and Christ's presence.
- The Holy Spirit continues the mission of Christ in and through the church as the body of Christ: the church's participation in Christ bears the shape of Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and God's coming reign. This Christ-shaped life of the church is not only Cross-shaped, but a reflection of the full life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the Way of Jesus.
- Without containing or prescribing the activity of the Spirit in the world, the life and witness of the church is sign, foretaste and instrument of God's coming reign. In this sense its community life witnesses towards and works for the full communion which is the *telos* of Creation with God.
- In the life of congregations, there is a genuine, imperfect movement of praxis towards congruence between the presence of the risen Christ through the Spirit, the Way of life of the people of God as the body of Christ (being and doing), and the witness of the church in the world.

This kind of normative understanding of the praxis of discipleship helps to make sense of what congregations in this study were seeking. It also fits with the theology and ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia, while posing some challenges for the church generally. The main implication is that to take formation and education seriously is not only to attend to the learning culture of a congregation but also to its practices of discipleship as essential for faith maturation and witness.

In the following chapter on leadership, we will look further at the being and doing of discipleship, the ethos of ministry as intentional leadership, and how the (re)formation of the church's culture and practices is in itself a work of the Spirit.

7. LEADING COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLES

Rev Dr Ian Hickingbotham, North Ringwood Uniting Church:

I find in a lot of places there's no intentionality. ... I'm in a cluster with other ministers at the moment, and I talk about some of this stuff, and there's just blank stares. There's no intentionality. Are we thinking about Christian education, Christian faith-formation other than the Sunday worship service? ... That's a bid to be intentional. Are we thinking about it for the different ages, for the children, for the youth, for the adults? Are we thinking about it for young parents who are under all this stress? ... Are we thinking about ... a resource we can give them? ... All that sort of stuff, we should be reflecting on all the time. ... We should be gauging the congregation and who is there, and what's going to work for them.⁵²²

A third lens for this study is church leadership as educational leadership. In Section 3.3 I introduced the theme of ministry as leadership, and the notion of educational leadership as the ministry of teaching on the one hand, and systemic leadership of a learning community on the other. The interview sample consisted of people in key congregational ministry leadership roles. Lay church members have been the primary teachers in congregations—in Sunday School classes, Kids Clubs, youth groups, adult Bible studies and small groups. However, to understand the congregation as a learning organisation, we need to pay attention to how it functions as a system. Where Chapter 5 considered the learning and leadership *culture* of congregations, Chapter 7 will consider the key leaders *ethos* along with their approaches to teaching. Teaching or *didache*, broadly defined, is recognised here as one of the core practices of the church. In the Protestant tradition, teaching is also identified as one of the core aspects of ordained ministry.⁵²³ But what does this look like in practice?

Each of the thirteen interview participants was asked about their role as a leader in helping the congregation/s growth in faith and discipleship. This elicited the following themes and sub-categories.

⁵²² Appendix 20, Reference 1.

⁵²³ Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit*.

Table 13: Minister as Leader

Minister as Leader	Sub-categories
Leadership styles and approaches	
	Initiative and experimenting
	Visionary
	Permission-giving
	Relationship-building
	Listening, discerning
Personal growth or openness	
	Openness to God or growth
	Authenticity, vulnerability, freedom
	Ongoing learning
Teaching styles and approaches	
	Adult education
	Minister as Teacher
	Learner-centred dialogue
	Equipping others
	Preaching
	Mentoring and modelling

The terms *ethos* is used here as a parallel to congregational culture. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *ethos* may mean:⁵²⁴

The character of an individual as represented by his or her values and beliefs; the moral or practical code by which a person lives.

or

The characteristic spirit of a people, community, culture, or era as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations; the prevailing character of an institution or system.

⁵²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press), www.oed.com (accessed March 21, 2018).

My use of ethos here is somewhat broader, encompassing the leader's values and beliefs, and also describing their approach to leadership. Leaders described attitudes and actions in concert, not in isolation from one another. Ethos seems an appropriate term to compare the leader's approach with the congregation's learning culture. Wendi Sargeant, whose interview is discussed in this chapter, defines Christian education as "an ongoing process of learning, teaching and living the Christian story in order to grasp Christian ethos."⁵²⁵ For Sargeant, ethos includes "identity, character, ethic, patterns of behaviour, and practices." I am not making such an expansive definition of ethos here; however, I mention it as a similar use. This prefigures later discussion about praxis and habitus.

Congregations in this Chapter

The following three congregations/regions are discussed here.

- **North Lakes** Uniting Church, north of Brisbane in south-east Queensland
- **The Mid-Lachlan Mission Area**, a cluster of rural Uniting Churches centred on Parkes in western New South Wales
- Christ Church Uniting Church, in **Wayville**, just south of the Adelaide CBD, South Australia (Christ Church will be referenced by its location)

Each interview will be examined in relation to the three broad themes identified: *leadership styles and approaches*; *personal growth or openness*; and *teaching styles and approaches*. In terms of leaders' attitudes and actions, leadership and teaching are not discrete categories, nevertheless I have attempted to distinguish more general leadership from specific approaches to teaching.

As I noted in the introduction, some biblical material is included here as normative sources for a dialectic with contemporary experience. Where Section 6.1 explored Acts chapter 2 as a way of examining what disciples are called to do, Section 7.1 analyses John 15, "the vine and branches," in order to reflect on the being of disciples in relation to God. The choice of John's Gospel was prompted partly by Rowan Williams' treatise on *Being Disciples*.⁵²⁶ However, this section of John's Gospel (Chapters 14 to 17) is also notable as a source of Trinitarian theology in relation to

⁵²⁵ Sargeant, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation* p126.

⁵²⁶ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples* (London: SPCK, 2016).

discipleship and the church. Chapters 8 and 9 also link this to the *missio Dei*. Further, I link John 15 to a local agricultural metaphor, namely grape-growing and wine-making, as a means of exploring what it means to be a fruitful community.

7.1 Being Disciples

a. Local Communities, Common Practice

My family lives in the Adelaide Hills, surrounded by wine regions and wineries to the south, east and north, and even north-west on the edge of the city. Among the regions of McLaren Vale, Langhorne Creek and the Adelaide Hills themselves there is a breadth of grape varieties grown in different soils and micro-climates.

I took two ministry colleagues to Hahndorf Hill winery, one of the smaller, privately-owned establishments with a focus on Austrian and German varieties. While sampling the wines, we ended up in a conversation about how wine-making was a craft consisting of many practices in the hands of different wine-makers in diverse soils and climates. As a result, the end product took on a character of its own. Each grape variety and varietal, each wine-maker is different from others. Single soil or *terroir* wine-making is something of a trend around here, as each wine bears the flavour of the parcel of land on which it was grown.

One colleague subsequently wrote a blog post, drawing upon our conversation.⁵²⁷

The art of making wine involves wisdom and creativity. Winemakers draw on inherited wisdom, picked up from family and colleagues, but also passed down over centuries from people in the industry. That wisdom is grown as people take risks and try out new varieties and techniques. Courage is required when facing what appear to be disastrous years. There is always something to learn. In the same way we see people around the country drawing on a tradition of faith formation that has centuries of theological exploration at its base, along with more recent learning about how people learn.

⁵²⁷ Duncan Macleod, "What We Learn from Winemakers", *PostKiwi* blog, <http://www.postkiwi.com/2012/what-we-learn-from-winemakers/> (accessed November 27, 2017).

The image of wine-making may be used to reflect on the praxis of forming and educating disciples. While a core set of wine-making practices exist, vignerons make vastly differing choices throughout the process. Some of these relate to the kinds of grapes being grown and selected, many involve choices in response to regional climate and weather conditions in any given season, some involve production and equipment, while in the final stages there are decisions about blending and ageing the wine. Alongside all of that is the nature of the community who make the wine, whether large or small, local business or multinational, close-knit friends and family or large staff team. Even the winemaker may have a larger or smaller role in determining the product range and style.

What they share in common is the desire to make good wine from the fruit they have grown. That goal might include profit-making and notoriety, but I have yet to meet a winemaker who doesn't want their wine to put smiles on people's faces as well. When you visit a family-owned winery, they display a sense of genuine delight in the co-operative endeavour, in working together to make a palate-pleasing product of which they can be proud.

This metaphor highlights some aspects of communities of practices. Practices are subject to substantial variation based on the characteristics of the community who embody them, and the context in which they take place. They change over time at the same time as they stay the same.

Vineyards and wine are common images throughout the Bible in narrative, poetry, parables and prophetic writings. Grape vines were a common feature of Mediterranean geography and important for economies.⁵²⁸ The budding vine is a symbol of beauty, plentiful harvest and prosperity, and its fruit had common use in meals and festivities. Grapes are not only to be gathered and enjoyed but left for the poor to gather.⁵²⁹ Of course, wine can accompany celebration, but also prompt unseemly behaviour.⁵³⁰ As valuable property, vineyards are bought and sold, gifted and stolen.⁵³¹ They are also prominent in divine judgement as evidence and in

⁵²⁸ Jan G van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁵²⁹ See Deuteronomy 20-28.

⁵³⁰ Judges 9:27; Proverbs 31:21; Ephesians 5:18.

⁵³¹ 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 18-19; Nehemiah 5.

divine reward as providence.⁵³² In the Gospels, vineyards feature in parables as workplaces.⁵³³ Wine symbolises celebration and friendship.⁵³⁴

In the Hebrew Scriptures, vines could represent people or Israel itself, with God as the gardener and the fruitfulness of the vine being its essential purpose.⁵³⁵ This is a backdrop to Jesus' imagery of the vine and the branches in John 15. Jan van der Watt examines the whole of John's Gospel through the lens of metaphor or figurative language, beginning with John 15 and John 10.⁵³⁶ He notes that John 15 has a "double narrative" of both literal and figurative references to the vine (Jesus), the gardener (God), the branches (disciples), bearing fruit and pruning occurring at the same time.⁵³⁷

In reflecting on my research interviews and the biblical and theological themes that they seemed to raise, the vine and branches from John 15 came to mind for three reasons. The first was the question of whether or how this congregation and its leader/s seemed to have a clear sense of the presence of God with them. Secondly, were they as a community demonstrating unity or division? Finally, in what sense were they being productive or bearing fruit?

There is a view that John's Gospel is primarily an evangelical document aimed at unbelievers. However Moody Smith concurs with Louis Martyn that the likely setting of John's Gospel is one of disputes within a synagogue and also between John's community and the synagogue.⁵³⁸ PHEME PERKINS suggests a Christian audience with some knowledge of Judaism.⁵³⁹ In this section, I take a view consonant with Smith and Perkins that John writes in order to remind his community about Jesus' story and of their identity as his followers.

⁵³² Isaiah 3:14; Isaiah 5; Isaiah 37-37; Jeremiah 31-21; Ezekiel 28:26; Amos 4-5.

⁵³³ Matthew 20-21; Mark 12; Luke 20.

⁵³⁴ Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; John 2.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel According to John* p54

⁵³⁸ D Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Setting, Sources, and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987).

⁵³⁹ PHEME PERKINS, "The Gospel According to John," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: G. Chapman, 1989).

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:1, 4-5 NRSV

b. Abide in Me

This text is part of the extended discourse from Jesus that takes place during the last meal with his disciples, beginning at John 13 and concluding with his prayer for them in John 17. It follows Jesus' example of servanthood, foot-washing and his commandment for them to love one another (13: 34-35). John 14 includes Jesus' emphasising his union with the Father (14: 1-2, 6-7, 9-13, 20, 31) and the promise that the Father will send the Holy Spirit (14: 16-17, 26). Repeatedly, the disciples are instructed to keep Jesus' commandments as an expression of their love for him.

Chapter 15 continues these same themes using the metaphor of the vine and branches. According to Painter, the Greek word for "abide," *meno*, means not only "dwelling" or "inhabiting," but also "persistence."⁵⁴⁰ Disciples abide with their Master not only in *place* but also across *time*. Rowan Williams says that discipleship is about "staying," not just "turning up from time to time."⁵⁴¹ He emphasises that in the time of Jesus, apprentices lived in a constant relationship with their Master. The followers' primary disposition was to be attentive to the Master's words and action, expectantly seeking new teaching.⁵⁴² Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus calls his followers to pay attention to him—to his sign-actions, to his words, and also to himself. It seems odd that the Master's departing message is to instruct his apprentices to stay with him. Abide with me! See you later!

According to John 14 and 15, to abide with Jesus means firstly to remain in his love. This is relational in scope, although not simply affective. To abide is to *be* in Jesus' love, and therefore in the Father's love—to *stay connected* to the vine. There is a circular reasoning in these chapters: abide in my love, love me, keep my commandments, abide in my love. The beginning and end

⁵⁴⁰ *Word, Theology, and Community in John*, ed. John Painter, R Alan Culpepper and Fernando F Segovia (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), p178.

⁵⁴¹ Williams, *Being Disciples* p1f.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

points are Jesus' and the Father's love. God's love undergirds and envelopes our discipleship. "It is not just endurance or tenacity that is encouraged, rather abiding *in Jesus*" as the basis for enduring everything else.⁵⁴³ These chapters repeatedly connect Jesus with his disciples and Jesus with the Father; knowing the Son is to know the One from whom he comes. As children of God, we are born of God (John 1:12-13), but we can only know the Father through the Son. These relationships are mutual and prior to any obedience on the part of disciples, hence my emphasis on *being* in Christ rather than *doing*.

c. I am the True Vine

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the one who makes God known. He reveals God to humanity so that people might know God and be liberated and transformed by that revelation.⁵⁴⁴

If disciples are to pay attention to the Master, what is on their observation checklist? Gail O'Day answers this question by asking why, from a literary perspective, Jesus' long discourse is in this particular place in John's Gospel. "Jesus' talking is as much a part of the story line of John as Jesus' acting."⁵⁴⁵ O'Day links the Word becoming flesh with the Gospel being a "story of the Word." Jesus' repeated declarations about himself would sound egotistical if he were a modern-day politician (or an ancient Emperor). Instead they represent the Logos who was at the beginning of Creation, now speaking in the disciples' world. The Word becomes flesh, then the flesh acts as Word. Powell identifies John's Gospel as having two parts, *The Book of Signs* (1:19-12:50) and *The Book of Glory* (13:1-20:31).⁵⁴⁶ Here we are seeing Part Two of the Gospel as, in a sense, the *Book of Words*.

Just as the identification of Jesus with the Logos in John 1 reveals his unity with the Father from the beginning, so his declarations as the incarnate Son reveal that he and the Father are one. Jesus' words come from the Father; the disciples have no other way of knowing the Father than through the Son (John 14:7).⁵⁴⁷ Jesus is not simply a messenger, nor is he a mimic, but abides with

⁵⁴³ *Word, Theology, and Community in John* p179.

⁵⁴⁴ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* p181.

⁵⁴⁵ Gail R O'Day, "'I Have Said These Things to You': The Unsettled Place of Jesus' Discourses in Literary Approaches to the Fourth Gospel," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John*, ed. John Painter, R Alan Culpepper and Fernando F Segovia (Chalice Press, 2002), p146.

⁵⁴⁶ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* p170. See also Johan Ferreira, *Johannine Ecclesiology*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement series 160 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁵⁴⁷ "If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." NRSV

the Father, and he with the Son (John 14:11).⁵⁴⁸ This mutuality is also a future promise to the disciples (John 14:19-20).⁵⁴⁹

God's activity with relationship to the Son is all-encompassing and comes to expression in statements regarding God's life-giving powers and activity in past, present and future.⁵⁵⁰

Jesus' "I am" statements are not only declarations about himself, but also about Yahweh, the "I am" from whom he comes and on whose behalf he speaks and acts. As such, Jesus' words also declare his mission to those who hear him. For his followers, this frames their mission inasmuch as they abide in him. His words reveal the Word who was at the beginning, is now present in the flesh, and on whose behalf the Father will send the Spirit to be their teacher in the future (John 14:25-2). Jesus will also return to them (John 16:22-23).

To abide in Jesus, then, is not just to notice what he has said in the past, but to recognise that he is present now, and continues to remain with his followers and teach them through the Holy Spirit. The Word continues to reveal the love of the Father and speak of God's will and purposes -- the *missio Dei* -- to and through his disciples. The text raises the question of how faith formation and education help people to learn to abide in Christ, to learn from the narratives of his life, to grow in the habits that constitute attentiveness, and to discern what the Living Word says to us today through the Holy Spirit. Rather than simply learning about the Christian faith, such ways of learning would form people to abide in the source of faith, to live in attentiveness to the presence of God in Christ.

d. Bear Much Fruit

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12 NRSV

Just as abiding means persisting over time and not just sitting still with Jesus, it also has a result, namely bearing fruit in Christ and for the Father. The life of discipleship is a life of much fruitfulness. In John 14:10-14, Jesus states that the works that he does are the work of the Father

⁵⁴⁸ "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." NRSV

⁵⁴⁹ "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." NRSV

⁵⁵⁰ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p69.

who dwells in him, and that these works point back to the Father. The incarnate Word's signs and teachings reveal and thus glorify the One from whom he comes and in whom he abides. Then in 14:21-24, Jesus seems to make his love and the Father's love conditional on the disciples keeping his commandments. It would be a mistake to see this as a 'works righteousness.' The Father's love is purposeful in that we are to respond not simply by basking in God's love, but by choosing, in love, to do what God asks of us. If we were to fail to bear fruit, this would be a sign that we were not responding in love and obedience, hence not abiding in the vine. Jesus' commands to his disciples reflect his own obedience to the Father; he asks them to follow his example not by rote but through relationship.⁵⁵¹

Chapter 14 makes it clear that the fruit described in Chapter 15 is the result of keeping Jesus' words or commandments, all of which are instructions from the Father. The first imperative, however, is not to obey, but to abide. Jesus' discourse connects love from God, love towards God and love among the disciples in one set of mutual relationships. For disciples, fulfilling of God's will is inextricably enmeshed in the receiving and giving of love. It is, however, conditional in two senses. In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays that the Father will make his disciples one through the Father's love. This is conditional in that the world does not know the Father, and thus does not yet abide in his love. Divine love is presented here as the Father's choice, so to speak, rather than as a non-conscious force. Secondly, it is conditional as those who hear may choose not to respond with love and obedience (John 17: 12-20).⁵⁵²

God's love is a necessary but not sufficient condition for unity among believers; their response of love is vital if the world is to know of the Father's love. Fruitfulness is dependent on disciples abiding in God's love, but also on them being united in love and purpose. Koester notes that the Greek words for pruning and cleansing are similar.⁵⁵³ He says, "[The] fruitless branches are already separated from the love that the vine provides, since they do not bear the fruit of love."⁵⁵⁴ The

⁵⁵¹ "The love and obedience that characterise Jesus' relationship with the Father give shape to the life of his followers." Craig R Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p272f.

⁵⁵² "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." NRSV

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p273.

disciples, however, have been cleansed rather than cut off. Ferreira notes that Chapters 13 to 17 are about ecclesiology as well as Christology.⁵⁵⁵ He identifies relational themes of friendship, servanthood, and mutuality along with the distinctiveness of the disciples' separation from the world. This seems to suggest that the fruitfulness of a learning community of disciples is grounded in the quality of its communal life in Christ, not just in the acquisition of knowledge or skills.

7.2 North Lakes Uniting Church, Queensland

Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant

northlakesunitingchurch.org.au

www.thelakescollege.com.au⁵⁵⁶

North Lakes is a relatively new suburb 30 kilometres north of the Brisbane CBD, due west of Redcliffe. The Uniting Church congregation was started in 2006 as a church plant by Moreton Rivers presbytery alongside the establishment of The Lakes College, which is a Uniting Church school. The congregation meet on the College premises. In 2012 the College had 400 students, which had grown to 700 students by the end of 2017. The congregation consisted mainly of families with younger primary and pre-school children, a few teenagers, and an older group of people ranging from their 50s to their 90s. Worship attendance was 50–60 people. Many members were new to church or had come from a range of Christian denominations. Wendi Sargeant served from 2011 to 2013 as both minister to the congregation and chaplain to the school in one integrated role. The chaplaincy role included teaching Christian education, pastoral care and leading weekly chapel services.

⁵⁵⁵ Ferreira, *Johannine Ecclesiology*.

⁵⁵⁶ "North Lakes Uniting Church is an inter-generational community of people committed to living out God's Good News to each other, the community and creation." North Lakes Uniting Church website. <http://northlakesunitingchurch.org.au> (accessed 19 January, 2018). The Lakes College website. <http://www.thelakescollege.com.au> (accessed 19 January, 2018).

a. Leadership styles and approaches

With the congregation being relatively new, relationship-building was vital for forming community. This was encouraged as part of congregational life. For Wendi, the relational, pastoral dimension of ministry formed the basis for listening to people and discerning what was needed.

That's the great thing about here, because it is a dormitory suburb in some ways, and so it has a strong sense of its own community. In lots of ways that sort of thing is easier here, because already the idea is in people's minds, ... the sense that people come from other places. They're looking for friends and family, pseudo-family or whatever.

The pastoral side is so important, because without that relationship you can't get a handle on where they're at in their faith. ... At the moment we are going with the things that have been going and introducing a lot of more social type things, just to get to know people and to figure out what they understand and where their questions are. Listening, it's all listening. I guess in lots of ways, I do work fairly intuitively.

As a result, church life was somewhat exploratory, but with a strong relational base. It was about trying to "be" a church community in the first instance.

They're trying to figure out what being a church is. In lots of senses they're doing experiments. ... It was very strongly towards trying to help people understand what Christianity was. Very, very basic. ... Their idea really was to provide that kind of relationship community ... probably more so really than Christian education. ... They're just sort of helping people to relate and get to know one another and gently teach.

While this sounds like "fluid church," it was not haphazard. Wendi saw part of her role as helping to facilitate a sense of vision, but also asking critical questions of the congregation and its leaders.

We did a strategic sort of "vision for mission" thing at the beginning of the year, and about a month of prayer, and worked on what we were going to do, and it basically came out that we wanted to outreach into the community in the sense of helping people to feel welcome in the church. My role is saying, "OK, once we get these people here, what are we actually going to do with them? ... What's going to motivate them to come and stay and ... serve?"

Wendi brought her own sense of purpose and vision, namely that people would learn and live the Christian way (or ethos) in their particular time and place.

I guess firstly understanding that there is a Christian ethos, that there is a way of being a Christian that makes sense in this community here.

The great thing about a church plant is you can make it whatever it's going to be. You know, you can make it into something that really suits that area and isn't weighed down by a

whole lot of other stuff. The young families especially are open to so much, or so many different styles of learning, teaching and living the Christian story.⁵⁵⁷

Leadership in ministry was intertwined with the life of the congregation. Community itself was an opportunity for learning from life and faith.

Ethos envelops that kind of stuff as well. It's not just rules-and-regulation type instruction... "These are the ways that you live." It's "OK, come with me, come and have dinner. We'll talk about that." But also, "Come down to see our soup kitchen or whatever it happens to be. Come with me while I drop off a casserole to somebody or something." It's the whole, that *real* sense of community.

b. Personal growth or openness

Wendi indicated that she couldn't be a teacher unless she was first a learner.⁵⁵⁸ Her emphasis here was on learning from the congregation.

Listening, to me, is the most vital kind of role that you have, because you're listening to not just conversations, but "text" in a whole range of different ways, why people say things and what they're doing, what they're doing in the body language, why they act in particular ways and all those kinds of things. It's sort of a listener, but it's drawing all the bits together.

My sense was that Wendi was articulating a way of learning through attentiveness for herself as well as for the congregation, a "paying attention" that echoed John 15.

The ethos thing is probably the key in lots of ways in the sense of listening, listening to what's happening in the world, creation, in the community, listening to the Word, listening to the Bible, the Word Jesus, listening to the Spirit, all those sorts of things, listening to other denominations, other faiths, and yeah, working as, as the hands and feet of Jesus in lots of ways.

Her approach to ministry was grounded in a sense of God being real for us today and also God as greater than our present experience.

What I'm trying to do is help them to enjoy God. If you know a little bit about the nature of God and the nature of yourself, as Augustine would say, then you're probably going to be a bit more motivated, bit more interested in your faith, and how you put it on the ground.

⁵⁵⁷ Appendix 15, Reference 1.

⁵⁵⁸ Wendi had just completed a PhD, so she was obviously open to ongoing academic learning.

I suppose it comes down to the immanence and transcendence of God. God is close to us, and also God is all-powerful. There is ... our understanding of what it means to be a Christian is the mundane day-to-day stuff, but it's also the awe and wonder and figuring out that tradition means there's lots of people down the ages that have also experienced that.

c. Teaching styles and approaches

At the time of the interview, Wendi had recently completed her doctorate in the field of Christian education.⁵⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, she was quite articulate about the nature and role of Christian education.

I see Christian education ... as an intersection of doxology and dogma. Doxology is the ... worship of God, and dogma ... is what we believe about God and ourselves. ... The intersection there is [that] ... we've got to know something about God in order to serve God, in order to worship God. ... An intersection of those two is where we learn the character of Christianity, of what it means to be a Christian.⁵⁶⁰

Worship, belief and experience

Her approach to teaching and learning had a number of facets based on connecting belief, worship and experience. For Wendi, worship was seen as central and critical in Christian education and formation.

It's also what you do in worship, too, and how you explain bits of worship. Because many of the young families have ... never had any formal Christian instruction or training, they're open. ... The world's your oyster almost. It's like you can help them to get an idea of a Christianity that's not bound up with a whole lot of rules and regulations. ... It's fairly experiential, but grounded for me in that doxology and dogma intersection.

This understanding combined formation and education. Wendi's doctoral thesis included an education program designed for use in worship about the nature of belief and the nature of worship.

Worship can have a more formative nature if we actually understand what's going on in it. ... Sunday school happens while church is on. I'm helping them to realise how important it is for children to be in worship, and so we're gradually moving into the church.

⁵⁵⁹ Sargeant, Wendi, "Christian Education and the Emerging Church" (PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia, May, 2011). An adaptation of her thesis has since been published as Sargeant, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation*.

⁵⁶⁰ Appendix 15, Reference 2.

Learning as reflection on experience

Intentional teaching, however, was not viewed primarily as being about cognitive understanding. Rather it included teaching processes that enabled people to reflect on daily experience, resulting in changed living. According to Wendi, this way of teaching suited a post-modern environment.⁵⁶¹

I see it as more openness to a whole range of different worldviews and different ideas and different practices. ... That's why in my ... interpretive framework [there] is action and reflection on teaching, learning and living. ... It's more the knowledge of the craftsman or the craftsperson. It's like "This is how you practice this thing." ... It's much more than *poiesis*.⁵⁶²

We are looking to be able to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. It's all very well knowing a lot of information or knowledge about our faith, but unless we can actually do something with it, put it on the ground and think critically about it, then it's probably not a whole lot of use to us.

There was a sense in which learning began with life and ended with life, however education included bringing theology, the Bible and tradition to bear upon human experience as "a framework of action and reflection on teaching, learning, and living."

Intentional Teaching

Wendi also spoke about the need for Christian education to be intentional, not only as well-designed education, but also as something important and purposeful in the life of a congregation. Thus, Christian education included working on how people learn.

It's the actual intentionality of keeping those things interwoven and interlinked, the pastoral and the liturgical and the ecclesial and diaconal ... so that they're not just kind of picking up the next thing that comes along... "We should go and do *Alpha*, or we should go and do *Christianity Explained*. ... Yeah, that could be good, but let's look at what we've already been through. ... "Is this really the best thing for us?" It's critiquing, as well critical thinking and reflecting on ... praxis, on our practices and where we're going and what we're doing, bringing to that a sense of spirituality and the sacredness of everyday things.

Teaching involved listening, good learning processes, and understanding of theology. Wendi described a method of practical theology as the way to teach.⁵⁶³

Practical theology can grow out of ... the actual thinking about a situation and being able to bring to it a whole range of things that might talk to one another, to bring in tradition, to

⁵⁶¹ Appendix 15, Reference 3.

⁵⁶² Appendix 15, Reference 4.

⁵⁶³ Appendix 15, Reference 5.

bring in Scripture, to bring in experience ... and then to be able to help them be interwoven and talk to one another. ... In that sense, [a teacher is] somebody who has a solid understanding of why they're doing what they're doing theologically.

At North Lakes, intentional teaching opportunities included church meetings, presbytery leadership training events, and particular teaching events.⁵⁶⁴ In a faith community which gathered people from many different churches and some from no church, Wendi realised that intentional teaching about theology and church history was needed.

I used to talk about reformed theology all the time, and people would say, "Well, what's that?" So, I did a historical thing on the Reformation. ... Many people knew about the Reformation from their history lessons, but they didn't really understand what it meant theologically for them. I get heaps of questions about "What does the Uniting Church think about this or that?" and so [I'm] trying to point them ... to an understanding of our reformed and evangelical theology.

Learning through questions and conversation

This kind of approach to learning from experience and relating it to Scripture and theology required an open, dialogical learning climate.

Openness to keep questioning, ... to make sure that questions and exploration and experimentation is okay... an environment where people can open up and say what they think and be understood. ... An openness to diversity, ... helping people to see that new way of knowledge. It's not just learning of facts. It's not just we have to know Bible stories, but it's how we bring our tradition and our Scripture and our experience and whatever to situations.

Hence the relational character of the learning community and the fruits of learning were both part of "walking the talk." Wendi's emphasis on attentiveness and discernment, close and open relational community, and transformation for mission, provide connecting points with John Chapters 14 to 17.

All those different things ... work towards transformed action ... That's what it's about: transformed by the Spirit of God.

There's the church being the church, as in people of God, body of Christ, working together, all that sort of, all those sort of pictures, listening to and being sort of the hands and feet of the *missio Dei*, God's mission. It's not just that we happen to be doing something, having a pantry where we give out things or food, but it's all part of the mission of God across the whole world.

⁵⁶⁴ Appendix 15, Reference 6.

7.3 Mid-Lachlan Mission Area, NSW

Rev Tom Stuart

The Mid-Lachlan Mission Area is a cluster of rural churches centred on Parkes in mid-western New South Wales, approximately 400 kilometres west of Sydney, and lying on the Newell Highway and the Indian-Pacific rail route.⁵⁶⁵ In 2001, Parkes had a population of about 10,000 people. The region features broadacre farming and grazing, wheat and sheep, and is noted for the Parkes radio telescopes. It is renowned for an Elvis Festival, which has been held periodically since 1992, and now in 2018 attracts over 20,000 people annually.⁵⁶⁶

Part of the Macquarie-Darling Presbytery, the Mission Area includes the towns of Condoblin, Parkes, Forbes, Bedgerabong, Cookamidgera, Eugowra, Bogan Gate, Gunningbland and Trundle—an area of about 150 km by 100 km. Forbes is the second-largest town in the area and in 2011 had a population of approximately 6,800.⁵⁶⁷

When we spoke in 2012, Tom Stuart had been in ministry in the Mid-Lachlan for eleven years. During the 1970s and 1980s, there had been ministers at Forbes and Condoblin, and three or four ministry agents based in Parkes. Prior to Tom's arrival, the Presbytery Minister and Synod Rural Ministry worker devised a plan for a regional cluster ministry with a team of three: a Traditional Congregations Worker, a Rural Congregations Worker and a New Congregations Worker. The Traditional Congregations Worker would be based in Parkes, the Rural Congregations Worker based in Forbes (sixty percent) and working regionally (forty percent), and Tom was appointed as the New Congregations Worker to work with one new congregation and seek to establish others.

Tom explained that they had been unable to appoint a Rural Congregations Worker, and as a result he needed to rethink his leadership role with the smaller towns and congregations, which he called *village congregations*. The Parkes congregation was served primarily by the "Traditional" resident

⁵⁶⁵ "2011 Census QuickStats - Parkes NSW" (Australian Bureau of Statistics), http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/UCL113017?opendocument (accessed March 23, 2018).

⁵⁶⁶ "Parkes Elvis Festival", <http://www.parkeselvisfestival.com.au> (accessed March 23, 2018).

⁵⁶⁷ "2011 Census QuickStats - Forbes NSW" (Australian Bureau of Statistics), http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/UCL113017?opendocument (accessed March 23, 2018).

minister. The Forbes congregation had previously split over worship style, with a charismatic group leaving and a small remnant remaining.

The smaller towns were in decline in terms of population, services and church membership. The village congregations (several numbering five to ten people) consisted mainly of retired people, some farming families and a small number of other professions (e.g., teachers). The Forbes congregation numbered about forty-five people while Parkes had thirty people. The new congregation persisted at Forbes for a few years and then ceased.

a. Leaderships styles and approaches

I had previously heard from UCA synod and presbytery staff anecdotally that Tom's leadership was critical in the development of a different approach to ministry and discipleship with the village congregations. In terms of leadership style, Tom could be characterised as highly intuitive, affective/relational and experimental.⁵⁶⁸

Visionary, initiative, experimenting

Tom's "aha" moment was a realisation that worship in the village congregations was "serviced" by the ministers or lay preachers who would fly in and fly out each Sunday (by car) "like a milk run." Starting new congregations and supporting the existing ones seemed impossible in his role. The minister-centric approach needed changing. This involved paying attention to what God might already be doing.

I began to flow where I saw where there was life already and support the life that was there, rather than trying to start something new, which perhaps should have been an important thing to do as well. ... I couldn't find really a lot of energy to create new things and I knew I wasn't going to do that on my own.

Tom realised that each congregation already had what they needed to *be* the church in their place. What would help them best was resourcing to enliven this.

What I'd been doing was jumping into a car, racing off and taking church to these poor people who then sat there ... like "Here is everybody sitting in a bus" and I was the driver, and if the driver didn't turn up it wouldn't go anywhere. It dawned on me that day ... they truly *were the church* and everything that I'd heard Jesus saying, ... "When two or three

⁵⁶⁸ He told me during the interview that his Myers Briggs personality type was INFP, which seemed to make sense in terms of his narrative.

gather together, there I am in your midst," ... all the gifts. ... I'm thinking that they're at a loss for something. ... But [what] hadn't dawned on me before, ... [it] was already present there and all I had to do was provide the resources to become what it truly is.

This was the genesis of *Project Reconnect*, an initiative to equip congregations to lead their own worship with additional resourcing as required.⁵⁶⁹ *Project Reconnect* was the main initiative explored in our conversation together as a strategy for ministry and mission across this cluster. "Reconnect" signified a renewed connection with God, with each other, and with the world. Worship became a weekly focus for discipleship growth in a fresh way.

Listening, discerning

Project Reconnect arose from Tom paying attention to the context, thinking theologically and using intuitive discernment. This was not simply "reading the culture," but involved a fresh recognition of God's presence in the lives of people. Tom articulated his growing awareness of spirituality involving the depths of one's inner being, with ministry needing to draw this out.

Christianity has almost been a construct placed on us. The more I've been on this journey and the journey of ministry, ... to the centre of my being I'm discovering how *it* truly is something that is just trying to explain [*itself?*] to us. ... It's helped me to give much more direction in how I work with a congregation. This then moves into the more direct things about education. ... I realised that the more people were helping people to become the church, the more we had to equip them.

As we will see later, the "it" refers to God. I will explain *Project Reconnect* in some detail below. Here is a further example of Tom's leadership and evolving theology. Since 1992, Parkes has hosted an occasional (now annual) Elvis Presley Festival, with thousands of people converging on the regional city for performances by Elvis tribute artists. During his time in Parkes, Tom initiated an Elvis Gospel Service as a way of connecting faith with tourists. This Sunday event came to attract 3000 people.

I saw that Parkes had a festival, and I thought, well, this Festival's struggling actually. ... "Why don't we the church make a contribution in the festival?" The biggest thing going in town, let's be part of it.

⁵⁶⁹ "Project Reconnect", <http://projectreconnect.com.au> (accessed March 23, 2018).

I've had a ministry sense of entering into, and actually somehow being the ... dynamism or catalyst for what is there and watch it, it's just extraordinary, watch it burst. ... We talk about paucity and abundance. [It's] where I've seen the abundance, because when I've been doing this sort of thing, I see things explode as if there's limitless energy.⁵⁷⁰

It was in the annual worship service that Tom made spiritual connections between Elvis' songs, the Gospels and people's lives. This helps to explain his theology in relation to the faith development aspect of *Project Reconnect*.

I wanted in that two hours to help people realise their experience of God for the rest of the year, ... telling the Elvis story ... and saying "See the passage of Scripture. See this spiritual stuff is in you. It's in your bones. You can't escape it. It's just there." ... It's somehow speaking [to] what is already there, ... not just speaking to it but genuinely endeavouring to find God present, ... rather than use the Bible as the centre.

This was similarly reflected in Tom's realisation that the Mid-Lachlan church people needed to grow deeper in spiritual practices. This became a major project (outlined below), which he described as something that he initiated before fully understanding it. "Now I can talk about [spiritual practices] quite knowingly. Back then I just sensed them, almost."

Permission-giving

The *Project Reconnect* strategy was intended to free congregations to have more control and direction and to be less minister-dependent. This provided impetus for new initiatives in mission—Family Fun Days, Christmas events, a Car Boot Sale, barbecues, a holiday program for children, and Carols by Candlelight.

The congregations started creating things that connected with the community. ... They gained a greater sense of who they were. ... All of this stuff was the milieu of their Sunday conversation. They began to realise that in fact, they were the only gathering that was left (except for the rural fire brigade) that gave this community its own identity.

I just marvelled at the energy that one of these congregations had. ... I just can't in my best imaginings think that those things would have taken place if it wasn't for this new dynamism.

The Resource Ministry approach developed with the intent of encouraging, empowering and freeing congregations to take initiative and find their direction, almost independently of the Mid-Lachlan ministry team.

⁵⁷⁰ Appendix 16, Reference 1.

b. Teaching styles and approaches

Equipping people to lead

With *Project Reconnect*, Tom and other Mid-Lachlan ministry workers provided village churches with a fresh look at worship.

We have confined worship to such a narrow practice that in fact we have prevented a huge number of people from ... real worship, instead of actually saying, "Well, what is this group? Let's design worship." or "Let them develop the worship which is actually [true for] them ... and works for them and values the God that is actually on the journey with them. ... We're going to make a fundamental shift in [the] understanding of the basis of their worship, which is [that] it's something that they *do*."

Firstly, the aim was to keep the shape of worship more or less familiar through providing a template (order) for worship. Secondly, local leaders were taught about the nature of Christian worship. The Mid-Lachlan region ran worship-leader training in each town, conducted by a Synod-funded Education Discipleship Facilitator, along with visiting teachers. Tom said this was the first time that training had ever "come to them" rather than expecting people to come to a regional centre.

As we talked to them about the structure of worship, what they'd been doing for years and years, it was staggering to see them go, "Really?" They'd been doing this all this time, and never knew that there was a reason why we did it the way we did it. It was an amazing, exciting time.

Thirdly, each congregation was provided with a DVD player and large-screen television. Tom and a team began preparing a weekly DVD resource which contained elements of worship which local worship leaders could use as needed, including music, a children's message, and a sermon. However, the encouragement was for local people to plan and lead as much of the service as they could themselves. Local leaders were encouraged to use a resource called *Words for Worship* for prayers. Following this, each congregation received one or more visits from ministry workers or lay preachers to help them exercise leadership, although Tom reported that they needed little help.

Learner-centred dialogue

The discipleship strategy centred on Sundays because in dispersed rural communities, getting people together during the week could be difficult. Sunday was the day when people expected to catch up with one another.

The *Project Reconnect* weekly worship DVDs each contained an eight-minute sermon followed by four questions. Tom's intention was that if the message (sermon) was coming from outside the congregation, then the local people also needed the opportunity to reflect on what God's word was for them in their context.

We included something which became the dynamic: ..., four questions [which] ... had a particular character which actually drove at the heart of what I might be saying to you ... in terms of education and discipleship. ... The four questions [were] the dynamic that began to help them discover that the articulation of their Christian journey was to come out of their own mouth, to come out of their own experience, and out of their own lives.

The first question was simply to invite people to respond to the message. ... "What was something you remember out of Tom's message today?" ... The second question is always ... "Tell a story out of your own experience that connects with the message that you'd heard today?" The third question ... is "What is the significance of this congregation in terms of the message that you've heard today?" For example, if it was about prayer, "How does this congregation help you develop your sense of prayer?" If it's about risk-taking, "How does this congregation support or not support risk-taking?" ... The final question, ... every time they come to church they address the question or the issue that has been the focus of the message of the day ... "How does this message find itself in the community at large?" That can be in various ways. It might be "How do you think this community sees this sense of the Good News expressed through this congregation?" or it might be "How do you give expression to this message in the community?"

While there was a regular pattern to the questions, they were fine-tuned for each week's theme and texts. Initially there were some complaints; however, the people participated willingly in the weekly faith conversation. The "dynamism" that eventuated was through the bringing of personal stories into dialogue with God's story in Scripture.

It is amazing to listen to people tell their stories and discover through the telling that [it] is their spiritual story. ... Until they gave articulation to that story on that particular Sunday, it had just been history. But in the telling on that day, because of the context, and because somehow it fits the gospel, ... it changes character and that was one of the things I found really exciting. ... I think [they] gained a sense of the reality that it is God's space, because it had become very precious. People would be saying, "I learnt more about my members of my congregation I've been worshipping with ... in the last two [years] than in the last twenty". And the things that they're talking about have changed. ... After the service is over, they still had the capacity of continuing a conversation about faith matters.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷¹ Appendix 16, Reference 1.

Adult education

Tom described a point at which he recognised that adults in the church needed to deepen their own spiritual lives, in particular through spiritual practices such as *lectio divina*, the examen, spiritual exercises, spiritual direction and meditation. This strategy included inviting a visiting US teacher to be resident for several years. She trained a local leadership group in spiritual practices, ran retreats in daily life and Quiet Days. This became an important part of Tom's personal faith journey as well.

Tom saw this kind of growth as the church "actually being a movement that is trying to communicate the fullness of life which Jesus was advocating." This journey of experiencing God wasn't confined to the church, and in fact the church could stifle it.

[My] seeking has caused me to believe that there is much more to the Christian life than where the church is and where most people are now. I have also realised that what it is for them to discern that for themselves is to make them aware of their own experience, but to frame it in such a way as to ... give them some concepts and some ideas that help them see that it's been part of their story all the way along.

Such a general approach to learning emerged partly from the experience of the worship conversations through *Project Reconnect*.

Particularly in the questions, because I have no control in the discussion. The idea is to just provide a question that may be a catalyst for them to start journeying to their own stories so that when they're doing that they'll see that in fact, it is somehow the story of Jesus [that] helps them have an understanding of their own story.

What I'm trying to do is to help them to make the connection with things that they would never have normally associated as being spiritual, in fact, that their whole journey is a spiritual one. ... My task is to continue to develop the integration or develop their understanding of that.

c. Personal Growth or openness

Openness to God, authenticity

Tom spoke of his own journey in faith interweaved with his description of ministry. His realisation that the minister wasn't there to do everything for everyone coincided with a growing understanding that God was present with each person, including himself. The critical place of the *Project Reconnect* worship conversations matched Tom's deepening sense that people's life stories are significant and that we can find God's story connecting with our stories.

The journey to deeper faith through spiritual disciplines was a yearning in Tom's life that resulted in a growth strategy for church members. He had been experiencing spiritual growth and a theological shift and felt that, in a sense, his way to express this in ministry was to take others on the journey with him.

The concept of journey ... it's always *with* God ... but being on a journey doesn't necessarily mean that it's going always in the direction that we want it. ... I'm not sure that there's a place we get to. No destination.

When I interviewed Tom, he had recently moved from the Mid-Lachlan to suburban Newcastle. His spiritual journey as a minister at that time was building on his experience in the Parkes region. He put a challenge to the three congregations in Newcastle:

"I'm sick of being in a congregation where it's actually the leadership who are least interested in things that you've called me here to do. ... So, if I'm going to come to here," and this is the reason I said yes, "I want to have the executives of the three congregations meet together for an hour a week and we're not going to do any business for the church. We're going to sit down, figure out how it is that we live loving God, loving each other" and actually, because I used it from *Project Reconnect* ultimately, "and how does that work out in relation to the rest of the world."

This kind of relational, spiritual, *being* community together was the essence of experiencing God.

This is how I'm discovering that *is* God. It *is* that relation. It *is* that caring for one another. And that's what we're doing. We're meeting once a week.⁵⁷²

Ongoing learning

Tom's own learning was described in terms of intuition and action-reflection. Reading and education events were helpful insofar as they confirmed or gave voice to what he was already discovering.

I seem to learn phenomenologically. I was reading stuff out of my context and I noticed things. Then I'd go along to [an event], the latest stuff, like Fresh Expressions or Thomas Bandy ... and I'd go, "I know this stuff!" ... because in fact it was ringing true.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² Appendix 16, Reference 3.

⁵⁷³ Appendix 16, Reference 4.

The spiritual practices initiative described above is an interesting example of Tom choosing an area of learning that reflected his own needs as well as those of the church members. At the same time, he saw himself as a catalyst, prompting changes that he could then step away from.

I think one of the things is that I love getting people who I think are better than me because I'm never very secure. ... I start finding people I know can do it, and I pull them inside and get them onside. And they start, and then that means it's *them*. I just love that, it's all owned.

7.4 Christ Church Uniting Church - Wayville, SA

Rev Sean Gilbert

Christ Church Uniting Church in Wayville is only 2 kilometres south of the Adelaide CBD in South Australia. The congregation consists mainly of professional, well-educated, middle-class to “wealthy” people. In 2012, the Sunday morning congregation numbered between fifty and seventy people, mainly older adults including retirees, and very few children. The attendance of children and youth had declined gradually as the congregation grew older. Sean had recently concluded his ministry there after sixteen years. He characterised the congregation as critical thinkers. This included a number of retired Uniting Church ministers and former Moderators of the Synod. The minister prior to Sean had an emphasis on adult education and scholarship. Christ Church was a congregation to which people travelled because of its liberal theological ethos and worship style.

a. Leaderships styles and approaches

Minister as Bread breaker

The theme of formation recurred in the interview in terms of Sean's role and his understanding of the faith dynamic of the congregation, centred on worship. When he first came to Christ Church, Sean recognised “a certain correctness” to the life of the congregation, including its worship, and sought to address this.

It might have ... got ten out of ten for liturgical flow, but it didn't necessarily express any great depth of soul or spirit. I think a lot of that had to do with my own inability to speak out of a vulnerable place, or the community acknowledging their own vulnerabilities. Over time ... changes happened to me and various things fell apart, but I was also drawn to not just education for education's sake, but [for] formation's sake; people discovering

something about themselves, and out of *that* place being able to offer something to the rest of the world.

Worship was focal to the life of the congregation and also to Sean's ministry, not solely as a community gathering, but more so as a place of formation.

Worship is where it began and ended. ... Worship has to express something of development, formation, implicit within the worship. It's about... [being] willing to be taken somewhere and not just to be reinforced in what we already know. ... My experience at Christ Church was a lot of things flowed out of the worship, changes of perspective or openness to new possibilities. ... Whether it was Word or Sacrament, it was just hoping to break something open, afresh, anew, to people, to carry it with them and to be nurtured and shaped by it.

Sean described his ministry role as being a *bread breaker*, a metaphor that he connected to his experience at ordination.

It's breaking bread, seeing something anew, being taken in a slightly different direction, or seeing life from a different perspective, with a different lens, being challenged to be something that you haven't been before. For me it's this constant and organic, vital, understanding of ministry and my role. ... I'd apply that to whether I'm leading prayer, or leading song, or preaching, whatever. ... It's not my bread. ... It's not just being at the [communion] table. ... It's sharing something of the goodness that I've experienced and offering it, almost a conduit.

To be a bread breaker was not to be a directive leader; it was to be a life-giver, not on his own behalf, but offering the means to life from God. Sean indicated that this sounded passive and mystical, however the evidence was that, like Tom Stuart, he was something of a catalyst.

Visionary, Initiating, Experimenting

The *Effective Living Centre* (ELC) was given birth during Sean's ministry at Christ Church. The church became a centre for community education programs aimed at engaging locals and people from further afield through a range of events, learning programs and seminars. Sean had a key role in helping to envision and develop this.

There were really active people who wanted the church to be credible and professional. We felt we had space or a place where something could happen with the wider community. It became this mixture of educational experience, sacred experience, instead of simply Christian in a very dogmatical or propositional way.

The Centre received funding from the Synod and the local Council. Programs included social issues such as aid for refugees as well as professional/vocational series, parenting courses, life skills and creative arts. The Progressive Christianity network became a partner and ELC hosted their programs.

Its whole vision was that we would address issues of life in breadth. My vision was that somehow, we'd try and bridge ... *sacred* and *secular* and try to bring them closer together. So therefore, we didn't have to cringe as a Christian community about inviting people into our space, and then we would also learn from the wider community. ... People ... kept wanting to describe this as Christ Church's *outreach*, and I always stopped short of that because I saw it as *community engagement*. (italics added)⁵⁷⁴

A second initiative was the *Artist-in-Residence* week which commenced in 1995, involving a visiting poet, visual artist or musician. This person would teach, run workshops, and create art during the week. The worship space became an artist's studio and workshop room. Sean was proudest of this particular program initiative.

He sought to invite a certain kind of artist:

People who had a spiritual base and saw their art as an expression of that. ... They may well have been Christian, but they weren't going to sort of make that a dogma. [The artists] were more interested in people's creativity and giving birth or expression to who [the people] were. That was a very important program. It got the community of Christ Church in touch with more spirited things other than simply analysis.⁵⁷⁵

In the end it wasn't about the art, or the discipline that was being put on display. It was about the light of creativity, or the potential of creativity in people's lives.

The *Artist's Week* culminated with a worship service on Sunday morning.

You'd always see the product, or the fruit ... of the art that had taken place. ... [It] attracted people who ... would not even come to a church normally, [who] had been a part of that week, because these programs appealed to a wider community than just the church.

These programs are good examples of outcomes from a leader who values learning and exploration and takes time and effort to facilitate a range of learning opportunities of differing styles and subjects. They also reflect Sean's ministry emphasis on fostering learning, spiritual exploration, creativity and community.

⁵⁷⁴ Appendix 17, Reference 1.

⁵⁷⁵ Appendix 17, Reference 2.

Relationship building, permission giving

Sean saw Christ Church as a community and a venue that could be open, accepting and inclusive of people beyond the church. The church's broad learning emphasis sat within an open view of community.

These were people to learn from, because a lot of them had been burnt by the Christian church, and to listen as to why was really important. A lot of them had been imposed upon, so far as their thinking, their spirituality was concerned. And they were looking for greater freedom, permission giving, and an affirmation of who they were, not a conditional sort of affirmation.⁵⁷⁶

This reflected Sean's view of his leadership as enabling community life in ways which embodied his understanding of the Trinity. The life of God was to be experienced and encountered in community and in ministry.

The place of mutuality, the place of compassion, the place of equality. I think equality is a huge thing for me so far as leadership's concerned, that I am a member of the human race. ... This vocation doesn't take me beyond that; it actually plunges me deeper into ... my own humanity.

The theology to educate or to encourage people in their own faith, it does arise out of my understanding of God, this self-giving, honouring, dignifying, ennobling presence in our world. So, it's all about relational stuff in the end. For me, it's not simply about information.⁵⁷⁷

The results of formation and education were also seen in relational terms as virtuous life together.

I think Christian education, formation ... would help, and I think that gives rise to mercy and to forgiveness and grace and good humour, ... getting to the core issues of living in community together, respecting each other and respecting the wider community. Jonathan Edwards said the key fruit of the Christian life is graciousness: that for me is a key sign of a healthy Christian community. ... It comes back to my theological vision ... of the Trinity, which would take us into much broader places, ... more important places, ... very costly places.

Communal life in the Spirit was seen by Sean as life with God in which people are not only formed but transformed; worship, prayer, learning, and relationships were all intertwined.

Prayerfulness is intrinsic to all that. ... How affective is the worship? Is it moving hearts to a point of not just religious fervour, but change, genuine transformation, shedding stuff,

⁵⁷⁶ Appendix 17, Reference 3.

⁵⁷⁷ Appendix 17, Reference 4.

relinquishing stuff? ... It's slow, incremental changes within us. ... We're in this business to be changed for the better.

Christ Church's orientation towards the wider community was indicative of Sean's view that growth in community was not solely inward, but rather reflected the outward generativity of the Triune God.

b. Personal Growth or openness

Spirituality, authenticity, community

Creativity, spirituality and *authenticity* were also inter-connected in Sean's own faith experience and in his approach to ministry at Christ Church. He saw these as avenues for God's action and for community growth.

What I clearly understood too for myself was the connection between art and spirituality and formation, that good art creates empathy, where it draws us into a commonality, a place of deep empathy for others. That was my lasting experience of trying some of these disciplines myself. ... It's taking us to deeper places. ... These aren't always the places where the Christian church operates from, the more authentic places, the freer places, more colourful places, interesting places, broader places. ... I understand the place of the arts closely aligned to the work of Spirit.⁵⁷⁸ A lot of that isn't just about my work. It's about how does this bring community together. What I continually saw ... was an incredible sense of community created during the week, with people looking at each other's work and admiring it and saying, "Well, how did you do that?" That was always very moving.

Sean repeatedly drew connections between the genuineness of his own spiritual life, the nature of his ministry and the spiritual life of the congregation: these arenas were inter-related.

If you're speaking out of a truly creative place ... and there's a knowing about it, and how it's changed you (for the better, I hope) then I think that has a valid expression in the life of a Christian church. ... [That's] what I look for in Christian community: its own corporate authenticity, its own individual authenticity, where people are wrestling with identity and seeking to express that.

This authenticity also applied to the congregation's sense of identity, whereby their mission and life as Christians were inter-related.

⁵⁷⁸ Appendix 17, Reference 5.

There was a congruity between what was espoused and what was being lived. My understanding of mission is about what processes from us, I mean what flows from us. It's not something that's imposed. To me, that's authentic mission: it's a self-giving that is true to that community or to the person. ... That which is overflowing in us is that which we would offer. ... [Christ Church] wasn't driven by its own sense of mission, it somehow embodied it.

Vulnerability

Authenticity and vulnerability were construed as going hand in hand. Sean recounted his experience of offering ministry leadership while experiencing a deep, personal crisis.

Publicly, you're taken to places that are really, out on a limb. There's safer ground elsewhere. ... Having to front up week after week to people, ... feeling within myself that this was the last place I wanted to be, but at the same time having to give something out of that, and not wanting people to feel sorry for you. ... Being a person who ... is feeling really broken, but at the same time wants to offer a word of grace, to myself as well as anyone else. I was actually forcing myself to places of grace. To confront the gospel readings some of those weeks was just excruciating, because they were so confronting.

Vulnerability was seen as an honest recognition of one's deep humanity and brokenness. For Sean and members of the community, authenticity was the place in which grace might be known.

You've got to speak from a place of hope, not just despair. ... My spiritual director would often say the place of deepest hell is the place where grace is most operative. ... What is it you offer most authentically? I think a broken but graced self, and that's a very honest self: it's hopefully somewhat transparent, and inspiring.

My experience was incredible. I didn't do that on my own. ... A lot of people held me ... People trusted me. And I heard later, ... "What we saw was your integrity." ... What I heard was not so much a divided self, or a compartmentalised person, but a person who was actually trying to hold some of this really difficult tension together, and that here was a minister.⁵⁷⁹

While Sean certainly offered vision and discernment to the congregation, this view of ministry meant that he was sceptical of simplistic or formulaic notions of leadership. To lead was seen as costly, challenging, humbling.

⁵⁷⁹ Appendix 17, Reference 6.

c. Teaching styles and approaches

Adult education

Sean indicated early in the interview that adult education was a particular interest. This matched a congregation which expected well-reasoned theology.⁵⁸⁰ Two emphases emerged early in his ministry at Christ Church. John Spong's visit brought an emphasis on critical thinking, an "analytical deconstructionist approach," which spoke easily into the Christ Church culture.

I think what he brought was a bit of a wake-up call, by suggesting, "What do you think? How do you apply your own Christian faith? Will you act upon your own convictions, and not simply accept what the clergy or the institution are saying to you?"

The second emphasis arose from the visit of Mark Burrows, also from the US.

He came with a lyrical, poetic approach. That was equally as important, if not more important and it certainly set *my* agenda, if you like, for the next how many years it was. Because whilst I was appreciative of ... Spong, for me what was critical was who were these people becoming spiritually.

Some lectures and seminars with prominent speakers, including Spong and David Tacey, attracted large audiences. The Progressive Christianity group (PC Net) was a regular partner in such events. The aim was to engage the broader church and the wider community educationally and spiritually.

You're dealing with people pastorally on individual levels. They often will compartmentalise ... "Do you mean to say the whole of my life is of interest to God? I can actually express the whole of my life? Isn't it just that saved bit or that ... pious bit?" People often have this division within themselves. I want to encourage the whole of you, not just a religious part.

For Sean, this reflected a shift in post- or late-modernity where reality had more than one perspective. This, in a sense, validated personal experience and participation (rather than mere observation), not simply as subjectivity, but as the opportunity to recognise grace.

A vital sense of formation can be happening. People are revaluing their own experience. ... That explains why I'm interested in people's sharing of their vulnerabilities, their own perspective ... [and] experience of life, to hold it up as being valid. Christianity is not to be

⁵⁸⁰ Sean described the congregation as having a degree of liberal agnosticism about it, with some people more interested in the community fellowship or social justice causes than in spiritual growth or encounter with God.

imposed on that point, so we've got to measure up, but to see somehow that grace is operative in all aspects of your life. Your life is a gift and it's unique.

I want them to... see whether there are moments of grace. They're already there. You don't have to conjure them up. They're just simply a part of the fabric of life. And I see that as a beginning point of the discussion so far as faith is concerned, and formation of [a] person. So far as education, I'm trying to get people to an end point, that they somehow arrive. It might be a retrospective sort of tracing things that are already operative in people's lives and celebrating, not diminishing it.

Here, not only is participatory learning valued, but the substance of learning is God's participation in a person's life, or their life in God's. People are on a journey with God that is very human and deeply spiritual.

Learning through dialogue and biography

Sean led discussion groups rather than Bible studies, often using videos (feature films including *Babette's Feast*, *As It Is In Heaven*, *Man on a Wire*) or books (authors including Jean Vanier, Henri Nouwen, Brother Roger from Taizé).

I was more interested in ... things that affected me. I had a hunch that maybe they might affect other people as well. ... What I was looking for as a result, people engaging themselves with that material, and then the question being "How did that impact on you? Where did it lead you? Where did it take you, in your own imaginings, in your own life story?" ... It wasn't just about education. It was about formation, shaping the community ... in the ways what I understand to be the ways of Christ.

Sean also used "progressive" Bible study series by Marcus Borg and Tim Scorer, though these became more of a springboard than a fixed script.

I'd find myself wanting to move from it in order to generate discussion. It comes back to this funny word *vulnerabilities*, that people would dare to share something that they might not have shared before, and get beyond right answers, wrong answers, and simply get to saying something about who they are, who they desire to be. Sharing painful hurts, and having a group hold them.⁵⁸¹ The word *affect* is an important word for me, that which affects people, moves them, and moves them to a deeper experience, or broader experience of their own humanity.

This biographic-dialogical approach also applied in a sense to preaching, where Sean would often "begin with a life experience" and also include some critical thinking in the sermon, but with the aim that people would bring "their spirit, or their soulful world into that conversation," asking

⁵⁸¹ Appendix 17, Reference 8.

“How does that intersect?” This seems to be a kind of circular, theological reflection process from life through critical engagement with Bible and theology back to life.

It needs to take... human experience more seriously; seeing that as a gold mine, like a place of beginning, rather than actually imposing or foisting something, even in good intention with good faith. ... honouring the Wesleyan prevenient grace that’s already been at work, and tracing that, seeing, celebrating, seeing it for what it is. ... beginning where people are at and honouring the sacredness of that. ... I think it’s a good principle for approaching people, really, honouring them, and honouring the work of the creative Spirit in their life.

The lasting impression of the conversation with Sean is of a minister wrestling with how a deepening inner life, personal integrity, communal authenticity and embodied mission, flow together in faith formation.

7.5 Ministry as Educational Leadership

This chapter has explored the intentionality of ministry leaders in the (re)formation of Christian education. What do they contribute to the generativity of learning communities, both personally and organisationally? Drawing on the research sub-themes, I will focus the findings in terms of *intentionality and improvisation*.

This chapter began with the metaphor of wine-making to link the concepts of communities of learning and communities of practice—the learning *culture* of a community with its *habits*. John 15 tells us that grape vines do not grow for their own sake, but in order to be fruitful. You can tell the taste difference between a wine-maker who is constantly learning and refining their craft, and one who is mass-producing with little effort other than volume production. Constant learning, organic growth, and perennial fruitfulness are all part of the equation.

Chapters 14 to 17 of John’s Gospel connect the life of the disciples with the life of the Trinity. Fruitfulness results from abiding. As disciples live in relationship with one another and with God, they are able to follow Jesus’ directives and continue his mission. Here the twin foci of *abiding as being* in relationship, and *obedience as doing* what God requires, combine to describe a community life whose character and purpose are both shaped by Triune love. God is generative by nature—creating, redeeming, sustaining. As I noted in Section 5.5, *community, communion* and *communication* are inherent aspects of the ways in which the people of God are indwelt by the

Spirit of God. Leadership is not a discrete call or gift, but a certain kind of participation in community life.

Within any community, leadership is exercised at various points by many people. Those interviewed in this study were in key ordained or lay ministry roles in their congregations. By any systemic analysis, their leadership contributions would be seen as pivotal. Within the oeuvre of leadership studies, a minister's identity and roles could be analysed through a number of lenses.⁵⁸² The interview coding highlighted the ministers' *teaching styles and approaches, leadership styles and approaches, and personal openness to growth.*

a. Minister as teacher

Within the sub-theme *teaching styles and approaches*, categories included *adult education, minister as teacher, learner-centred dialogue, equipping others, preaching, and mentoring/modelling.* I am using the heading "Minister as teacher" to discuss these.

Intentional teaching

The majority of interviewees described their role as including an intentional teaching dimension, often within worship, and also in other planned programs and activities. This was evident with Michelle and James (Mapoon), Ian (North Ringwood), John S and Elizabeth (Mid-North Coast), Andrew (Maroubra), John R (The Gap), Kerrie and Charles (Queenscliff), Steve (Nedlands), Wendi (North Lakes), Simon (Clare) and Sean (Wayville). Within corporate worship, preaching did not necessarily equate with teaching. While worship was seen by most ministers as vital for Christian formation, teaching in worship was explained in terms of (a) planned, thematic preaching series, (b) intergenerational engagement, (c) teaching *about* worship during worship, or (d) an emphasis on discipleship. Ministers also taught in small group settings: Bible study series, film and book discussions, topical seminars, leadership development sessions, and less formally through everyday conversations and group excursions. The striking characteristic here is the ministers' personal commitment of time and energy to *adult* education in most of the congregations. Those

⁵⁸² In relation to Christian education, ministry roles were categorised in Section 3.4 in terms of *professional* Christian educators (those with graduate qualifications and/or in regional denominational roles), ordained ministers as *teachers*, and ministers as leaders of congregational *learning communities*. While the first category may be important in the overall denominational system, the leadership focus here is on the latter two kinds of leadership.

congregations with younger generations also gave evidence of investing considerable energy into their faith development.

Learner-centred, dialogical

Teaching and learning were conducted in a dialogical and interactive manner. From Sean's film and book discussions to Tom's *Project Reconnect* weekly sermon discussions to Michelle's and James' all-age participatory worship, the minister-teacher enabled a guided but open conversation between life and faith. Andrew's Bible studies with university students allowed for loosely structured inquiry. Links between everyday life experience, the Bible and theology were seen as critical. At Queenscliff, The Gap and North Lakes, the importance of an open, accepting environment for active inquiry was highlighted. Even at Mount Louisa, where systematic teaching was not a priority, learning through conversation was common. John S and Elizabeth at the Mid-North Coast also created regular opportunities for mutual, participatory, group learning.

It would be possible to typify the educational approaches used by each person using Seymour and Miller's categories, or a detailed typology of the role of religious educators such as Timothy Lines offers: Religious Educator as *Parent, Coach, Scientist, Critic, Storyteller, Artist, Visionary, Revolutionary, Therapist* or *Minister*.⁵⁸³ Lines calls for integration rather than specialisation in educational roles and methods. Those whose education is more holistic will adopt a diverse repertoire of teaching and learning approaches. The challenge here for most church leaders is to see teaching, not as a narrowly defined role or set of tasks, but as a multi-faceted *team approach* to learning. To focus on the minister as teacher is not to suggest a limiting of the scope of education, but rather to highlight the critical impetus provided by competent practitioners.

Mary Elizabeth Moore describes five kinds of teaching arising from process theology understandings of God and growth—*midwife, integrative, incarnational, relational* and *liberative*.⁵⁸⁴ She sees that teaching as a matter of the *heart* insofar as both faith and learning are more than cognitive, and oriented to relationship with God and God's world. Moreover, teaching

⁵⁸³ Lines, *Functional Images of the Religious Educator*. Lines' taxonomy of the field is complex, describing biblical, theological, historical, contemporary and functional dimensions and examples of each type. His analysis reveals a breadth and depth to religious education that is absent from most churches, suggesting that it is one thing to be strong in a particular approach, and another to draw from a wide suite of teaching and learning approaches.

⁵⁸⁴ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

from the heart is based on an organic view of God's movement in the universe; it is about a life of love for God, passion for life, and reverence for God and God's Creation.⁵⁸⁵ Moore speaks about education as relational, affective, energising and imaginative. While few participants in this study would align themselves with process theology, Moore's language about education reflects common language from the interviews concerning teaching and learning. These leaders' educational paradigms were about individuals and communities being on a dynamic, intimate, transformative journey of faith, rather than about imparting knowledge or replicating tradition.

Passion for learning, invitational teaching

The main, modest, conclusions here are that in general these ministers indicated an interest and passion in people learning and growing in faith, a personal sense of the importance of teaching in their ministry role, approaches that took the sources of faith seriously (Bible, theology and tradition), yet were often learner-centred and inquiry-directed. Margaret Ann Crain describes the educational disposition evident in several of these churches.

For me, listening has become a primary mode of teaching. ... Only when each learner is invited to participate with his or her unique needs, interests, and gifts ... does genuine learning occur. Learning happens best in a customised context. This can only happen when the learners participate, and the teacher listens in order to learn.⁵⁸⁶

The key here is the connection between minister-as-teacher and learner-centred inquiry. Most of the ministers described a disposition of hearing and responding to people's questions. Teaching involved not only beginning with learners' needs, so to speak, it also involved taking their questions and doubts seriously. Moreover, some ministers were quick to point out that their personal journey of faith was in company with the questions of the congregation: Tom (Mid-Lachlan), John R (The Gap), Sean (Wayville), Kerrie and Charles (Queenscliff).

⁵⁸⁵ Moore acknowledges Alfred North Whitehead, whose influence on Christian education, process theology and practical theology is substantial. There is a further project here to explore theological influences (both explicit and implicit) on Australian Christian education. My guess here is that some, perhaps most, of these ministers would have encountered Whitehead's work in learning about theological reflection.

⁵⁸⁶ "More and more congregational learning involves small groups where dialogue invites learners to take charge of their own learning and to learn from each other. ...Good teachers pay attention." Margaret Ann Crain, "Introduction: Through the Lens of the Ethnographer," in *Educating for Redemptive Community*, ed. Denise Janssen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015), p3.

To return to Val Webb, doubt and faith go hand in hand.⁵⁸⁷ The ministers seemed to recognise that growing faith required active enquiry and the freedom to doubt. Theology involved regular God-talk. The liberation of theology from theologians not only helps theology to be done in context, it also gives lay people permission to engage in a lifelong quest of engaging in dialogue between doctrinal beliefs and faith experience for the sake of deeper understanding and better living. The minister-as-teacher makes the resources for such learning available. Drawing on Parker Palmer, Mary Hess describes a teacher, not as an expert who stands *between* a body of knowledge and the class, but as one who gathers with learners in a circle *around* a sacred text or shared focus.⁵⁸⁸ For Hess, the teacher may be seen as one who is a little further along the journey of understanding and living from this text. Of course, a teacher is not necessarily more mature than all students in living the text, and a good teacher would not presume as such. We see in this study some examples of minister-as-teacher encouraging questioning and doubt, inviting participation, valuing honesty, and humbly making available the treasures of the faith.⁵⁸⁹

A majority of ministers in the sample had prior studies or roles in teaching (theological college, lay education, nursing, pre-school, primary and secondary school) or involving group facilitation skills (social work, youth work). This seemed to be reflected in the leaders' interest in teaching and learning and in their ability to engage people in formal and semi-formal learning activities. While I did not undertake an audit of their academic qualifications, my assumption based on the interviews (and some extant knowledge) was that very few had undertaken formal studies in Christian education beyond their undergraduate ministry studies. They were mainly operating out of more general educational understandings and skills applied within a faith-formation mindset.

This kind of leadership ethos includes a clear commitment to providing opportunities for people to be formed and educated in faith, a desire to be involved actively in teaching the faith and a capacity to engage learners at their levels of understanding and points of need *around* a topic. This

⁵⁸⁷ Webb, *Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: Finding Your Own Voice*.

⁵⁸⁸ Mary Hess, "Rescripting Christian Education for Performative Practice" (Luther Seminary Convocation) (January 9, 2002), <http://meh.religioused.org/convocation.html> (accessed April 6, 2018).

⁵⁸⁹ New Zealand educators Klangwisan and McConnell suggest that inclusive, invitational, participatory learning environments reflect a Trinitarian theology of mutuality and reciprocity. Yael Klangwisan and T Mark McConnell, "Theology and Pedagogy of Hope: A Vision for Teaching and Learning", *Stimulus* 23, no. 3 (2016): p18-22. Authentic, interactive, relational learning settings do not only constitute positive teaching, they are also embodiments of a communion grounded in Trinitarian faith, hope and love.

takes ministry beyond a narrow liturgical-pastoral paradigm or a didactic-instructional educational approach and calls for sustained passion and widening expertise in a ministry of teaching.

b. Leading a learning community

The second sub-theme concerned leadership of the congregation as a learning community. This goes beyond the minister's role as teacher, without being separate. The categories of response included *initiative-experimenting*, *visionary*, *permission-giving*, *relationship-building*, and *listening-discerning*. This sub-theme could be described as including *both* individual creativity *and* communal receptivity. Leaders talked about community life prompting their own discernment, learning, and imagination, which in turn fed into ministry. They sought to intentionally, proactively foster a future-oriented, participatory learning culture.

John R, The Gap:

My two roles are to teach and to provide leadership. I'm committed. I'm here to help teach people and I'm here to provide leadership and a sense of vision. ... We're going somewhere. We've got a sense of purpose. Come on board. Let's be a part of it... My leadership style is very much permission-giving.

In Section 3.4 I discussed briefly the renewal of interest in the late 1990s and early 2000s regarding the *Ministry of Teaching* or the *Minister as Educator*. In the mid-2000s, Mary Hess at Luther Seminary in the US developed a set of educational leadership competencies which guided the seminary's teaching in Christian education over several years.⁵⁹⁰ According to Hess, whether or not a minister is a good teacher, they need to have a compelling vision for lifelong learning and the abilities to guide a community towards it.

Catalysts in context

Leaders in this study generally demonstrated imagination and vision in the development of new initiatives, yet also described repeatedly how new directions were discerned through listening to

⁵⁹⁰ The 2008 version of these competencies is included as Appendix 21 Along with understandings of faith nurture and learning theories, and biblical, theological and ritual integration with education, Luther Seminary's *knowledge* competencies included the following: "able to articulate a clear statement of their vision for providing leadership in supporting faith nurture across the lifespan" and "familiar with a variety of ways of supporting, structuring, facilitating and trouble-shooting learning communities." In terms of *skill* competencies, the Luther framework is mainly about supporting and resourcing education, rather than the minister as teacher *per se*. *The primary aim was to foster leadership of communities of lifelong learning.*

people and encouraging others' gifts and wisdom. Directive leadership was certainly exercised at times, though many of these leaders described themselves more as a kind of catalyst who would pay close attention to people and context, and then make creative suggestions to the church's leadership team or council. There was a repeated emphasis on having a permission-giving culture, with high trust and sharing of responsibility. Direction, discernment and devolved leadership were inter-related.

Wendi spoke about listening and working intuitively. Her pastoral ministry was the foundation for discerning learning needs. Also, her fledgling congregation needed to foster trustworthy group settings in which faith could be explored. Tom described his ministry role in highly relational terms, but also as an idealist and a catalyst. The *Project Reconnect* idea developed from his recognition that the village congregations needed to reconnect relationally with God, each other and the wider community. Sean spoke of a range of initiatives and insights in relation to the desire to prompt deeper and more virtuous community life. He saw his role as enriching the community's life, but as *bread breaker*, not director.

Other ministers talked about bringing ideas to leadership teams, while encouraging those teams to grow in their abilities to contribute to new directions (John R, Ian, Kerrie and Charles, Simon). Kerrie and Charles in Queenscliff described a process of building community and then seeing where it would lead, rather than having a fixed plan. Steve in Nedlands and John at The Gap were perhaps more directive in their leadership, yet their narratives suggest a valuing of people over programs, plus creative, intuitive approaches to formation and education. These ministers' personalities were diverse. What many seemed to have in common was that they were imaginative, creative, "ideas" people who also worked intentionally on the relational health and leadership cultures within their congregations.

What was missing from the interviews were narratives of despair and dysfunction. This is not surprising, as these congregations and ministers were sampled from peer recommendations about effective communities and leaders. There is no suggestion here that there are two types of leaders—those who can and those who can't. Rather, the sample gives evidence of passion for learning and growth, educational competencies, and some particular communal leadership characteristics. The interview descriptions were of sustained effort, trial and error, passion for learning, and gradual faith growth, rather than quick success.

c. Personal openness to growth

Kerrie, Queenscliff:

On behalf of the whole wider church maybe, carriers of the story, people who keep the story, presenting it and keep saying “This is our story. This is our core.” We’ve always got to be going back to this and coming out of this in everything we do, a person of hope, trusting that the Spirit will open doors. And if doors close another one opens... It’ll be okay. We are being carried by something bigger than ourselves, and when we connect with it life happens, so, hopes and encouragement.

The third sub-theme describes the minister’s sense of openness; firstly, openness to growth in terms of God or faith or learning, and secondly, openness to other people in terms of honesty, authenticity and vulnerability. These are complex areas. Are people more likely to learn and grow in faith when such growth is desired, expected and celebrated? Does such expectation reflect an openness and freedom to explore questions? Is a community more likely to change and grow in faith if their minister is also on a genuine journey of transformation? Are ministers open in sharing their growing and learning with their congregation?

Authenticity and vulnerability

With Sean, Kerrie and Karyl, open conversation about faith, whether thoughtful or heartfelt, was particularly important with people for whom Christian faith was either foreign or negative.

Kerrie, Queenscliff:

The wider community know that we’re not a church that says we have all the answers, and that we have a very open-minded and -hearted sense of the Gospel and the meaning of life. I can talk to people in the wider community about issues of spirituality and faith just as easily as I can to people who are there all the time. People would know that I’d be happy to say “We’re in a very pluralistic world now, and that’s fine. I know what my story and my journey is, but yours is different, and we can talk about that.”

For Sean, authenticity meant speaking and acting honestly from your own experience, not expecting others to encounter something that wasn’t in some way true for you.⁵⁹¹ This wasn’t to limit others’ faith development to your own, but only to speak honestly of your own growth, change or struggles.

⁵⁹¹ In some interviews, I introduced the term *authenticity* as a possible factor to describe comments made by the leader in question, and this brought a positive response.

Sean, Wayville:

You don't set out to speak from those places but when you do, with some sense of hope or grace, or dignity, then I think there's a power in it that you don't even seek.

Karyl, Eaton-Millbridge:

I think that helping people understand that some of those yearnings, senses of spirituality that they have in them are actually OK, that we're not going to force them into a little box of "This is what Christian spirituality actually is", but that we're more open, more understanding and accepting of practices that don't fit that traditional mould. ... We can't just tell people about it. We need to enact it to give it authenticity.⁵⁹²

Several leaders spoke about the importance of authenticity or openness in their relationships with others. For Kerrie, this concerned being free to articulate her own evolving faith language and theology openly with people. For Ian and John R, it meant acknowledging that you didn't have all of the answers to difficult questions. John S linked authenticity with integrity; if you wanted to encourage and equip people, it had to be based on trust, not authority. Andrew indicated the importance of sharing his personal faith journey intimately in a small group setting as a way of building trust and modelling a prayerful relationship with God. For Sean and Simon, the willingness to be vulnerable and admit a deep sense of failure and brokenness was a kind of watershed in their own journeys, with implications for their ministries and also their personal faith.

As well as speaking about faith and failures, each interviewee displayed positive expectations that God was at work. This was not named in the same ways, nor always articulated clearly. Yet all interview subjects conveyed a positive emotional sense of hope, expectation, vision or passion about what God had done or might do in their lives and in their churches. Across the sample, Simon and Sean spoke most about the grace of God. For Simon, grace described the gift of new life, healing and power through Jesus Christ, whereas for Sean, grace was more about the encounter with divine love at a person's point of brokenness and vulnerability. Anne, Simon and Sean described the work of God most readily as an immediate spiritual encounter, whereas Michelle, James, Steve, Kerri, Charles, Tom and Andrew spoke of God being at work in a definite but more general sense of fruitfulness from their ministry. For several other leaders, the sense of

⁵⁹² Appendix 19, Reference 3.

positive expectation came through a description of celebrated growth in people's lives rather than explicit identification of where or how God might be at work (Ian, John R, Wendi, Karyl, Elizabeth and John S). While theologies and faith language varied, the consistent feature was a positive recognition that ministry had been fruitful and an expectation that growth and change could (or would) happen in the future.

There is an educational dimension to this question of authenticity and vulnerability. In *Educating Christians*, Seymour, Crain and Crocket speak about the *incarnational religious educator*:

While the goal of Christian religious education is to incarnate wholeness and justice, the process begins as religious educators seek to create hospitable and just spaces in which to practice God's presence. We *invite* others, by our very "being" into the process of meaning-making. More than being mere role models, we too inhabit that space. ... Meaning-making profoundly focuses us on our own struggles for meaning. ... We are vulnerable. We must be *authentic*. Incarnational religious education may require simpler structures, but it asks more of the educator.⁵⁹³

This evocative description explains something of my observation, and also perhaps a late modern shift in Christian education from content and method to presence and authenticity. The minister-as-person precedes or rather encompasses minister-as-teacher.

Simon, Clare:

You can't necessarily separate what's happening for me as a minister, as a human being, from my own relationship with Jesus, and because of that what's happening in the church and the way that I lead the church, but also recognising the church is made up of a whole lot of individuals who have their own things happening, their own relationships with Jesus.

Initiative and Experimentation

These ministers often gave evidence of taking initiative to develop new or different approaches, provide impetus and encouragement to new programs, experiment with novel methods, and change existing processes or activities.

⁵⁹³ Jack L Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain and Joseph V Crockett, *Educating Christians: The Intersection of Meaning, Learning, and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p188.

These included the following:

- *Initiating themed teaching series in worship:* The Gap, Nedlands, Clare, Mapoon
- *Developing the congregation as a regional centre for learning:* North Ringwood, Wayville, Queenscliff
- *Initiating cross-cultural learning experiences:* Maroubra, Mapoon, The Gap
- *Fostering fresh engagement with spiritual disciplines:* Maroubra, Mid-Lachlan, Queenscliff
- *Developing and promoting mission service opportunities:* Mount Louisa, North Ringwood, Maroubra
- *Conducting adult education lectures, seminars and other special teaching events:* Mid-North Coast, North Ringwood, North Lakes, Wayville, Queenscliff
- *Redesigning worship for greater participation:* North Lakes, Mapoon, Queenscliff, Mid-Lachlan
- *Altering Church Council meetings to incorporate leadership development:* Queenscliff, Clare, North Ringwood
- *Integrating social justice or mission with worship and learning:* Mid-North Coast, Queenscliff, North Lakes, Maroubra, North Ringwood

Ministers repeatedly described themselves as initiators or catalysts, but rarely claimed that it was all their own doing. Often, they had ideas, but these needed support or ownership and development from church leadership, or else the minister trialled something to see if it would garner a response.

Ian, North Ringwood:

I thought, "I've got a clean slate here. There's nothing happening at night. I want to do something different." I started a monthly evening event called "Leadership Lifter," which was a training event, and I was doing the teaching... and introducing some of the models, how I think, and we were getting fifty to seventy, which was really good. That went for probably two years, before I then started transitioning to another model ... and I tried different things. I had a lot of ideas. ... I tried what I called "Conversation Services." One night I had on the platform ... nine people who were involved in the sciences, and I interviewed them. ... So, I really tried to experiment with the evening. ... And that's now developed into ... a School of Ministry.

My claim in Chapter 5 was that such development was evidence of *double-loop, generative or adaptive* learning, whereby some leaders were not only having fresh ideas, but thinking critically and creatively about the bigger picture of what they were doing and why, and also exercising reflexive awareness of their contributions to the congregation.

Wendi, North Lakes:

Someone who's listening on many levels, not just coming in and saying this is what you need, but open to that action-reflection inquiry style of learning, ... but with a good grasp of a foundational theology. ... The actual thinking about a situation and being able to bring to it a whole range of things that might talk to one another, to bring in tradition, to bring in Scripture, to bring in experience ... to help them be interwoven.

Kerrie, Queenscliff:

It's such an experimental place now. Anyone can have an idea and it'll be in action in no time at all. It's just like we're all learning together and we're constantly thinking about and changing perspectives and it's very organic.

Adaptive Leadership

In *Faith Formation 2020*, John Roberto suggests six new leadership challenges for developing a 21st-century faith-formation system. Most of these are about leadership in general rather than educational leadership.⁵⁹⁴ Roberto draws his understanding of adaptive leadership from Heifetz and Linsky. Along with Groshow, they suggest that systemic dysfunction is a myth, and that organisations get the results, positive or negative, that they have either intentionally or inadvertently worked to achieve.⁵⁹⁵ What distinguishes technical problems from adaptive challenges is that the latter require learning on the part of stakeholders. Technical expertise and authoritative guidance do not provide sufficient answers. Rather, "addressing adaptive challenges requires stepping into unknown space."⁵⁹⁶ These authors also describe several characteristics of

⁵⁹⁴ 1. Becoming an Adaptive Leader. 2. Becoming an Innovative Leader. 3. Becoming a "Blue Ocean" Leader. 4. Becoming a Change Leader. 5. Becoming a Culturally Intelligent Leader. 6. Becoming a Curator of Content. Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020: Designing the Future of Faith Formation*.

⁵⁹⁵ Heifetz, Linsky and Groshow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p28.

adaptive leadership evident across the sample of leaders in this study, though *not* all characteristics were present in every case.⁵⁹⁷

As with Schön, a leader's capacity to be a reflective and reflexive learner underpins or integrates with many of the above capacities.⁵⁹⁸ Schön spoke about the development of professionals' capacities as teaching *artistry* through *reflection-in-action*.⁵⁹⁹ Professional expertise requires more than the acquisition of knowledge; it relies on people gaining the ability to learn experimentally in the midst of their practice. Also describing adaptive leadership, Sharon Parks (a colleague of Heifetz et al.) challenged the directive CEO approach to leadership and instead proposed an understanding of *leadership as artistry*. This included such qualities as working at the edge, interdependence with their field, improvisation and courage.⁶⁰⁰

The picture of the solo, creative, self-reflective, visionary leader is challenged by a paradigm of leadership whereby the above capacities and culture are built within the whole organisation. In *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Wenger et al. speak of the need to design for evolution, create internal and external dialogues, invite varied participation, focus on value, and combine familiarity with excitement.⁶⁰¹ Heifetz et al. also claim that adaptive leaders can develop adaptive cultures which are critically reflexive and also build shared responsibility, encourage independent thinking, develop leadership capacity, and embed continuous learning.⁶⁰² It should be evident that there are some common themes in the above literature which link reflective and reflexive learning, participatory and permission-giving learning, and creative, experimental learning.

⁵⁹⁷ Adaptive leadership: 1. enables the capacity to thrive, which involves leaders working on normative questions of value, purpose and process. 2. builds on the past rather than rejecting it, and thus is both conservative *and* progressive. 3. occurs through experimentation and improvisation. 4. relies on diversity of membership and capacity rather than cloning. 5. generates loss, displacement and rearrangement. 6. takes time: the radical is incremental. Ibid., p14ff.

⁵⁹⁸ Here I take *reflective* learning to mean learning both in and from practice, while *reflexive* learning refers to the awareness and capacity to learn in and from one's participation in the organisation. This sees the leader's ability to recognise and adapt their active involvement as a ministry leader as a critical function of leadership.

⁵⁹⁹ Schon, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*.

⁶⁰⁰ Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* p209ff.

⁶⁰¹ Etienne Wenger, Richard A McDermott and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston.: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

⁶⁰² Heifetz, Linsky and Groshow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* p165.

These themes of adaptive creativity and continuous learning are reflected in varying degrees by a number of Christian authors other than John Roberto.⁶⁰³ There have also been a plethora of writings on church leadership over the last three decades by now-prominent authors (often white Anglo or Euro males).⁶⁰⁴ Several threads relate to this study—leadership roles, organisational change, and redefining organisational purpose. Throughout the narratives in this study, there is evident intention to foster congregational transformation or growth for the sake of mission beyond the congregation. Chapter 8 will examine links between education and mission. The question here is about the leader’s role in fostering organisational change.

Intentionality, Improvisation and Innovation

So far, I have used the term *intentionality* to encapsulate the following traits of leaders:

- recognition of the importance of formation and education
- regular planning and resourcing of formation and education
- purposeful development of a healthy community culture for learning
- deliberate, double-loop learning about formation and education

In *The Practicing Congregation*, Diana Butler Bass distinguished between *Established Churches* (and churchgoing) and *Intentional Churches* (and churchgoing).⁶⁰⁵ She described an established pattern of churchgoing that was like an accident of birth. You just happened to be born Episcopalian, so you automatically attended the local Episcopalian Church. According to Bass’ continuum (not dichotomy), these *Chapel* congregations are places “where members *receive*

⁶⁰³ For example: Anthony B Robinson, *Leadership for Vital Congregations* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006). Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*. Shapiro, *How Your Congregation Learns: The Learning Journey from Challenge to Achievement*. Shapiro and Faris, *Divergent Church*. Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*. Steve Taylor, *Built for Change: A Practical Theology of Innovation and Collaboration in Leadership* (2016).

⁶⁰⁴ These include Kennon Callahan, Bill Easum, Tom Bandy, Bill Hybels, Len Sweet, Michael Frost, Alan and Deborah Hirsch, Inagrace and Paul Dieterich, and others. The more recent generation of writers also includes emerging church authors such as Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Ryan Bolger, Jonny Baker, Cathy Ross and Dave Male, along with Mike Breen and Tim Keel. There has been frequent discussion among emerging church networks about the less prominent leadership and writing by women.

⁶⁰⁵ This was a Lilly Foundation-funded study of fifty mainline US churches who were seeking to reinvent themselves. Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, *the Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*.

customs, traditions and beliefs rather than create new ones.”⁶⁰⁶ These are *ordered, homogeneous, closed* systems. By contrast, intentional churchgoing is an active choice.

Intentional congregations are marked by mobility, choice, risk, reflexivity and reflection. They think about what they do and why they do it in relation to their own history, their cultural context, the larger Christian story found in Scripture and liturgy, and in line with the longer traditions of Christian faith. In addition to *thinking about* their practices, they reflexively engage practices that best foster their sense of identity and mission.⁶⁰⁷

Drawing on Wade Clark Roof, Bass describes a *communal reflexive spirituality*, which is theologically imaginative and engaged in Christian practices in faithful, transformative, creative, yet costly ways.⁶⁰⁸ The similarity of this description of US churches to my own characterisation of Australian congregations is striking.⁶⁰⁹ An intentional congregation is one that is “a people on the way,” to quote the Uniting Church’s Basis of Union; it actively pursues its teleological purpose through sustained and reformed practice, risk-taking, ongoing learning and experimentation. This both correlates with and extends my view of intentional leadership as stated above.

When it comes to development or change, are these leaders mainly *innovators* or *improvisors*? Recently, the language of innovation, pioneering and entrepreneurship has gained some currency within church leadership studies. In the business world, innovation often refers to the corporate conditions that can encourage creative product development, respond to or anticipate new market demand, or design increased efficiencies in production or service.⁶¹⁰ Denning and Dunham suggest that innovation is not simply creative invention.⁶¹¹ They suggest that most studies of innovation tend to focus on *talent, creativity, process* or *leadership*.⁶¹² These authors focus instead on eight essential *personal skills* or *conversational practices* of innovation: *sensing, envisioning, offering,*

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p78.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p80.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p80f.

⁶⁰⁹ Bass’ definition of intentionality is broader than my initial usage. The primary model for intentional congregations is faith-as-pilgrimage, a dynamic and organic image of mobility and change while fixing on an ultimate destination - union with God. Ibid., p81.

⁶¹⁰ Tom Peters, *The Circle of Innovation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997). Tom Kelley and Jonathan Littman, *The Art of Innovation* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 2001). Tom Kelley and Jonathan Littman, *The Ten Faces of Innovation* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 2005). Richard L Hughes, Robert C Ginnett and Gordy J Curphy, *Leadership: Enhancing the Lessons of Experience* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2015).

⁶¹¹ Peter J Denning and Robert Dunham, *The Innovator’s Way: Essential Practices for Successful Innovation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

⁶¹² Ibid., p3.

*adopting, sustaining, executing, leading, embodying.*⁶¹³ In terms of innovation as *change*, Andrew and Gaia Grant indicate that the contemporary challenge is neither short-term breakthrough innovation, nor long-term incremental innovation, but *sustainable transformative* innovation—neither a sprint nor a stroll, but a marathon race.⁶¹⁴

The use of the term *innovation* in Christian leadership writings is more varied. In their study of leadership in church denominations, Banks and Ledbetter state that churches have three tensions—*tradition and adaptation, preservation and innovation, stability and change.*⁶¹⁵ Hence, innovation is a general term for changing established practices or capital. In *Built for Change*, Steve Taylor describes innovation as including new initiatives, adapting existing programs or activities, developing organisational culture, and varying team roles and group processes.⁶¹⁶ Taylor also distinguishes creativity from innovation; the idea from the complexity of bringing it to fruition.⁶¹⁷ Deborah Kapp describes improvisation in congregations as a subset of innovation, yet doesn't clearly define the latter.⁶¹⁸ The Emerging Church and Fresh Expressions movements have used the language of *pioneer* and *entrepreneur* to describe the roles of initiators of new ecclesial or missional groups or activities.⁶¹⁹

Jones says:

Transformative leaders know what to preserve as well as what to change. We need to conserve wisdom even as we explore risk-taking mission and service. Too much change creates chaos. Transformative change, rooted in tradition and the preservation of wisdom, cultivates the adaptive work that is crucial to the ongoing vitality and growth of any organism, Christian institutions included.⁶²⁰

⁶¹³ They also indicate that some innovation is more linear and controlled in nature, while other kinds develop through expanding networks of collaboration.

⁶¹⁴ Andrew Grant and Gaia Grant, *The Innovation Race: How to Change a Culture to Change the Game* (Milton: John Wiley, July, 2016).

⁶¹⁵ Robert Banks and Bernice M Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), p49.

⁶¹⁶ Taylor, *Built for Change: A Practical Theology of Innovation and Collaboration in Leadership*.

⁶¹⁷ He also speaks about *strategic* versus *accidental* innovation, and *strength-based* versus *weakness-based* innovation.

⁶¹⁸ Deborah J Kapp, "Improvisation and the Practice of Ministry", *Journal of Religious Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2010): p35-57. <http://arl-jrl.org/journal-of-religious-leadership/journal-articles-by-volume/>.

⁶¹⁹ First published in 2004, *The Mission-Shaped Church* challenged denominations to identify *mission entrepreneurs*. Recently, *The Pioneer Gift* describes learnings from development in the United Kingdom since that time. *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004). *The Pioneer Gift*, ed. Jonny Baker and Cathy Ross (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2014).

⁶²⁰ L Gregory Jones, "Traditioned Innovation", <https://www.faithandleadership.com/content/traditioned-innovation> (accessed May 1, 2018).

Michael Moynagh quotes Edison as saying that there are 41 definitions of innovation.⁶²¹ Seeing innovation as essential for Spirit-led “micro-expressions of the innovative Kingdom Jesus has promised,” Moynagh describes it as going beyond many of the above definitions; true innovation “change[s] the rules of the game.”⁶²²

There are a number of threads in the above literature: adaptation (of tradition) vs fresh creation; personal vs group capacities; linear vs non-linear processes; intentional vs accidental change; rapid vs incremental change; burnout vs sustainable change. These are not necessarily a series of dichotomies. They are all, however, aspects of change, including transformation.

My sample of leaders and their congregations were primarily *adding onto* or *adapting from* their existing groups or activities, with the Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project being the notable pioneering exception. Based on the interview evidence, I would classify the majority of these leaders as exhibiting *improvisation* rather than *innovation*. Here I make a distinction between adapting familiar or existing practices and creating completely new or markedly novel approaches.⁶²³ I also recognise that a number of roles, behaviours or capacities identified in the literature concerning innovation were described in some interviews.

While this is general observation about the leadership in the sample, *improvisation* applies particularly to their approaches to formation and education. Some leaders spoke about creative approaches to Christian education, some described a revived focus on Christian practices, and some emphasised communicating the faith or the Gospel in contemporary ways.

Michelle, Mapoon:

I think it's a gift, to be where we are ... in ... the destruction of Christendom and in some ways antagonism for faith, for how we do Christian discipleship, because people are actually thinking, “Well how have we been doing this? Have we been doing it? Have we been intentionally forming people in the faith?”

⁶²¹ Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life* (London: SCM Press, 2017), p8.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, p174.

⁶²³ Fulkerson speaks of improvisation in relation to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*: fluid performance conveys changing identity. Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* p47. “The *habitus*, the durably installed generative principle of regulated *improvisations*, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the *habitus*. (italics added) Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* p78.

Simon, Clare:

I think we certainly are in a new setting, we can't just do things the same way that we've been doing them. But I think in some ways we're also called to do things the same way that we've been taught to do them.

Andrew, Maroubra:

We don't know what the future is like. I mean, no one does, obviously. But quite clearly the denominational structures of the church are rapidly, if they haven't already, shed any identity they had. ... But my first and foremost task, and not even mine, but anyone in ministry, has to be to form people with enough resource in their own faith, and in small groups of people, who can support each other, that if the church fell over tomorrow they would still have some supportive community—house church, small groups, a wider network of people.

Elizabeth, Mid-north Coast:

I think there need to be some profound changes in how people understand church and living out their faith for it to survive as a viable something into the future. ... It's about risking transformation and it's about risking doing things differently and allowing yourself to be changed and continuing the dialogue differently between church and community and you as a faith person, a disciple person.

John, Mid-north Coast:

If you do things better, then one of the things you do is get an awareness of the context that you're in and reshape or rework what you do. With our church Christian education, we don't just say "We had this really good program. Can't we just put in the 2010 words rather than the 1970 words and it will work?" No, we actually have to rethink it in terms of what the society is and that means that some of the biblical material comes to life in a different way.

John, The Gap:

I think we still tell the same story. The same Good News that was Good News 2000 years ago is still Good News today, but the way we share and do that with people, it has to grow and move and change.

According to Swinton and Mowatt, “[Practical theology] ... is dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God.”⁶²⁴ My understanding of improvisation in this instance is developed from several sources. Butler Bass’ definition of intentional congregations includes purposeful *retraditioning* or adaptation of Christian practices.⁶²⁵ She recognises both the importance of bearing traditions forward, and for their transformation in reflexive communities of faith. While this may include creativity and invention, her observation and mine is that churches were flexibly contextualising the habits of their common lives, as well as revisiting and rethinking the tenets of their faith. Butler Bass’ description encompasses reforming practice as well as reforming beliefs; both are interconnected. Such a view of Christian education accords with Mary Elizabeth Moore’s view of a *traditioning model* of Christian education. “Traditioning is understood as a process by which the historical tradition is remembered and transformed as the Christian community encounters God and the world in present experience and as that community is motivated toward the future.”⁶²⁶ Traditioning has the goal of “transforming our praxis in the present.”⁶²⁷ For Moore, religious education is about *continuity* and *change*.⁶²⁸ The past matters. Hence, education has a narrative trajectory, like Creation itself.⁶²⁹ Jones coins the term “traditioned innovation” in relation to the church’s role in social entrepreneurship; creatively serving local communities.⁶³⁰

Mary Hess speaks of “rescripting Christian Education for performative practice.”⁶³¹ Hess likens Christian learning to the work of actors and a director taking a script, understanding and inhabiting it in order to bring a contemporary performance to a particular context. Her focus is on Christian education as enabling the church to perform Christian practices. The metaphor is the same that Samuel Wells uses in *Improvisation* to explore Christian ethics as the performative embodiment of

⁶²⁴ Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* p5.

⁶²⁵ Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church, the Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* p47ff.

⁶²⁶ Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* p121.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p121.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* p154. Education is neither simply socialisation or reconstruction but takes place at an intersection of interpretation and transformation. Moore, *Education for Continuity & Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* p123ff.

⁶³⁰ Jones, "Traditioned Innovation". L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2016). “The best way to interpret the book of Acts ... is a process of discernment rooted in traditioned innovation.”

⁶³¹ Hess, "Rescripting Christian Education for Performative Practice".

the Christian story (drama) in various times and places.⁶³² One must be formed by the story in order to have both imagination, character and familiarity to inhabit the story.⁶³³ The life of discipleship, in other words, involves learning the script so that we might enact the ongoing story of Christian faith in many varied situations. Such *Christly gestures*, as Brett Webb-Mitchell describes them, are formed both by the Christian story and by participation in Christian practices. Their embodied performance is the action of accrued practical wisdom or *phronesis*.⁶³⁴

A repeated theme throughout this study is that the praxis of Christian education and the praxis of Christian discipleship may be inter-related in the dynamics of congregational life. In examining leadership traits of initiative and experimentation, the question has been whether leaders were conservative, innovative or adopted a middle ground of improvisation in relation to Christian education, Christian practices or leadership in general.

Whereas Kapp speaks of improvisation in ministry more as “on the fly” adaptation in response to immediate need, I am placing improvisation in a continuum between conservation and innovation.⁶³⁵ Improvisation is more concerned with creatively transforming the tradition, whereas innovation is focussed on doing completely new things.

<i>Conservation</i>	<i>Improvisation</i>	<i>Innovation</i>
Maintaining tradition	Reforming tradition	Releasing tradition
Preservation	Adaptation	Mutation

In terms of Christian formation and education, most leaders and churches in this study were improvisational rather than innovative. Kapp speaks of leaders having a limited “zone of manoeuvring” for improvisation due to church expectations about standards and tolerance for

⁶³² Wells draws on Nicholas Lash’ *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* for this notion. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004).

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p76ff.

⁶³⁴ Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures* p178ff. For Webb-Mitchell, the *praxis* of Christian living arises from *poiesis* and *phronesis*. *Ibid.*, p182.

⁶³⁵ Kapp, "Improvisation and the Practice of Ministry".

failure.⁶³⁶ This resonates with Butler Bass' distinction between the predictability of Established Churches and the flexibility of Intentional Churches. Hence the role of a leader is not simply to be a soloist in a jazz band but to foster the culture in which all players might have the freedom to take their instrumental break and shine together.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p50f. According to Kapp, organisations that support improvisation and other forms of innovation are ones that nurture reflective practitioners, tolerate mistakes and welcome creativity, communicate effectively, and support collaborative teams. Ibid., p51.

8. LEARNING FOR MISSION, LEARNING FROM MISSION

If the gospel is to be understood,
if it is to be received as something
which communicates the truth
about the real human situation,
if it is as we say, “to make sense,”
it has to be communicated in the language
of those to whom it is addressed
and it has to be clothed in symbols
which are meaningful to them.

And since the gospel does not come
as a disembodied message,
but as the message of a community
which claims to live by it
and which invites others to adhere to it,
the community’s life must be so ordered
that “it makes sense” to those who are so invited.
Those to whom it is addressed
must be able to say, “Yes I see.”⁶³⁷

Forty years ago, renowned missiologist Lesslie Newbigin asked how the church could not only declare, but also live the Gospel authentically in a religiously plural, ethnically diverse and culturally relativist world. In *The Open Secret*, Newbigin grounded the church’s mission in the way that it embodied its belief in the Trinity as “as model for understanding human life.”⁶³⁸ Mission was a performance of belief and “a process in which this belief is being constantly reconsidered in the light of the experience of acting it out.”⁶³⁹ Mission was seen as “proclaiming of the kingdom of the Father, as sharing the life of the Son, and as bearing the witness of the Spirit.”⁶⁴⁰ Thus Newbigin saw the church’s beliefs not solely as doctrine but as a trinitarian-expressed communal way of life involving ongoing Gospel representation and ecclesial reformation. The church’s common fellowship, its proclamation or testimony, and its manner of living in the world are inter-related; ideally, they are in a constant process of cohering through revision and renewal. While Newbigin is not speaking here of Christian education as such, the connection that he makes between the

⁶³⁷ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p141.

⁶³⁸ Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* p30.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p30.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p31.

church's *koinonia*, the constant reconsideration of its faithfulness to its beliefs, and the shape of its witness, mirrors closely the enquiry of this study: how do formation and education connect *church as faith community* with *church in mission*?⁶⁴¹ Newbigin's view that belief is performative is consonant with Samuel Wells' notion of improvisation.⁶⁴² Also, Newbigin's description of "constant reconsideration" fits well with Butler Bass' notion of *Intentional Churches*.⁶⁴³

I have chosen Newbigin because of his influence in missiology at the time of the formation of the Uniting Church, particularly his emphasis on the primacy of the congregation. David Withers provides a useful summary of mission influences in the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*.⁶⁴⁴ Statements about mission prior to and following the establishment of the UCA have a high degree of alignment with Newbigin's work. In 1963, the Second Report of the Joint Commission on Church Union stated: "It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the Church exists to fulfil a mission."⁶⁴⁵ David McCaughey, in his commentary on The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*, said "The Holy Spirit gives to Christ's people a glimpse, a pledge, a foretaste of the coming reconciliation."⁶⁴⁶ In *Manifesto for Renewal*, Andrew Dutney says, "The Basis did not seek to define what the church is, but to describe the church in terms of what it *does* in response to the message of Christ. The church works for reconciliation and ... offers itself as an instrument in the hands of Christ."⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴¹ Of course, Newbigin is concerned with education, in particular the competing nature of authority of traditions and truth claims, and how one learns them. "Thus, the Christian understanding of the world is not only a matter of *dwelling in* a tradition of understanding; it is a matter of dwelling in a story of God's activity, activity which is still continuing." Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p51. Newbigin was not without his critics with regard to authority. Kirsteen Kim notes that "the weakness of Newbigin's appeal to postmodernity is his modernist appeal to history as the basis of the church's claim to truth." Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission* p188.

⁶⁴² See previous comments about Wells in Section 7.5.

⁶⁴³ See also Section 7.5

⁶⁴⁴ Withers' notes that the publication of Newbigin's *The Household of God* in 1957 coincided with the beginning of the Joint Commission on Church Union. David Withers, "The Basis of Union: A Missionary Vision for Uniting Church Congregations", *Uniting Church Studies* 21 (2017): p65–81. Withers quotes Newbigin: "It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community." Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*, Kerr lectures; 1952 (London: SCM Press, 1957), p27.

⁶⁴⁵ *The Church - Its Nature, Function and Ordering* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1984), p26.

⁶⁴⁶ J Davis McCaughey, *Commentary on the Basis of Union* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1980), p21.

⁶⁴⁷ Dutney, *Manifesto for Renewal: The Shaping of a New Church* p101.

Writing from an Australasian perspective, Cronshaw and Taylor recently revisited Newbigin's writings as a lens for the study of congregational mission.

Newbigin's congregational hermeneutical foregrounds the church as the interpretive performer in the task of western re-missionalisation. ... So in "word, deed and new being" a congregation expresses mission. The way a church community lives and communicates the gospel, as a new community, as well as with its words and deeds, is intrinsic to the gospel itself.⁶⁴⁸

The mission focus of this chapter firstly examines how congregations and their leaders see and express their call to participate in the mission of God as local *ekklesia*. Participation in the *missio Dei* is seen here as a primary purpose of the local church and therefore as a core purpose of Christian education, reflecting the paradigm shift in mission described in Section 3.5.⁶⁴⁹

In Chapters 5 and 6 there was some evidence of how congregations see their community life and their Christian practices relating to mission. The educational dimension of this chapter concerns to what extent congregations are learning *for, in* and *from* their engagement in mission. *Missional or mission-shaped* discipleship is defined here as both individual and corporate.⁶⁵⁰ Christian education doesn't lead to mission in some ethereal sense, but through the shaping of mature disciples who actively serve a living God whose purpose is the renewal and reconciliation of all Creation.

Speaking of the theme of mission in the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*, Ben Myers says:

Mission is more like an exercise in artistic creativity than a logical argument or a sociological experiment. The church's calling is to show something: like those characters in the Gospel of John, our message is always simply, 'Come and see!' ... The church has a dual role: our mission is both to *see* and to *show*. Transfixed by the sight of Christ's creative genius in

⁶⁴⁸ Darren Cronshaw and Steve Taylor, "The Congregation in a Pluralist Society: Rereading Newbigin for Missional Churches Today", *Pacifica* 27, no. 2 (2014): p206-228.

⁶⁴⁹ This statement by Rev Dr Adam McIntosh, Presbytery Minister for Port Phillip West Presbytery, is indicative of some of the thinking expressed by leaders in this study. "The communities most effective in disciple making that result in a strong missional orientation are not generally associated with one particular study form or structure. I see in several instances that communities that undertake Christian education as a 'way of being community' to be the most effective. That is, Christian education is not undertaken as a program or a series of programs, but as a community of disciples seriously engaged in a variety of practices that nurture discipleship. Discipleship is owned as an ongoing way of being the Christian community with Christian education an ongoing reflective practice permeating the whole way of life of the Christian community." See full statement in Appendix 4.

⁶⁵⁰ *Mission-shaped* is an adjective coined by the Fresh Expressions movement in the United Kingdom and used in a range of publications, beginning with *Mission-shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*.

action, we call others to come and see. We participate in Christ's creativity through our own creative witness.⁶⁵¹

In keeping with interview themes, this is a view of mission that involves both discernment and performance. In this section, I seek to bring together the prior themes of Christian community and Christian practices in relation to the *missio Dei*. Thus, the focus is educational, ecclesial and missional. These issues centre on the nature of the local church as a communal expression of God's mission, the nature of Christian practices or practices of discipleship as participation in mission, and how God is at work through the Spirit in mission (the latter being a significant focus in recent missiology).⁶⁵² If as Bosch says, "The reign of God is not a program but a reality," then the question is not simply what do churches *do* in mission as a result of Christian education, but how is growth in faith and discipleship constitutive of participation (being *and* doing) in the life in the Spirit which is in itself the first fruit of God's kingdom.⁶⁵³

In constructing a varied sample for this study, one criterion was diversity in the mission foci of congregations. This information was initially discovered through the peer referral process (see Section 4.2). As Healy notes, given that congregations display significant diversity of theology and practice within their own membership, a unified local view of mission was not expected.⁶⁵⁴ However through the interview process certain congregational mission emphases were described by each of the ministry leaders. Some of these emphases were recognised by the congregations as communal mission-oriented projects, even as major congregational priorities. Other mission initiatives consisted rather of a particular mission focus aggregated from a range of activities. How these variegated programs and processes could be considered either as congregational emphases or as related to individual Christian living or discipleship also differed.

⁶⁵¹ Benjamin W Myers, "The Aesthetics of Christian Mission: New Creation and Mission in the Basis of Union", *Uniting Church Studies* 17, no. 2 (2011): p45–54.

⁶⁵² Bosch says that "the church is to be viewed pneumatologically, as 'a dwelling place of God in the Spirit,' ... as movement of the Spirit toward the world en route to the future. When we view the church as 'community of the Holy Spirit' we identify it pre-eminently a *missionary* community, since the Spirit is the 'go-between God'." Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* p387. See also Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit in the World: A Global Conversation* (London: SPCK, 2007). Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*. Kim, *Joining in with the Spirit: Connecting World Church and Local Mission*.

⁶⁵³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* p41.

⁶⁵⁴ Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography, and God: An Interplay of Reality Descriptions".

These congregational mission emphases are summarised below. As noted, “mission” was not defined by the interviewer, nor was a discrete definition sought from interviewees. Also, mission here is not seen as necessarily separate from the congregation and its members, either geographically or socially. Thus, the examples include programs and processes within, overlapping, alongside and beyond the congregations themselves. This list is indicative rather than exhaustive of their mission priorities:

- Cultural and cross-cultural faith formation and education: Mapoon, Nedlands
- Education for the wider community: Mid North-Coast, North Ringwood, Queenscliff, Wayville, North Lakes
- Cross-cultural exposure and service: The Gap, Maroubra
- Well-being (and faith) of children and young people in the wider community: The Gap, Mapoon, Mount Louisa, Eaton-Millbridge, Clare, Mid-North Coast
- Evangelism and faith-sharing: Nedlands, Mount Louisa, Clare
- Community development or service: Eaton-Millbridge, Mapoon, Mid-Lachlan, North Ringwood
- Social justice engagement: Mid-North Coast, Queenscliff, Wayville
- Well-being and faith of school or tertiary students: Maroubra, Nedlands, North Lakes

Congregations in this Chapter

I report here in detail on three of the thirteen congregations. Once again these have been chosen to represent quite differing kinds of faith communities.

- ***Mid-North Coast Presbytery*** in New South Wales
- ***Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project*** within the Wellington Regional Mission Area centred on Bunbury, south of Perth, Western Australia
- ***North Ringwood Uniting Church***, in outer eastern Melbourne, Victoria

As in previous cases, these interviews could have been used to analyse characteristics from the previous chapters, hence references to leadership, community life and practices of faith also appear to some extent here.

The three key sub-themes arising from the qualitative research were the *congregation as a locus of mission*, *discipleship as mission*, and a *local community focus*. Interview responses are clustered in these three areas, with additional analysis of their approaches to Christian education in relation to mission.

Table 14: Congregational Mission

Congregational Mission	Sub-categories
Congregation as locus of mission	Church as a community centre
	Congruence between church and mission
	Church a welcoming community
Discipleship as mission	Mission in everyday life
Local community focus	Serving the community
	Starting where the community is at
	Evangelism

The *congregation as a locus of mission* concerns the ways in which the life of the congregation itself is a centre or hub of mission activity in terms of relationships, location and facilities, and identity. *Discipleship as mission* describes the ways in which mission is seen as a dimension of the everyday life of individual Christians, an outworking of their beliefs in action, and also as an arena in which they encounter God at work and participate in God's mission. A *local community focus* is about the ways in which the congregation sees mission as beyond itself, rather than simply as attracting new members, and recognises that the needs and hopes of the community, not the congregation, come first.

These three areas are not discrete, but inter-related. In addition, the chapter examines how these congregations and others were seen to be learning *for*, *in* and *from* their mission. Thus, at the conclusion of this chapter I seek to bring together the themes of *(learning) community*, *practices of discipleship*, and *mission*.

8.1 Mid-North Coast Region NSW

Rev Elizabeth Raine and Rev Dr John Squires

The Mid-North Coast Presbytery consisted of thirty-three congregations stretching in a long, thin, coastal strip from the Foster area in the south to Coffs Harbour area in the north. Elizabeth and John, a married couple, shared two full-time ministry roles. The first role was as Presbytery Resource Ministers, primarily within the central zone of the presbytery, but also serving the northern zone. The second role involved sharing congregational ministry in the Wauchope congregation. The central zone of the presbytery included thirteen congregations but only three ministry placements, while the northern zone had ten congregations with one full-time and two part-time ministers.

Wauchope is situated 20 kilometres west of Port Macquarie on the NSW coast. In 2011 the town population was 6,372.⁶⁵⁵ According to the ministers, the region was mixed demographically, with many retirees (both self-funded and pensioners), a large, partly itinerant Aboriginal population, farmers and retired farmers, and some people living in significant poverty, particularly inland. Wauchope was previously a centre for timber industry. The region had varied agriculture (beef, dairy, poultry, pigs), mixed horticulture, and a dairy co-operative. The area was also a strong National Party seat in the State Parliament.

John and Elizabeth's presbytery resourcing role involved lay leadership education and working with church councils on presbytery matters.⁶⁵⁶ The majority of their work was with congregations without a minister. John had previously lectured in biblical studies at the UCA theological college in Sydney (UTC) for about 25 years (he has a PhD in New Testament studies). As well as her theological studies, Elizabeth has a Master's degree majoring in biblical studies and ancient history. She had taught biblical studies at UTC, and also worked in community development, youth work and school chaplaincy.

⁶⁵⁵ "2011 Census QuickStats - Wauchope NSW" (Australian Bureau of Statistics), http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/UCL114029 (accessed May 7, 2018).

⁶⁵⁶ Lay education included presiding at sacraments, conducting funerals, lay preaching and worship leading, biblical and theological teaching, orienting people to the UCA's *Code of Ethics* and *Living Values*.

The Wauchope congregation consisted of an average Sunday attendance of thirty to forty people, mainly retirement age and older. The ministers characterised Wauchope UC as less conservative than many of the surrounding churches, with an awareness of biblical criticism and social justice—“traditional Protestant Christianity.” Elizabeth served in the region from 2011 to 2015 and John from 2011 to 2016.

a. Congregation as Locus of Mission

Many rural church members are deeply embedded in their local communities. The question here is to what extent the congregation collectively sees its life and its location (premises) as a hub for mission. Is mission understood to emanate from the faith community’s relationships, activities, programs, rituals and other ways of being church together? This is different from the question below of how members are encouraged to express their faith individually in everyday life, and it is not simply about the congregation seeking to attract new members.

The Wauchope congregation offered a range of groups and programs, including a Bible study group, a prayer group, women’s fellowship dinner group, women’s day fellowship group and men’s fellowship dinner group. The day fellowship raised funds primarily to support various mission programs beyond the congregation. A small children’s club had been running for 20 years. The church also conducted a monthly hymn singing and morning tea gathering for people from a nearby aged-care hostel. Elderly people were transported to the church from the hostel as a regular outing.

Once a month, the congregation hosted community markets on their premises with items for sale, morning tea and a sausage sizzle. They also hosted a weekly lunch on Fridays for anyone in the community. This was attended by many of the local Aboriginal community.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁷ Other churches across the region also acted as community centres, Manning had a cafe and was an open community centre during the week, Coffs Harbour hosted a soup kitchen five days a week, and Port Macquarie ran a large community market. Notably, each of these churches also had a full-time minister in placement.

Elizabeth:

This is a very poor area. ... It was set up to help ... people that were struggling and couldn't afford a good hot meal. But it also brings in older folk that live alone, especially older men. ... You can have it for free or you can donate. ... They like the company. They get to sit at a table with other people and socialise.

Along with two other churches—one Anglican, one Uniting—the Wauchope congregation had recently started taking morning tea to the courthouse next door as a way of providing hospitality to people awaiting hearings. They also looked at providing rooms for solicitors to meet with clients.

Engagement with the local community also came through social action linked to education about social justice. Elizabeth saw practical service to the community as a vital part of discipleship, integrating with other faith practices, and also related to congregational vitality. In this sense, the church not only was only a community service or community centre, but a fruitful expression of Christian community life.

Elizabeth:

I think that integrity is essential. Willingness to share your faith and why it is meaningful for you is really, really important, and our churches are getting increasingly poor at doing that. When you work your faith out in the community, with your soup kitchen or your meals program or whatever it is, you need to say why you're doing that. ... If you can put those three things together, and you undergird it with good Biblical learning or study and a good prayer life and an openness to transformation ... then you probably will be healthy, and you probably will grow.⁶⁵⁸

The above description has two facets; running fairly traditional church programs, mainly for members, and serving the local community from the church premises. It was unclear to what extent the latter fed into participation in the former.

b. Local Community Focus

In addition to the above ways of connecting with the local community, the Wauchope congregation, and to an extent the presbytery, engaged with community concerns through education and action campaigns prompted by Elizabeth and John, with Elizabeth as the primary

⁶⁵⁸ Appendix 18, Reference 1.

instigator. These activities picked up on local community issues and also their broader social justice implications.

c. Discipleship as Mission

A large part of the conversation with John and Elizabeth revolved around connecting the Bible, social justice and everyday Christian living or discipleship. This was important in the ministers' approaches to education, their ministry in general, and for their personal faith. Mission was seen to have inter-related global and local dimensions. The ministers developed a particular teaching and action emphasis on Christian living and discipleship called *Everyday Justice*.

Elizabeth:

With an ageing congregation, they often say “But what can we do about famine? And what can we do about unfair practice?” ... We’re trying all sorts of different things. ... We’ve got them on a thing we call *Everyday Justice*, that is “What can you change in your life, even if you’re 110, that might make a difference to someone, somewhere in the world?” We’ve started with tea, coffee and chocolate, because pretty much everyone in our congregation drinks tea or coffee and eats chocolate. So, we’ve got into Fairtrade in a big way as an everyday justice thing.⁶⁵⁹

Part of *Everyday Justice* was *Just Add Salt*—a series of information on social justice education issues with an invitation to simple, weekly action responses. The question was how individuals, families and households could make a difference in the world.

John:

Luke 4 was kind of the motif for *Just Add Salt*, even though it was based on “You are salt of the world.” The Luke 4 manifesto ... of course is [from] Isaiah and that links in to a whole lot of stuff.

Elizabeth:

Just Add Salt, seasoning your discipleship. It’s about being an everyday disciple of Jesus, what everyday changes can you make.

⁶⁵⁹ Appendix 18, Reference 2.

John:

Tea, coffee, food, fuel, clothes, waste, all that sort of stuff. ... What *Just Add Salt* has done is help Christian people realise that the prophets actually have an important role in who we are as Christian people and our discipleship.⁶⁶⁰

The ministers indicated that *Everyday Justice* wasn't an idea imposed on the congregation. John and Elizabeth sought to make connections that built upon church and community concerns in order to extend local care and compassion to wider issues related to poverty and economics, human rights, and the environment.

Elizabeth:

Everyday Justice for them has been things like the markets and the community meals ... instead of them just having an "outreach program." ... It was about "What can *you* do as a disciple of Jesus?" And we started with the premise "Love your neighbour," and that went into Bible studies. It went into worship in terms of sermons and praying. ... And it was "What does loving your neighbour actually look like?", and then it was "Who is your neighbour?" Is it just the person on the pew next to you or the lady next door? Or is it somebody who's been enslaved on a cocoa farm? Is that your neighbour?

"Abolition of Sunday" ... We signed the congregation up for that. ... It's to do with "Stop the Trafficking." Last Easter we did a Fairtrade chocolate Easter egg drive in the congregation.⁶⁶¹

Elizabeth and John were active as instigators, also working in consultation with church leaders. It seems quite unlikely that these projects would have developed without Elizabeth and John's passion and creativity. Nevertheless, the ministers saw their role as enabling shared ownership.

Elizabeth:

I initiated it.

John:

We are the planners and strategists and implementers, I suppose. ... We have a monthly Church Council. We report in writing to that every month, ... not only what we have done, but what we would like to do, ... what issues are around. ... It hasn't just been "Oh, here they are doing their thing."

⁶⁶⁰ Appendix 18, Reference 3.

⁶⁶¹ Appendix 18, Reference 4.

This emphasis on discipleship was grounded in the ministers' views that mission is about changing lives and changing society.

John:

So theologically, our line is that our mission is not to tell people to accept Jesus as Saviour and come and sit on these seats on Sunday. Our mission is actually to ... help people to be a part of transforming this society.

Elizabeth:

Your discipleship is not just about your personal piety, though that is important. It is about how you live [as] someone who is a faithful follower of Jesus.

So, they're not just like offering a program, but they're actually doing something themselves, ... in their personal life and their personal faith journey.

It was not clear whether such an approach would have been well-received by a more theologically conservative congregation. Yet it seems to me that part of the strength of the ministers' approach was in finding practical responses to big issues, both tapping into people's desire to make a difference, and at the same time fostering discipleship through changing attitudes and behaviours.

d. Christian Education and Mission

In both the presbytery and congregational roles, John and Elizabeth provided specific lay education and leadership development programs for church members and also encouraged people to exercise and develop their individual gifts.

John:

My starting point would be fairly standard Uniting Church *Basis of Union*, all members are gifted for ministry ... and the role of leadership in ministry, or the role of the minister is to equip and enhance and encourage and support.⁶⁶² Our ministry is working with people who have a ministry.

Rather than using the terms *Christian education* or *formation*, they tended to speak to people about *discipleship, faith, living out your faith, understanding your faith, resourcing, and training*—although the latter was not a favourite term. The ministers utilised a range of educational

⁶⁶² *The Basis of Union* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1992).

approaches to explore the Bible, deepen faith, respond to social issues, and foster faith practices. The mission dimension of this was seen in the integration of belief and action.

Teaching and Learning from the Bible

Being former theological college lecturers, John and Elizabeth brought expertise and intentionality to their teaching and resourcing responsibilities. They regularly planned and led biblical and theological teaching series both within worship services and at other times. These included Lent/Easter and Advent/Christmas series, and Lectionary studies run regionally for lay worship leaders and preachers. As biblical scholars, they brought particular emphasis to cultural and critical studies of Scripture. Some of these programs were standalone events, advertised and attended by people from across the region.

John:

We added an extra one last year ... “Who killed Jesus?” “The Jews killed Jesus”, quotation marks! That classic thing that comes up at Easter. We pulled out the historical data about Pilate and talked about the Romans and the angle of the Gospels and all of that basic kind of historical, critical stuff, and they loved it.

Elizabeth:

We got things like “How come other ministers have never taught us this stuff?” When we talk to our ... ministerial colleagues ... they’ll say things like “Oh, you can’t say that in your congregations. They think the Bible’s literal,” or “I’ll get into trouble,” ... but we haven’t found that.

A weekly *Lectionary Cafe* conversation was held in a local coffee shop. This idea came from a ministry colleague in Sydney.

Elizabeth:

Once a week at [a] café in Wauchope on Thursday mornings at about 10:00, 10:30, we sit there and anyone from anywhere is welcome to come and sit with us, drink coffee, and thrash out the Lectionary readings for the week. They don’t have to study up on them or do anything. It’s just talking about them.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶³ Appendix 18, Reference 5.

John:

It also became a bit of a time for pastoral care and a bit of a time for people, local people with an interest in the wider church, to learn a bit about the wider church, as well as us to learn a bit about the wider Wauchope community from local people, so it had all kinds of spin-offs.

Understanding the Bible was seen as integral to social justice. Elizabeth developed and led a seven-week study on justice and discipleship both in Wauchope and Port Macquarie.

Elizabeth:

I'm very enthusiastic about the Bible. ... I take it very seriously. I read it a lot. I study it a lot. And I get very excited about sharing the things that I discover about it. ... And I think that's part of it, teaching the Bible and getting people to understand its cultural settings, its relationship to today, its relationship to community faith, personal faith, prophetic stuff, you know, ministry, mission, discipleship. ... My role [is] to unlock its treasures, find ways of teaching people, to give them the tools to discover these riches for themselves.⁶⁶⁴

Church and community engagement

A connection between the church and the wider community was developed in relation to climate change and clean energy.⁶⁶⁵ John and Elizabeth signed the Wauchope Uniting Church up to *Climate Change Australia*, Hastings region—an alliance of church, union, and climate groups. This involved a difficult conversation to get the agreement of the church council.

Elizabeth initiated a public seminar on climate change with the aim of helping the congregation to work through some of the issues. They invited “a respectable Uniting Church evangelical minister” and people from the Climate Change Alliance to speak on the issue, including practical topics such as how to reduce one's household energy bill. The ministers worked with the local newspaper editor to get regular articles leading up to the event. People from across the presbytery and the local community attended.

⁶⁶⁴ Appendix 18, Reference 6.

⁶⁶⁵ As a political issue this gained attention due to the stance of Rob Oakeshott, the local Independent member of the Federal House of Representatives.

Elizabeth:

At the end of it, some of our dyed-in-the-wool National climate change sceptics were saying "Gee, I never knew that. That's really given me something to think about." ... But [it] was hairy in the Church Council because some people saw us as being political. And I was trying to say it is political, but it's not partisan political. There's a difference. ... What we're saying is this is an issue that needs to be on the political agenda, and it's something that Christians should be concerned about, and it's something that the Uniting Church is concerned about.

Through this initiative the ministers developed a positive relationship with local media and with the local Federal member of parliament, such that they would be contacted as spokespersons on social issues.

Preaching and being Prophetic

The ministers sought to be prophetic in their preaching and teaching, not simply to educate, but to proclaim a vision of the kingdom of God, beginning with the church. The mission of the church was seen to include speaking prophetically about one's social and political context. The Bible and the Gospel addressed society with a vision for God's purposes.

Elizabeth:

Ministers have a mandate to be prophetic too. It's not just pastoral. It's not just preaching. Being prophetic is really important, and your congregation's never going to shove themselves along the way anyway. They're never going to grasp a new vision easily unless you are prophetic in some way.

John:

You're never quite just kind of nestled in there snugly. ... There's always some kind of agitation or aggravation or something or other in the relationship because of the prophetic dimension.

Elizabeth:

Congregations change at the edge of chaos, so being a prophetic irritant creates that necessary chaotic element for change to be able to be explored, interpreted and perhaps adopted.

The issue of integrity was raised again in relation to preaching and also the church's public image.⁶⁶⁶ Word and deed needed to align for both the minister's message and the church's witness to have authenticity. Moreover, this provided a meeting place for learning to occur.

Elizabeth:

If you can't preach something with integrity, if you can't pray something that you honestly believe, you can't inspire people to think about their own discipleship.⁶⁶⁷ You have to have integrity in your own belief and how you communicate that, but you also have to respect their integrity and their beliefs. ... Where they kind of mesh like this in the middle is where you've got fertile ground for developing people's understanding, ... discipleship and what they're doing.

We have a gap between our public face and rhetoric [and] what's happening in the pew. ... You can only [bridge] that if you educate people about their Bible and you educate people about Jesus and the prophets and about what the kingdom of God might really look like.

Elizabeth also used her personal blog to discuss social justice in relation to Christian faith. John and Elizabeth were also proactive in using the Uniting Church's national Assembly policies, particularly in relation to social justice issues, as resources for education—in preaching, Bible studies, teaching, with the media and in public events.⁶⁶⁸

Elizabeth:

You can't understand the Uniting Church's policy on stuff if you don't understand the Bible. And if you understand the Bible, then you'll understand the Uniting Church's policies on stuff. And if you understand both of those things you might have a concept of who you are and where you stand as a disciple within that faith tradition and how you might actually live that out in your life. So education is just *essential*. And it's got to be this constant circular process where one feeds into the other.

Authentic Relationships, Interactive Teaching

Bringing solid academic credentials and significant teaching experience, John and Elizabeth said that they cultivated a strong relational environment for learning and leadership.

⁶⁶⁶ Appendix 18, Reference 7

⁶⁶⁷ Appendix 18, Reference 8.

⁶⁶⁸ Appendix 18, Reference 8,9.

Elizabeth:

The basic way of doing that for me is forming relationships with people, because if you're in good pastoral relationships with people, then you can talk to them about almost anything.

John:

The kind of relationship-building Elizabeth's talking about, and the kind of authenticity and integrity, that's all essential to it. Otherwise it just doesn't work. It's not a matter of saying, "Do this because I say so, because I have authority." It's not a matter of saying "Do this because you will get great benefits out of it." "Trust me."⁶⁶⁹

While teaching might include mini-lectures or spoken input and preaching, these weren't the primary means of learning about the Bible, discipleship or mission.

Elizabeth:

Sermons aren't the best vehicles to teach stuff. ... It can reinforce other things you're doing, but it's not the best vehicle to teach anything. A dialogical conversation, where you can explore together different things about the passage, and different points of view, has far more sticking power and is far more likely to change the way someone will read the Bible.

John:

The Lectionary Café is about that. It's never a prepared lecture pattern. It's "Let's look at this" and we say something and then that leads to these questions and then back and forth, so you never know where you're going, but that's fine because that's much more effective.

Elizabeth:

We just did our Old Testament Lay Preachers. ... Parts of it were things up on a slide and you did talk about it, but other parts of it are about them doing exploratory things, conversations with us, each other, in table groups. We move them around. We get them to do exercises and ... people remember that. ... The best way to understand the literary structure of a Psalm is to get them to write one.

John and Elizabeth also conducted occasional "biblical culture experiences," where they would provide an experience of particular eras and places in Middle Eastern biblical history through special clothing, music, dress, craft activities and teaching times.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁹ Appendix 18, Reference 10.

⁶⁷⁰ Appendix 18, Reference 11.

Learning for and from Mission

The description of the Mid-North Coast has been mainly about the approach of the ministers, insofar as John and Elizabeth narrated in detail their approaches to teaching and learning, and in particular the relationship of these to Christian discipleship and mission. They worked proactively with the Wauchope Church Council, local church leaders, the presbytery, and community leaders to create educational programs and social awareness campaigns. In doing so, they also attempted to foster a kind of learning culture that connected Bible and theology, Christian living or discipleship, and mission as social transformation. This was extremely purposeful, reflecting their understandings of theology and ministry, their approaches to education, and their passion for social justice.

I asked about the relationship between growth in Christian faith and discipleship and the mission of the church.

Elizabeth:

I think it's circular, because I mean it's not linear. You don't read the Bible, practise this, get this achievement. ... If you do something and you do it well and it has an impact in your community as a church, it will be a transforming experience. And that impact then comes back onto you and it changes you and the way you interact with those people, the way you express your faith and the way you see it, which then changes again how you go back and interact with them. So, you've got this cyclical experience, and I guess it's a question of how to capitalise on that and develop on that and to move people forward. ... It's about again being in conversation and relationship and about being prepared to be transformed.⁶⁷¹

John:

If you do things better, then one of the things you do is you get an awareness of the context that you're in and reshape or rework what you do. ... With our church Christian education, we don't just say we had this really good program. Can't we just put in the 2010 words rather than the 1970 words and it will work? No, no we actually have to rethink it in terms of what the society is and that means that some of the biblical material comes to life in a different way.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷¹ Appendix 18, Reference 12.

⁶⁷² Appendix 18, Reference 13.

8.4 Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project, WA

Rev Karyl Davison

www.facebook.com/staugbunbury

www.staugustineuc.com.au⁶⁷³

The Wellington Regional Mission is centred in Bunbury, 180 kilometres south on Perth on the coast of Western Australia. In 2012, the Regional Mission consisted of five congregations—St Augustine (Bunbury), Collie, Waterloo, Harvey and Donnybrook. Collie and Harvey congregations have since closed. Bunbury is a regional centre of 31,000 people, the third largest city in the state (after Perth and Mandurah).⁶⁷⁴ The city is a service centre for the surrounding rural region, with local manufacturing, education, health services and tourism also important. Due to its airport, Bunbury became a hub for fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) mining workers travelling to the north of the state, resulting in a growth boom in the 2000s. Eaton and Millbridge are two suburbs of Bunbury, seven kilometres and nine kilometres respectively from the its centre. Eaton was an established (Karyl said for 20 or 30 years) suburb while Millbridge was a new housing development, with the combined area doubling in population from about 5,000 to 10,000 people in the previous five-year period. In accord with the mining boom, housing was expensive, and according to Karyl, many families had large mortgages. However, the population boom meant there were few community facilities and limited infrastructure.

Following considerable groundwork by the minister based in Bunbury, Karyl was appointed to a new ministry role with two focus areas—supporting the small rural congregations of Collie, Waterloo and Harvey, and developing a new mission initiative called the *Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project*. When I interviewed her in mid-2012, the Project was six months underway. Karyl had previously worked in a Christian education role in Central Queensland Presbytery and a Synod Christian Education role across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

⁶⁷³ St Augustine's Uniting Church Facebook page. <http://www.facebook.com/staugbunbury> (accessed May 1, 2018). St Augustine's Uniting Church website. www.staugustineuc.com.au (accessed May 1, 2018).

⁶⁷⁴ *City of Bunbury*, <http://www.bunbury.wa.gov.au/> (accessed May 1, 2018). *Bunbury*, <http://www.bunbury.com.au/> (accessed May 1, 2018).

The aim of the Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project was not to start a Christian congregation but to serve the local community through community development. This was seen as part of the mission of the Uniting Church in the region. It is included in the sample as an example of a “fresh expression of mission”, a different way of “being church” in the community. Karyl served in the role from 2012 to 2016. The project was funded by sale of local church property, but restrictions placed by the synod combined with lower than expected returns on the capital fund meant that Karyl’s role was no longer sustainable beyond 2016.

a. Congregation as Locus of Mission

We don’t have a building. We don’t intend to have a building, but we are hoping to make connections with our community and be the people of God with them in their place.

The Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project was distinctive as a fresh expression of mission as the aim was not to start a new church. This was quite different from every other church in the sample. The Regional Mission determined that if people wanted to join a congregation, there were already Uniting Churches in the area. St Augustine in Bunbury was the central and largest congregation, and thus the primary financial and personnel base for the Regional Mission area. The establishment of the Project requiring garnering the support of the local Uniting Churches, particularly St Augustine, for a different approach to ministry and mission. The Regional Mission leadership worked hard to find ways to help members be open to a new experiment in “being church” in the local community. This was an ongoing educational exercise during Karyl’s ministry.

Thanks to some great ministry leaders here over the past 20 years, they’ve gradually moved ... to a place where they realise that we have to do church differently and that people won’t come to us anymore. A lot of that hard work has already been done. But [we] help the team and all of those who volunteer on the days when we do have a big event to understand that it’s not about converting people, but about getting alongside with people and just being normal human beings with them. And that’s been good fun. Some of the connections stuff is really paying off at the moment.

There was active congregational sponsorship and some participation, but congregational membership growth was neither the goal nor the stimulus for mission.

b. Local Community Focus

The aim of the Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project was to serve these burgeoning suburbs by helping them grow as a healthy, positive community—a *community development as mission* approach with Karyl working as a community development worker.

Long term, I guess one of the things we're aiming at is to help the community be the best people they can be, to actually help develop that sense of community, so that rather than people coming home ... and then closing the garage door behind them, they actually get to know each other and then offer support to each other. I don't think that we as a team are in the business of being everything for the people of Eaton-Millbridge. We just can't do that and it's not appropriate anyway. But that we can help them help each other and support each other.

[It is] dependent on having a space to do these things, setting up interest groups, and whether it's a men's shed, or whether it's a knitting group or a book club or things that people do that enable them to make friends and become supporting friends in the community. I think that's our next step.

Karyl was aware of a range of social issues in the community, including the challenges of the disruptive FIFO lifestyle for families and schools, financial pressures on families, lack of facilities, and isolation. The aspirations and needs of the community (rather than the church) were seen to be the starting point for mission.

Making connections

Karyl's initial strategy was to build connections both with community leaders and with residents. She met with school principals, people from the local council, a service club, and joined a school P & C committee as well as the Eaton Community Aspirations Project. She saw part of her role as helping to advocate and plan for community improvements. While there were some good community facilities in Eaton, the same was not true for Millbridge; for example, no public toilets (so no public events could be held), very limited public transport, and a park with no play equipment.

[We're] making connections. We've had a couple of events as part of that Eaton-Millbridge team but primarily at the moment trying to make connections with people who know a fair bit about the community or have influence in the community. ... Once a month, instead of leading worship somewhere, I go to the Eaton Community Markets so that I can get to know people and have them get to know that we're around.

Karyl and her team ran an Easter Egg Hunt which attracted 120-140 people.

We designed it so that they had to go to six different stations where someone on the team was at each one, and either answer a question or introduce themselves. One of the stations ... [involved asking] them "What's missing in Millbridge?" so that we could begin making relationships, making those connections.

The Regional Mission bought a manse across the road from one of the local parks, seeing this as a natural connection to a community space.

Just down a few steps from that park there's another smaller grassed area which is covered by a fallen tree at the moment. It's used for weddings in summer, but it would also be a perfect space to set up a contemplative space. So that might be one way we can start doing some of the more intentional faith stuff in the area, if we can convince the council to let us do something there. But putting in a labyrinth or some seats that they can sit in and reflect is something we're hoping to work towards.

The goal was to establish a long-term presence, albeit with the ministry worker as the primary agent of mission in the first instance. This is ironic given the ultimate cessation of the Project due to funding issues.

Forming a Team

With the support of the Regional Mission leaders, Karyl formed a small team with church and community members to help her run events, keep her accountable, and provide feedback and some direction for the ministry.

In some ways it's a group to keep me accountable. ... But more than that, it's that shared ideas thing. They know this community better than I do, so it's about getting the guidance from them about what they think needs to be done and working with it. As I get to know the community better I'm more able to do that for myself.

Developing the team's understanding, along with that of the supporting congregations, was seen as a critical task and challenge. A feature of this project was that while the minister was central, she was not solo. There was a broader intention to challenge and change the congregation's views of church and mission.

Dave Male [from the UK] came out here when he was in Australia last and a number of the congregation members went to that. They've really caught that understanding that ministry is much more than coming in and worshipping on a Sunday. They've been hugely supportive.

Six months into the Project, the team and approach were still in a formative stage. They met regularly and engaged in a range of learning processes.

Fostering Faith

While church planting was not the aim, Karyl was certainly open to the possibility of faith being explored and expressed in ways that would be accessible in everyday terms to people with no church background.

I would hope down the track there is some interest in becoming, not becoming a faith community, but having some of those faith conversations with people. But we think that there's no point trying to do that until people trust us. They can see that we're not out to get to know them simply to make them come to church, but that we actually want to get to know them for their own sakes. And if they then have some indication that they would like to have a faith component then we can be ready to do that with them.⁶⁷⁵

While she was not averse to forming Christian community, there was an apparent reluctance to focus on this if it was at the cost of broader community growth. The mission priority was fostering well-being.

In the long term, ... we may have some small communities of faith, but for me and I think for all of us it's about much more than that, it's about helping the community to live life abundantly. The call [to] us to encourage people to live life abundantly is more important than getting them into a church building.

Karyl clearly valued opportunities to discuss spirituality and the meaning of life with people, but on their terms. Such conversations needed to be grounded in genuine, trusting relationships. This also required an openness on the part of Christians to not seek to compartmentalise or judge others' beliefs or practices.

Although I've done some more formal Christian education, ... my best approach is through relationship, actually developing relationships with people and being able to say "Mmm, I'm not sure I see God that way" and so on, and help them perhaps expand their perceptions a little bit. ... helping people understand that some of those yearnings, senses of spirituality that they have in them are actually OK, that we're not going to force them into a little box of "This is what Christian spirituality actually is," but that we're more open, we're more understanding and accepting of practices that don't fit that traditional mould.

⁶⁷⁶I think in our context, faith development has to happen over a meal or meeting in a coffee shop or over knitting in a knitting group. ... People *are* spiritual and spiritually aware and *are* interested in things about God. But they're not going to come into a church, or it's got to be in a fairly natural environment where they feel comfortable and all sorts of questions come.

It seemed evident that Karyl was seeking to develop such an everyday approach to acceptance, and to open, positive relationships among her team as well, and for her, the best way to teach was to model this.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ Appendix 19, Reference 1.

⁶⁷⁶ Appendix 19, Reference 2.

⁶⁷⁷ Appendix 19, Reference 3.

c. Discipleship as Mission

An integral aspect of the Project's vision and its educational perspective, then, was that the Christian life should be lived authentically. Mission began with *being* Christian, caring for neighbours, building genuine friendships, being trustworthy, and demonstrating belief through action.

[For] the existing people of faith, it's helping them understand that actually living in a Christ-like manner is as much church as coming in here and singing hymns, and that for people in the community who have ... no connection with the church at all, for them to understand that in fact Christianity is about living in a Christ-like manner and supporting each other and encouraging each other as much as it is coming to church.

I think we've often used the "We need to develop ourselves as disciples before we go out" as a way of never going out. "We're not quite ready yet," and so on. ... I think we've been frightened to go out because we've thought that we have to articulate our faith in three sentences or less, and we have to be able to convince people of the Christian faith and the story and then get them to come to church, or at the very least get them to go to *a* church.

Thus, in the first instance, the learning of discipleship was in the doing. Life and not church were at the heart of faith. Secondly, to have integrity or credibility was to faithfully and failingly seek to show one's faith before speaking too much about it.

I mean, I'm a fairly great believer in terms of, we need to enact it, we can't just tell people about it, we need to enact it to give it authenticity but also, ... we're not asking you to anything that we're not already doing ourselves. ... Modelling ..., for me Jesus of Nazareth is a model for how we should live. ... We actually have said, "We follow this amazing example," but we haven't done it, and the credibility gap is there.

But I think the emphasis for me is about saying "We need to go out and *be* Christians. We need to go out and *model* what the Scriptures tell us about how to live and how to relate with people." You know, "love thy neighbour" stuff. And you don't need any particular amount of discipleship development. You don't need to have that neatly packaged spiel to do that. Changing the emphasis, I think is important.

The tacit suggestion here is that Christians will grow as disciples and in mission firstly by seeking to live their faith and learning from engaging with the world, rather than merely seeking to impose their message upon it.

d. Christian Education and Mission

Both in her previous and current roles, Karyl sought to help people think differently about faith, church and mission. This involved intentional teaching by the ministers and visiting speakers, bringing new insights and questions about being the church and participating in God's mission.

The focus for me had to be on teaching people in today's context. So, as we were teaching them about the Gospels for instance, and how they were put together, also teaching them about the fact that as a church, doing what we've always done is not going to work anymore. And so helping people think more missionally about leadership in the church and in our community. Getting out of the building and out into our communities.⁶⁷⁸

Secondly, learning took place within Karyl's Project team through discussion, reflection and teaching.

Certainly ... that's stuff we talk about at our meetings. ... Last time we talked through some of the stuff in Alan Roxburgh's latest book, ... actually affirming that we're already doing some of what he's talking about, ... settling in the area ... and eating what's put in front of you and so on, ... that melding with the community thing. So, we're doing some of that just in the natural scheme of things.

Thirdly, Karyl sought to address the general issue of people's biblical and theological understandings.

I've been, in the past as a Christian educator, fairly critical of ministry agents. ... There's a huge gap between congregational understanding of the Scriptures for instance, and ministry agents. Why is there this huge, huge gap? And I think I've certainly found that here too. But now that I'm responsible for bridging that gap, it's a real challenge.

For me it's about helping them, educating them, about what we actually understand ourselves to be as the church. Going back to doing... I did a bit of Basis of Union with them this morning about "This is what we as a church understand ourselves to be."

Also, in a limited way, mentoring was emerging as a useful teaching approach.

I think what's happening the most in terms of the Eaton-Millbridge team is the one-on-one mentoring stuff. That's not happening with all of the members of the team but with a couple of them.

⁶⁷⁸ Appendix 19, Reference 4.

8.3 North Ringwood Uniting Church, Victoria

Rev Dr Ian Hickingbotham

www.nruc.org.au⁶⁷⁹

North Ringwood Uniting Church is in the outer-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, 30 km from the city, close to a major train station on the main highway and a large retail complex. The City of Maroondah consists of substantial retail and service centres along with government, health and community services. While the area is middle- to upper-middle class, there is also a lower income population, as well as people who come to the area seeking welfare assistance.

The congregation is partly regional, drawing people from surrounding suburbs, but with a strong local base. The minister described it as a “stable population.” It is at the eastern edge of what is often called “The Bible Belt,” where in the past there were many large churches across mainline denominations. North Ringwood UC began as a Methodist Church in 1960, and in recent decades has defied the trend of decline in many other Uniting Churches. The congregation experienced significant growth during the ministry of Ian Hickingbotham, including a building redevelopment and Sunday worship attendance increasing from about 120 to over 200. The congregation has an evangelical theology combined with a passion for social justice and overseas mission. North Ringwood has also maintained a focus on ministry with all generations combined with systematic Christian education.

Ian Hickingbotham served at North Ringwood from 2002 to 2016 (when he retired), having previously led a large congregation west of Melbourne in a relatively lower income but growing housing area. In 2012 the congregation was employing a part-time youth worker, part-time children and family ministry co-ordinator, and a part-time Playgroup co-ordinator.

⁶⁷⁹ “To reach out beyond ourselves both locally and globally: We are called *To Know Christ and Make Christ Known*” North Ringwood Uniting Church website. <http://nruc.org.au> (accessed 6 November, 2017).

a. Congregation as Locus of Mission

While North Ringwood had been a medium-sized congregation for some time, the arrival of the new minister in 2002 was the occasion to establish a vision for its future identity and mission. Ian was proactive in changing the meeting pattern of the Church Council and in facilitating forward planning.

When I first came here, one of the first things I did was assemble a think tank group to think through what is the mission or what is the vision for the future of this congregation. What we came up with was a vision statement which said to be a seven-day-a-week missional church and training for life centre. ... Ministry and mission occurs seven days a week. ...Missional, that we turn outward rather than turn inward, and that's happened in a big way,

A Community Centre

In terms of property and programs, North Ringwood developed over time into a community centre. Playgroups had operated since the early 1990s.

We've got Playgroups. That's probably going to extend shortly to four mornings a week. The office is open five mornings a week. So there's people there continuously. The new [building development] has been around [a] hospitality space... and that creates community... Lots of people are opening up to us their needs. They're coming to this open door of Playgroup which is safe ground for them. They're starting to trust the coordinator and our volunteers. Then they open up. Last week the coordinator was taking some meals around to some of the families and they are blown away by this. They've never had people care for them like this before. They're overwhelmed. "The church is giving me something?"

Several years ago, an early retiree in his 40s felt called to start a ministry to people struggling with poverty and other crisis issues. This developed into *North Ringwood Care*.

If you were to go up to the building this morning, there'd be volunteers... for... North Ringwood Care which is our care ministry. People come in seeking help when they're in strife and they'll be able to select food off the shelves... We're networked with the various community agencies. They send people to us. We can get free pharmaceutical and free dental and things like that. That's happening three mornings a week.

On any day of the week, the building had church members and people from the local community coming and going for a range of reasons. In ways that sounded similar to Queenscliff (although more highly programmed); the congregation and wider community interacted regularly onsite.

b. Local Community Focus

North Ringwood's priority on ministry and mission with children, youth and families included the Playgroups and also local schools. The congregation had developed a positive culture of people contributing their gifts and time in service, and they regularly celebrated this.

We network with the local primary school and provide mentors in the Kids Hope Program... We provided ten. [The Principal] said to me, "I trust you because you're the Uniting Church." We have value within the community. That's proved a terrific relationship. Last Christmas the Principal took all the volunteers out for lunch ... In terms of the congregation, high volunteer rate, which is very exciting. When we bounce the ball on new ministry initiatives, we generally are not left floundering. People rise to the occasion... Maybe that has something to do with how we bounce the ball and how we discern which ball to bounce. It probably does, because it's come from within rather than from without and imposed. High volunteer rate, and that creates real community.

The Playgroup ministry was seen as a way to connect pastorally with families beyond the life of the congregation. Ian indicated that an outward-looking congregation was always generative in mission.

We realise that there's lots of needs there that we're beginning to touch. We'd ideally like to start another position of someone who can start to work amongst these families who aren't in the congregation. ... We're applying for some government funding. ... We would have to put some money in as well... We're always forward-looking in terms of "What's the new doorway?" rather than "What do you think we should do around here?" ... It's "What is actually presenting to us, and how do we now meet that? Who are we in this context? What is our call?" We don't have to scratch very hard before we know what our next mission front is. It keeps opening up to us. With a thriving church, you just have to start, and it just keeps growing, and the need edges just keep opening up.

c. Discipleship as Mission

Ian spoke several times about the congregation being outward-looking, and how this sense of identity was encouraged and reinforced.

We must not assume that ministry is what happens on the church property. Ministry is what happens in the world. So, we go out into our ministry. Now as a way of demonstrating that to the congregation, ... I did a whole series where each week [in worship] I'd interview someone from their workplace. I actually would visit them in their workplace first. And they would tell me what they did, and I'd engage with them in terms of stresses they were under and those sorts of things, so I was pastor as well. And then I would interview them.⁶⁸⁰ So we

⁶⁸⁰ Appendix 20, Reference 2.

did a long series on that, week after week. Most weeks I interviewed someone different, and so that sort of hopefully started to ... forge this link between Sunday and Monday.

We tried to talk to people about this frequently. "Who you are in the community, in your family, in the workplace, is communicating, and you need to be aware of that." And so that's sort of the missional mindset.

Calling and sending

At North Ringwood, active discipleship also included calling and sending people to mission further afield, particularly overseas. This was driven by individuals' sense of call and concern rather than by committees. People with a common concern could band together if they chose. The mission culture of the congregation was about inviting people to hear God's call and helping them to fulfil it. Some of these developed into congregational missional partnerships or mission projects; with the minister at Pukatja (Ernabella), the Vanuatu Eye Care Project, an orphanage in Kenya, a vocational training centre in Zambia (which the congregation gave \$20,000 to build). Ian also mentioned people serving on the Thailand/Burma border, in Cambodia and Tanzania. This was hands-on service, not simply fund-raising.

The experiences of church members in mission fed back into the life of the congregation in a number of ways. Sunday morning worship services provided an important platform for telling the story and celebrating mission connections.

[Vanuatu] We've got a service and celebration coming up in a month's time. They'll participate in the morning service and then they're going to have a concert in the afternoon, a big banquet.

[Kenya] One of the locals is coming across and she's going to be interviewed on that platform in about six weeks' time and again there's going to be a banquet.

[Thai/Burma] Quite heart-rending when I interviewed her a few weeks back on the platform and she showed photos, and different groups in the congregation become sponsors for different children.

[Cambodia] Groups are heading out and we interview them before they go. We pray with them. They come back. They give reports to the congregation.

Permission-giving

The above is indicative of programs and activities at North Ringwood arising from a permission-giving culture.

A church like North Ringwood, that's a thriving church, I don't know everything that's going on. We very much use the management model whereby the church council sets policy, and they may set limits. You can do anything you like within these limits, and the limits are the values and the ethics of the Uniting Church. As long as you work within the values of this congregation and the ethics of the Uniting Church, you can be creative. You don't have to come to us with every single creative idea. So you have a banquet dinner. You don't have to ask us for permission. You just do it, right? And that's the culture of the place. My role in this place is threefold. One, empowerment, two, voicing the culture, speaking the culture, and three, vision casting.

In terms of fostering growth, both in discipleship and mission, this meant allowing people to learn by trial and error.

We have to have a value whereby people can try out in ministry, and have it not work, and they be met with grace, not failure. So, we don't beat people up if it doesn't work. If you have a culture whereby "If this doesn't work, they'll never trust me again," they'll never step out in the first instance. One of our values is you can try in the ministry and it cannot work. ... The values out of which we work, which are very much grace values, that's part of the leadership I think.

Everyday discipleship was seen as "having a go." It should also be said that Ian was evidently an "ideas person" and a motivator, such that the church environment was not laissez-faire but rather a culture that encouraged participation within the framework of its vision.

Learning by doing, action-reflection

I asked Ian about the relationship between growing in faith and being engaged in mission.

The problem is [if] we need to grow before we go out and we might just become fat. Right? Whereas the action-reflection model is much better, so we go out. The girl who's just been to Vanuatu, that then causes her to reflect on issues of poverty, injustice, those sorts of issues. The experience becomes, then, the seed-bed for asking questions, which then, we as a community must engage in. I think action-reflection is the mode we would hope to use as much as we can.

For decades, young adults in the congregation had served in Scripture Union Beach Missions during the summer. Several senior church members had been state or national Scripture Union staff (others in World Vision and Navigators) and this kind of learning-by-doing in leadership and evangelism was embedded in the culture of the church.

It was not clear whether there were formal action-reflection learning processes; however, there was a clear description of people's stories and personal learnings being reflected back to the congregation regularly.

d. Christian Education and Mission

Leadership development

While the congregation had well-established programs of Christian education, Ian brought fresh energy and focus with an emphasis on adult faith development. This began with the Sunday evening "Leadership Lifter" series. This series was developed by Ian himself from a variety of sources, and included learning about leadership styles, Covey's *Seven Habits*, being an outward-looking church, relationships and triangulation, encouragement, generational characteristics, team work; all adding up to a strong focus on congregational culture, healthy relationships and recognising gifts.

School of Ministry

With Ian's vision and influence, the congregation established a School of Ministry at the same time that they opened their building extension. This was seen as something of a leap of faith.

I had critics in my ear, saying, "Ian, you haven't crossed all the t's and dotted all the i's. ... What about this? What about that?" And I thought, if I let the critics win, I'll never get this up and running. I find you can't see the whole road map in advance, sometimes you just have to take the first step. I thought, I'll solve the issues. I have a model in my mind. I've seen it work. ... So, I ignored the critics and I just ploughed into it anyway. And it's worked, and it's been exciting.

In terms of leadership, Ian described himself as the air traffic controller, rather than the pilot.

In the first three or four years I did not teach any courses, deliberately. I raised others up to teach the courses.

The School of Ministry offered a wide range of learning programs in Bible, theology, leadership, creative arts, technical skills, relationships and other areas. This both equipped church members for discipleship and mission, and also engaged with people from the wider community.

With our North Ringwood Care, that's forty, forty-five volunteers, we sent some people off to do some training in welfare work, and they brought the course back, and we just did more training for them to equip them in their ministry. ... We sent some people off to do some training in some parenting series. We did two different types, those with young children and those with teenagers. We [then ran a] parenting series. We just had another

seminar, ... a Sunday afternoon for dads, fathering, parenting. We run the Pastoral Partner program ... and so we do the training each year for a new group of people.

The development of teachers was part of a strategy to build the educational capacity of the congregation.

What's our *mode* of education? What works? Just the fact that I've learnt a particular topic and dump it, doesn't necessarily communicate. It just means, "Well we all know Ian knows this stuff," but *they* don't grow. The mode of education matters. ... I'm attentive to that on the way through as we build courses and that's where the air traffic controller metaphor kicks in, and I will perhaps discuss with the teacher, the pilot, the mode [of education].

Gifts and ministries

Ian and another UCA minister co-produced a study guide and DVD called *GPS: God's Positioning System* which dealt with spiritual gifts, heartbeat or passion, abilities and experiences, personality-types and multiple intelligences. The series included individuals being able to work with a mentor for twelve months to explore their ministry. The authors produced youth- and adult-versions of the material, and church leaders actively recruited young people to participate in the program with mentors.

Another initiative was based on Christian Schwartz's *Natural Church Development* (NCD) series. This diagnostic tool highlighted the need for the congregation to develop two areas; passionate spirituality and need-oriented evangelism. North Ringwood produced their own DVD to explain NCD to the congregation.

We introduced the concept of these eight quality characteristics, and we said that as a congregation we are very strong in some areas ... But there are some areas where we're low, and one of them is Passionate Spirituality. Then we produced a passport which introduced the language, the new vision, and the direction for the next two years. Then everyone received a home visit, or a visit to their small group and watched the DVD and was given a passport to look through. We did a companion one for children ... so the whole family was using the same language.

The key words that we're using this year are "An Inside-out Church." Yes, we are nourished on the inside, but we are directed outwards into the community, into the world. "Growing Deeper, Growing Wider" [means] "Growing deeper", Passionate Spirituality, "Growing wider", Mission and Evangelism.

It was evident that the church was constantly engaged in planned, intentional, congregation-wide education and formation activities.

Spiritual growth

The area of Passionate Spirituality was explored and resourced in a range of ways including a teaching series on Stages of Faith, an introduction to the Labyrinth as a spiritual exercise, and a series of Christian Schwartz's *Nine Ways to Encounter God*. The church had ninety-two people signed up for the latter course to be run in home groups.

They do a questionnaire and they get a feedback sheet saying where they're biased. ... What they're doing is getting language around their mode and recognising that everyone's not the same as them ... and we need to honour that. [With] some of the things we do as a congregation, they might say, "Well why are you doing that?" "Why are you doing a labyrinth?" for example. "Because that nourishes the faith of a whole cluster of people. It doesn't work for you. Something else works for you." It actually broadens people's thinking and makes them open to the "other." Then of course we're trying to stretch them ... There are good things to be found in a mode that's not your natural style. ... We're asking people to sign on for courses in the School of Ministry which are not their natural take, and to grow.

As well as an extensive small group program, the congregation also encouraged daily Bible reading, journaling and prayer, including an annual forty-day Lenten Series written by church members. The congregational priority on mission was balanced by an emphasis on personal gifts and ministry, and spiritual growth.

Teaching

Through the School of Ministry and other educational programs, the congregation had an emphasis on teaching and learning. There were multiple examples that the nature of teaching was diverse—for different subjects or content, for varied learning styles, and for the sake of sustained interest over time. Ian had adopted a role as an occasional guide or mentor to people teaching or leading learning programs. Ian also indicated that he was quite thoughtful and intentional about his own approach to teaching and preaching.

We don't all learn the same way. We need to be aware of that. Simply because I might develop a particular teaching mode, [that] doesn't mean everyone's going to learn. Particularly in preaching, teaching, the voice that I have developed for me is very much right-brain, left-brain. What I mean by that is, for every concept or theological point, or Biblical understanding I want to focus on, I try to have a right-brain picture or metaphor or story that holds it. ... I often use music. ... I'm a framework thinker. ... If you give me the framework, then I can work within that. ... So hopefully when I teach I do that.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸¹ Appendix 20, Reference 3.

8.4 The Missional Impetus of Formation and Education

The church is.
The church does what it is.
The church organises what it does.⁶⁸²

Christian education is missionary education by definition.⁶⁸³

Craig van Gelder's pithy summary of the essence of the church as a Spirit-led missional community could have finished with "The church learns to become what it is." Not only is the church missional by nature, but the Spirit who creates the church also shapes its participation in and sending into the world. The Spirit organises the church for mission. "The Spirit-led ministry of the church flows out of the Spirit-created nature of the church."⁶⁸⁴ How does the church learn to shape itself for mission?

Letty Russell says:

The witnessing community is the context of Christian education, and where it is involved in mission, education will also take place in mission and be missionary education.⁶⁸⁵

Russell wrote *Christian Education for Mission* in 1967. She contended that Christian Education should be oriented towards mission, and as such permeates the whole of the life and mission of the local church. Russell understands mission in both individual and corporate terms, and as both local and global in scope. At the time of writing *Christian Education in Mission* in 1967, she had been a minister in East Harlem, New York City, for fourteen years.⁶⁸⁶ Russell had also spent five years as a member of the Working Committee on Studies in Evangelism with the World Council of Churches, focusing on "The Missionary Structures of the Congregation."⁶⁸⁷ She claimed that Christian education had become a "captive of the church" and also separated from other parts of the church's life.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* p17.

⁶⁸³ Letty M Russell, *Christian Education in Mission*, Studies on the church for others (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p37.

⁶⁸⁴ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* p18.

⁶⁸⁵ Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* p43.

⁶⁸⁶ I am grateful to Dr Deidre Palmer for drawing my attention to Russell's work.

⁶⁸⁷ Russell was certainly influenced by the global dialogue regarding the nature of mission, stating that "The mission of the church is to participate in God's mission of reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ." *Ibid.*, p14.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p20f.

The aims of Christian education, not only its practices, have been central in this study. Why do churches seek to foster faith among their members and the wider community? Is congregational Christian education oriented towards the church's sense of purpose, specifically as agent and locus of the *missio Dei*. The lenses of mission in this inquiry are both educational and ecclesial. To what extent has the "missional turn" in the Western church since the mid-20th century resulted in a shift in congregational understandings and practices of Christian education?

Interviewees in the study were asked to speak about congregational activities regarding faith development and how they understood the relationship between learning, discipleship and mission.⁶⁸⁹ Ministry leaders across the sample provided cognisant and reflective narratives regarding congregational mission. They described explicit mission emphases and provided coherent accounts of why these were important for the congregation's identity or goals. Some mission activities were well-established while others were still evolving. Mission was portrayed as work-in-progress; requiring discernment, attention, energy, experimentation and contextualisation. In general, leaders articulated both positively and critically what they were learning from mission engagement.

a. Congregation as Locus of Mission

The church-in-mission is, primarily, the local church everywhere in the world.⁶⁹⁰

The only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live it.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁹ A study more focussed on mission could have explored more fully their theologies of mission and the scope of churches' participation in mission. An early attempt of mine to map responses against Steven Bevans' *Models of Contextual Theology* proved inconclusive as there was insufficient interview data. Bevans' six models - *Translation, Anthropological, Praxis, Synthetic, Transcendental, Countercultural* - could be helpful for a further study regarding Christian education. However, I also found it a challenge to read the models into a Uniting Church mindset. There are aspects of the Catholic, inter-cultural and contextual nature of Bevan's schema that defy easy mapping into a Protestant, largely Anglo/European, mainline church setting. Stephen B Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002). Nevertheless, a "mission mapping" of Christian education approaches in congregations is an academically enticing prospect.

⁶⁹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* p387.

⁶⁹¹ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p227.

The *locus of mission* is the worshipping and witnessing congregation. It is the church, not just the pastor, that celebrates, embodies, and announces the advent of God's new world—a new social order—in a vibrant and open communal life of commitment, love, learning, purpose, meaning, and service.⁶⁹²

The role of the local congregation in mission has been crucial in the paradigm shift of the western Church and also in the formation of the Uniting Church. If as Andrew Dutney says, “mission is the hermeneutical key to the Basis of Union,” then the local *ekklesia* of disciples, not just the denomination or the church universal, is a particular expression of the Spirit-filled body of Christ, sharing in his ongoing mission.⁶⁹³ Rather than seeing the Christian community solely as the agent who *does* mission, Dietterich says that the life of the church is in itself a participation in the mission of God.⁶⁹⁴ The term *locus* quoted here is derived from Lesslie Newbiggin.⁶⁹⁵ While emphasising that the church points away from itself to the coming reign of God, Newbiggin also states that the church is a *foretaste, firstfruit* and *pledge in the Spirit* of the kingdom.⁶⁹⁶ *Locus* refers to a regenerative, living experience and expression of Spirit-in-community that is witness, promise and real fragment of the fullness of a renewed Creation.⁶⁹⁷ This goes a step beyond seeing the life and mission of the congregation as the curriculum for Christian education; it means that there is a diacritical relationship between the experience of Christian community, growth in faith, and participation in mission.

⁶⁹² “The evangelical mission of the church is graciously and hospitably to invite the world to participate in the re-creation of humanity: to experience the freedom, joy, and wholeness of life in communion with God and with one another. Inagrace Dietterich, “A Foretaste! Transforming Leadership Practices: Leadership for What?” (The Center for Parish Development, September 30, 2015), <https://centerforparishdevelopment.wordpress.com/page/7/> (accessed June 4, 2018).

⁶⁹³ Andrew Dutney, “Is There a Uniting Church Theology?”, *Uniting Church Studies* 2, no. 1 (1996): p31-32. *The Basis of Union* Paragraph 15.

⁶⁹⁴ “It is common to think of the church as the *agent* of mission. The role of the church as agent is to provide the resources, training, and support to enable lay people to bring their faith into the economic, social, and political spheres of the ‘real’ world.” Inagrace Dietterich, “A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America”, *Missiology* 38, no. 1 (2010): p27-36.

⁶⁹⁵ “Its visible embodiment will be a community that lives by this story, a community whose existence is visibly defined in the regular rehearsing and re-enactment of the story which has given it birth, the story of the self-emptying of God in the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p120.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p120.

⁶⁹⁷ “God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.” *The Basis of Union* Paragraph 3.

Intimacy and Inclusion

The theme of *congregation as community* was evident across the interviews. This was initially discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the foundations of being a learning community, where relational attributes of hospitality, trust, inclusion and openness were coupled with exploratory and participatory learning. Some congregations were seen to be permeable in their sense of membership, acting more as a hub of networks—a fluid organism—than as a discrete unit. The factors seen in the three case studies just discussed include relational intimacy *and* porous community. This combination was also particularly evident at Queenscliff, Mapoon, Maroubra, Nedlands and Wayville (Christ Church), where core congregational activities were inclusive of people beyond the church membership. While almost every church sees itself as open and welcoming, these churches combined program design with a culture of hospitality in varied but effective ways. As a locus of mission, the Christian community is an *open* invitation to experience *communitas* as Spirit-dwelt *koinonia*. Intimacy without inclusion, or vice versa, is a bifurcation of the trinitarian nature of Christian communion—life with God and life in the world. For a congregation to work actively on becoming and sustaining such an inward-outward community life is not peripheral but core to the purposes of formation and education.⁶⁹⁸

Community Centres

Congregations in the study also acted as loci or hubs of mission by developing their premises as community centres for the wider community—providing programs, activities and space to serve their neighbourhood, region or town. This was not simply hiring out their buildings, but offering church-sponsored activities involving service, learning, entertainment, friendship, food, advocacy or spiritual exploration. Examples include North Ringwood (playgroups, North Ringwood Care, education events), Wauchope (community markets, community lunch), Queenscliff (Op Shop, music concerts, guest speakers), Mount Louisa (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers: MOPS), and Wayville (Effective Living Centre). The members of these congregations had the opportunity to be highly engaged with people in the wider community on terms that connected the congregation's embodiment of faith with the well-being of the neighbourhood or town. Some churches

⁶⁹⁸ Guder says, "There is a constant concern about the public nature of the missional community that is emphasised by the apostolic use of Greek terms such as *polis* and *ecclesia* for the church. Their conduct toward one another is to be congruent with the message they proclaim." Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom", p265.

deliberately redeveloped their premises with this aim in mind (Queenscliff, Clare, North Ringwood). In an interesting reversal, the Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project sought to make the local community's facilities, spaces, and programs the place of mission, rather than the congregation itself.

Discerning and Participating

Leaders also spoke of the need to discern where God is at work in the world and to become participants in the mission that is already happening through the Holy Spirit.

Andrew, Maroubra:

I understand it that God's mission is at play in the world and our task is to try and find when we're called into that and asked to participate in it. Well, how do we do that except through listening to each other and listening to the community?

James, Mapoon:

God is out there, God is out there! And we can join God there! It isn't dependent necessarily on money and the things that we thought we've been dependent on before. But there's ministry and there is mission and there is resourcing from God, and the church hopefully will follow God.

Wendi, North Lakes:

Ethos is probably the key in lots of ways in the sense of listening, listening to what's happening in the world, Creation, in the community, listening to the Word, listening to the Bible, the Word, Jesus, listening to the Spirit, ...listening to other denominations, other faiths working as the hands and feet of Jesus.

While there was ample evidence of churches seeking to meet local needs, to see the church as a locus of mission is to see its embodiment of practices of discipleship (including advocacy and justice-seeking, peace-making, generosity, hospitality, compassion and more) as Spirit-guided teleological participation in God's mission. While the Uniting Church is noted for community service, within many of these narratives Christian service is made explicit through formation and education as engagement in mission.⁶⁹⁹ As a locus of mission, the life of the congregation is an instrument of the coming reign of God. Diettrich and Guder recognise that as an "eschatological

⁶⁹⁹ In the 2016 National Church Life Survey, 62% of Uniting Church attenders "said they had informally helped others in three or more ways in the last year" from a list that included visiting someone in hospital, helping someone through a crisis, donating money to charity and caring for a sick person. *Church Life Profile for Uniting Church* p22.

reality,” the Holy Spirit works in the church for “the fulfillment of God’s creative purposes.”⁷⁰⁰ The church not only points toward the inbreaking kingdom; by its practices it seeks to act as though the reign of God is a becoming a present reality.

The quality, character, and witness of Christian missional communities are determined by the social or ecclesial practices that shape, train, equip, guide, cultivate, their identity, vision and action.⁷⁰¹

Claire Smith drew on the work of Letty Russell and Darrell Guder in developing her understanding of *Missional Christian Education*.⁷⁰² Reflecting Russell, Smith said that “Christian education is by its very nature the means by which the church educates for mission and is in itself a missional act.”⁷⁰³

The questions that missional Christian education asks are the questions the missional church asks as it seeks to be faithful to God’s mission. The first question the church needs to ask is how has God called us to witness in this particular locality and society, at this particular point in time? ... The second question then is how do we know this? The third question is how do we, as an educative, witnessing community, move towards God’s mission purpose for us?⁷⁰⁴

For Smith, the first question is one of discernment involving Scripture, prayer and observation in “an ongoing conversation that involves God, the witnessing community, and the society.”⁷⁰⁵ This in itself is an education process.

Further, the church is a locus of mission partly because its *practices* constitute participation in the continuing mission of Jesus Christ. The emerging emphasis on the trinitarian nature of God’s mission in recent decades sees the Holy Spirit’s work in the church as a continuity of *Christopraxis*.⁷⁰⁶ Drawing on Zizioulas, Balia and Kim state that “if Christ *institutes* the church, it is

⁷⁰⁰ *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p144.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁰² Claire Smith, "Foundations for Missional Christian Education" (PhD Thesis, Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, May, 2005).

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p4.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p229.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p233.

⁷⁰⁶ “Christo-praxis is repeated in the actions of blessing, confronting, challenging, dialoguing, leading and renewing the mission of God in the contemporary contexts of different people groups and races.” *Witnessing to Christ Today*, ed. Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, Edinburgh 2010 Series; 2 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), p124. Also “The church is the church because of what happens in the local church’s *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*; that the church is an event among people rather than an authority addressing them or an institution possessed of the elements of salvation, of doctrines, and offices. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* p389.

the Holy Spirit that *constitutes* her.”⁷⁰⁷

Previously in Section 6.5 I noted the work of Roger Owens in *The Shape of Participation*. Let me revisit him here to make the connection with the Spirit and mission.

The church’s participation in God is Christ’s practicing himself as the embodied practices of the church, in the Spirit, for the world. Moreover, this practicing, this participation, has a peculiar visibility because it is the Jesus of the Gospels who practices himself in the church; this visibility of the form of Jesus in the church shows the world the shape of its own *telos* in God.⁷⁰⁸

Owens’ work is important in making the connections between the praxis of Christian education, discipleship practices and participation in mission that are intertwined here. Practices are multifaceted. On the one hand they can be seen as disposing us to the possibility of God acting (rather than being our work or achievement).⁷⁰⁹ Practices may also be seen as the kind of craft or rehearsal learning described by MacIntyre, Dykstra, and Webb-Mitchell, fostering growth in character beyond the value of incidental expressions of practice. For Owens, the body of Christ is embodied in the practices of the church.⁷¹⁰ Owen’s claim that participation in practices is communicative is what makes such action missional.

Participating in the life of God is God’s sharing his communication with humanity, it is God’s sharing God’s own practicing his life with humans, so they might practice a different life together... The church is the community articulating, practicing, so to speak, the world’s future, thus showing in this practical articulation the shape of the world to come, the shape of the world as it was meant to be, sharing the life of God.⁷¹¹

If the life of the church as the body of Christ involves participation in the mission of Christ, then the church as locus of mission is a community of missional discipleship practice. This is not to claim that the church does mission apart from God; yet, to see that Christ gifts himself to the church through the Spirit is to recognise that the church’s practices are open hands rather than empty hands.

⁷⁰⁷ *Witnessing to Christ Today* p25.

⁷⁰⁸ Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* p16.

⁷⁰⁹ This is partly Andrew Root’s critique of Aristotelean *praxis* as having value in itself, described previously in Section 6.5 Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*.

⁷¹⁰ Drawing on Bonhoeffer, Owens says “The church does not reflect the life of God in its practices, nor does it join God’s activity somewhere else. The church is God’s activity ... as the body of Christ...” Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* p93.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, p125, 126.

b. Learning for Everyday Discipleship

God's glory has a particular shape and form. Christ's cross is his glory; his humility is his exaltation. The hidden depth of creation is disclosed not in strong, successful, admirable lives, but in *cruciform* lives. The church is that community that takes upon itself the form of the cross. The glory that is even now at work, transforming all things, is the glory of Christ crucified and risen. The call to mission, then, is really nothing more or less than the call to discipleship.⁷¹²

In Wauchope, Elizabeth and John worked intentionally through worship, Bible study, advocacy and education to draw attention to the social justice implications of people's daily lifestyle values and choices of individuals and households. Their approach integrated Scripture, theology, ethics and politics. North Ringwood's discipleship emphasis was about being church seven days a week, on church premises and in daily life. While there was a strong accent on being called and sent on mission beyond the local community of North Ringwood, the congregation also invested heavily in local expressions of faith. Everyday discipleship included volunteering in service. The Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project was based on the premise that Christian faith is about being in the world, exemplifying Christ in everyday interactions in the wider community.

For young people in the Aboriginal communities of Mapoon and Napranum, becoming and being Christian was about discovering a faith that provided a sense of identity that was not at odds with culture, yet at the same time enabled a freedom to live differently. This was presented both as spiritual reality and lifestyle choice.

Michelle, Mapoon:

We try and encourage the congregation in Mapoon and the youth group to be thinking about what resources, spiritual resources they have, to make the right choices in their lives, the God choices.

James, Mapoon:

I reckon part of what we do is say "There is another way. ... God is another way. You can live a very full and exciting and happy life, and you don't need to go near that stuff. Keep away from violence. Keep away from alcohol and drugs and addictions of those dangerous sorts. This is another way."

⁷¹² Myers, "The Aesthetics of Christian Mission: New Creation and Mission in the Basis of Union", p54.

In the Mid-Lachlan region, *Project Reconnect* invited people to tell their life stories as part of a faith and life conversation in a sacred space. According to Tom, this enabled them to see their personal life stories as part of God's larger narrative.

Tom, Mid-Lachlan:

It is amazing to listen to people tell their stories and discover through the telling ... that is their spiritual story. Up to that point in time, until they gave articulation ... on that particular Sunday, it'd just been history. But in the telling on that day, because of the context, and because somehow it fits the gospel or the whatever of the day, ... it changes character, and that was one of the things I found really exciting.

The majority of congregations in the study provided regular weekly or short-term series -- opportunities for conversations about faith and life, sometimes within worship and often beyond worship. Permission to question and doubt was affirmed. Learning from faith to life and life to faith requires currency and authenticity. Andrew indicated that this was part of small group life with university students at Maroubra. John R spoke of The Gap UC's teaching series being an opportunity for frank exploration of faith and life themes such as suffering and hope.

At times, the mission of the local congregation has been presented as either a continuum or a choice between individual discipleship and corporate activity. Certainly, the recent emphasis on congregational mission planning suggests that shared vision, aims and strategies are vital for church renewal. However, as *ekklesia* and *oikos*, the local expression of the body of Christ is a company of disciples who are gathered from and sent out to homes, jobs, schools and a myriad of other settings and life situations.

Newbigin affirms that:

The congregation has to be a place where its members are trained, supported, and nourished in the exercise of their parts of the priestly ministry in the world.⁷¹³

In many ways, learning that connects Christian faith with daily life has been a central concern of congregational Christian education in terms of organisation, approach and curriculum, often through age-level groupings—small groups, Bible studies, special interest seminars or forums. I noted in Section 3.2 that the level of participation in and appreciation of organised groups and

⁷¹³ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p230.

activities for learning in the UCA was rather low. It seems significant therefore that many leaders in this study spoke enthusiastically about their members' involvement in small groups and special learning events. The repeated emphasis on discipleship, spiritual practices and mission involvement seemed to be indicative of congregational systems that valued and promoted these elements in concert together. However, such systems were also quite varied, consisting of mixtures of traditional practices, passion for learning and mission, and creative imagination.

Recent writing speaks of *missional spirituality* or *missional discipleship* in order to form mature Christians who are oriented towards God's mission. Susanna Hope's *Mission-shaped Spirituality* includes emphases of being called and sent, seeing God and the mission field, taking nothing for the journey, speaking of the gospel, and seeking to bring healing.⁷¹⁴ John McGinley's *Mission-shaped Grace* has five missional practices as expressions of God's grace: generosity, receiving and releasing, asking questions and telling stories, calling, and eating together.⁷¹⁵ Both authors are from the Church of England. Based on a broad global study, Balia and Kim note that *mission spirituality* is a recent term, "essentially Christian spirituality lived in and fuelled by an awareness of the *missio Dei*."⁷¹⁶ Their question is "What motivates and sustains mission?"⁷¹⁷ I noted earlier the lack of explicit inclusion of Christian education as a field in the writings of the "fresh expressions" and "emerging church" movements. The same is true of the first two texts above. Balia and Kim's summary is of a different nature as its sources are predominantly non-Western and defy simple summarisation. Their global survey speaks of the experience of the Holy Spirit, prayer, motivation to address social issues, evangelical zeal, holistic discipleship training, sending missionaries, eucharistic community, mission with young people, compassion for neglected people, dialogue across religious and class boundaries, wholeness and healing, political liberation, and the challenge of contextual-cultural spirituality. The study raises questions for Western Christian education beyond the scope of this thesis, particularly in relation to cultural differences and contexts. However, the authors' summary claim can apply here.

⁷¹⁴ Susan Hope, *Mission-shaped Spirituality: The Transforming Power of Mission* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010).

⁷¹⁵ John McGinley, *Mission-shaped Grace: Missional Practices for Missional Disciples* (East Malling, Kent: River Publishing, 2017).

⁷¹⁶ *Witnessing to Christ Today* p223.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p223.

Mission spirituality cannot exist without authentic discipleship, a discipleship, a path, that specifically addresses mission and that necessitates mission as an integral part of the path.⁷¹⁸

For Balia and Kim, such an authentic discipleship will embrace *diverse spiritual practices, expect the unexpected in a spirit of humility and reconciliation, be Christ-centred and biblically grounded, practice discernment, be mutually accountable, and know that God is concerned for the least of these.*⁷¹⁹ Such characteristics resonate with factors evident in this study, albeit within limited cultural scope.

Learning in, for, and from Mission

Leadership involves guiding congregations into missional ways of thinking about the church and its calling. Technically it means helping present-day congregations discern how their church, as a missional community called by God and gifted by the Holy Spirit, can faithfully participate in God's mission, the *missio Dei*.⁷²⁰

In her 1967 book, *Christian Education in Mission*, Letty Russell spoke of "the church in the world as the context of Christian education."⁷²¹ "Christian education is participation in Christ's invitation to all people to join in God's mission of restoring men (sic) to their true humanity."⁷²² Russell described the congregational context as a kind of family community, highlighting the relational qualities of Christian community, but also recognising its characteristic heterogeneity.⁷²³ Further, she described education for mission as *dialogical*, echoing God's relationship with the world, and education as *participatory*, both learning through engagement and learning through living.

Congregations in my study adopted a range of approaches, both structured and unstructured, to equip people for mission, to encourage learning while engaged in mission, and to reflect and learn from mission activity. Several leaders spoke of learning for and from mission as being part of an ongoing circle or loop.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., p241.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., p242.

⁷²⁰ Dietterich, "A Foretaste! Transforming Leadership Practices: Leadership for What?"

⁷²¹ Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* p35. I am grateful to Deidre Palmer for alerting me to Russell's work.

⁷²² Ibid., p35.

⁷²³ Russell also acknowledged other kinds of witnessing communities than the local congregation.

Michelle, Mapoon:

Sometimes we separate discipleship and mission in some kind of ways that's not helpful. ... Disciple, let's grow in faith, and then mission, that happens over here. They're like separate activities of the church. I would see them more as a feedback loop, so that people might be involved in the mission of God... whatever their level of faith is, and that helps them grow in maturity and faith, as well as people [who] are involved in what would be considered more traditional discipleship activities, prayer and Bible study and that sort of thing. But that grows their interest in what the mission of the God is. ... Making disciples and being disciples, ... it's more a feedback loop rather than a "we need to grow faith and then we can do mission," but we do those things at the same time. They complement each other.

James, Mapoon:

And as our faith grows, our mission expands. And as our mission expands, our faith grows, or needs to grow.

The categories below are not strictly discrete, and the examples listed are indicative, not exhaustive.

Learning for Mission

Many of the churches had small groups or study series designed to grow people in faith for the sake of active discipleship in the world. These included The Gap, Clare, Maroubra, Nedlands and North Ringwood. In the Mid-North Coast Region, a range of inter-related learning opportunities were designed to encourage responses to justice issues (preaching, Bible study, print resources, seminars). The Mid-Lachlan Mission Area saw the *Project Reconnect* worship conversations as having a missional intent. A few churches prepared people for particular mission engagement experiences or sent them to appropriate training elsewhere—Maroubra, The Gap, Mount Louisa.

Learning in Mission

Several leaders named cross-cultural exposures, exchanges, service or evangelism activities as learning through participation in mission: The Gap (*Walking on Country*, East Timor, North India); Mapoon (cross-cultural exchanges); Maroubra (Tonga, Villawood); Mount Louisa (Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Fiji); North Ringwood (Vanuatu, Kenya, Thailand, Cambodia); Nedlands. Leaders saw and valued these experiences not simply as serving others, but as potential learning and faith development experiences. Mission engagement was to be encouraged both for its own sake and as a catalyst for growth in personal and communal discipleship.

Learning Programs as Mission

For some churches, learning programs were seen as part of the church's mission to the wider community. Queenscliff, Christ Church (Wayville) and North Ringwood offered educational programs on church premises open to the wider community in areas including social justice, life skills, creative arts and spirituality. These churches became known as centres for learning and/or spiritual development. It is worth noting that these ministers had been in placement for over a decade. In their relatively brief time on the Mid-North Coast, Elizabeth and John also sought to engage the wider community in learning about social justice. Across the above churches, many of these were short-term events, with some repeated periodically.

Learning from Mission

Learning from mission was labelled by some respondents in general terms as informal action-reflection learning (Mount Louisa, North Ringwood, Mapoon, Nedlands). Some churches intentionally included debriefing among participants (Maroubra) and telling the story to the wider congregation through worship or special events (Maroubra, North Ringwood). Small group conversations were also seen as a key opportunity for people to connect the Bible and prayer with reflection on faith in daily life (Clare, Nedlands, Mapoon, Maroubra, Mid-Lachlan).

The majority of congregations in the study displayed an intentionality about connecting formation and education with mission in ways that were generative of both. Their programs and processes included experimentation and careful planning, formal events and informal reflection, discovery learning and practice learning. In every instance the minister was highly involved as a catalyst, facilitator or educator.

9. CONCLUSION: THE PRAXIS OF SHAPING DISCIPLES FOR MISSION

Michelle:

I think of the [Uniting Church's] *Basis of Union* [quote], "fresh words and deeds." If we're in that tension between identity and relevance, if we're in that post-Christendom context then we need to be thinking about "What is our identity? How are we relevant to the world that we're in?" That will necessarily mean changing the way that we do Christian education to suit the context that we're in. The core identity is the same, but it will be expressed in different ways.

This study has sought empirical answers to the question, *How are churches reframing Christian education in order to be effective in growing faith and engaging in mission in Australian society in the 21st century?* Christian education was defined as *the theory and practice of teaching, learning and formation in life-long Christian faith and discipleship, both for individuals and communities of faith*. Questions have been raised about the place, practices and purpose of Christian education. Wendi Sargeant says that "Christian education has suffered a loss of theological place in the life of the church."⁷²⁴ To Sargeant's claim I have added the claim that Christian education has lost a *missiological* place in the life of the church, an issue which is theological, contextual and organisational. Evidence has been gathered regarding ways in which congregations and their leaders are continuing, reforming or creating approaches to Christian formation and education in the light of their understandings of discipleship and mission.

This enquiry has been framed around four inter-related themes: *learning communities, congregational practices, educational leadership and congregational mission*. Using a Shared Praxis approach to practical theology, I have identified current practice in 13 diverse congregations across the Uniting Church and included both the respondents and my own reflections on their current practice. Further, I have sought to interpret and critique their practices in relation to biblical, educational and theological sources. At the conclusion of each of Chapters 5 to 8 and in this chapter, I provide some concluding observations and proposals for the revision of the framing of Christian education in the Uniting Church in Australia—how it is understood, practiced and resourced by the church.

⁷²⁴ Sargeant, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation* p95.

The key conclusion of this study is that *the intentional (re)forming of congregational Christian formation and education is core ecclesial praxis for growing mission-shaped disciples*. Rather than being another mere set of church activities, intentional processes and environments for growing disciples are part of the Spirit's constant guidance, inspiration and renewal of the people of God. Notwithstanding other definitions of Christian education, I suggest that forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ is not primarily an internal aim of the church but an integral aspect, a core *praxis*, of its participation in God's mission. Discipleship is an outcome of Christian formation and education, not a replacement for them. Indeed, the church's loss of focus on discipleship may be the result of a lack of recognition of the intentional processes that lead to mature discipleship. Formation and education permeate the church's practices such that it constantly learns to embody the mission of Jesus Christ. This is both gift and vocation for the church. Therefore, those who lead congregations, those who provide resources for congregations and those who educate ministry leaders should rediscover and reemphasise the understandings and practices of formation and education as vital for growth in Christian faith and growth in participation in the mission of God.

a. Mission as a *field of habitus*, Christian education as *praxis*

In what way is Christian education core praxis for the church? Wendi Sargeant sees Christian education as providing the church's Christian ethos: identity, character, ethic, patterns of behaviour, and practices.⁷²⁵ Sargeant canvasses the thinking of Aristotle, Bourdieu and Duncan Forrester before describing Christian education as "an ongoing process of learning, teaching and living the Christian story in order to grasp the Christian ethos."⁷²⁶ She defines Christian education as intentional teaching; Christian faith, indeed discipleship, as ethos; praxis as deliberate action. Thus, Christian ethos is an outcome of Christian education. The praxis of Christian life exists within its ethos.

Brett Webb-Mitchell places the emphasis of Christian formation and education not on praxis but on phronesis, the practical wisdom that both informs and arises from practice and which ultimately forms character or virtue.⁷²⁷ It is not sufficient to focus simply on practice, rather, on its fruits. While affirming these authors' views, I wish to conclude with a different perspective on the

⁷²⁵ Ibid., p126.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p126.

⁷²⁷ Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures* p178ff.

place of Christian education in the life of the Church. To appropriate Bourdieu's term, the mission of God may be seen as the *field* in which the church lives and the lens through which Christian disciples see and act in the world day to day.⁷²⁸ This is not to limit the understanding of God's mission to Bourdieu's view of field. Instead it is to suggest that just as a society has fields such as education in which the habitus of educators exists, so the church exists as part of God's mission, while neither encompassing nor expressing the whole of the *missio Dei*. The nature of the *missio Dei* gives the church its form and purpose. Rather than being a field in which the church exists passively, simply receiving instruction and following timeless norms, the people of God, in the Spirit, have an agency which consists of constant performance and reformation of belief and practice across time and culture. To speak of mission as a field in this way is to recognise that the church's life is framed by sources and systems of belief and habits that, while *durable*, are also *transposable* and *adaptable*.⁷²⁹ The habitus of disciples exists with the field of mission.⁷³⁰ What is critical here is the church's role in its own reform as it seeks to faithfully re-present the Gospel in particular times and places. The church participates in the mission of God in history as the body-of-Christ embodiment of God's purposes. In the power of the Spirit, the people of God are not passive subjects, but active apprentices in continuing the ministry and mission of Christ. While Christians also exist within social fields, the *missio Dei* is their primary orientation, not separate from the world, but in and for the world.

The church's missional praxis then, consists of Spirit-guided continuity and reform of its beliefs and practices, its words and deeds, through history, in faithfulness to the God who calls and sends this community of reconciliation and renewal. Following Osmer, I choose the term praxis here intentionally to reference *Christopraxis*. Bourdieu's view, that practices (both in their reception and in their reconstruction) are means by which human beings make meaning for their lives and reform cultural and social systems, accords with an understanding of Christian discipleship as performative witness—not rote representation but *in-habited (re)interpretation*. It is not only in the faithful continuity of tradition that obedience to God occurs but also in reform: the Spirit is active in

⁷²⁸ To relate this to Sargeant, *ethos* exists within or as part of the *field* of mission.

⁷²⁹ Here I am drawing on Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* p53.

⁷³⁰ *Habitus* here, according to Bourdieu, means more than habits or practices, and is close to Sargeant's definition of *ethos*.

transmission *and* transformation. Rather than seeing, as Healy does, that the diverse complexity of the church somehow masks its nature theologically, I suggest that it in fact reveals it.

Following from Russell, Seymour and Osmer, I suggest that Christian education and the mission of the church should be inseparable. If the field of the church's life is the mission of God, then both Christian education praxis and mission praxis coexist within this.⁷³¹ Christian education praxis consists of practices which are missional in intent and in substance.

b. Congregation as a Learning Community

A congregation is a Christian community seeking to grow in faith; not only in belief but in likeness to Christ and active discipleship. The church is always becoming who it is called to be. Chapter 5 explored how community generates learning and how learning generates community. What community attributes provide a positive culture or environment for learning? Echoing the words of some Christian educators and learning community theories, leaders in the study spoke of their congregational cultures in terms of relational dynamics; openness, vulnerability, trust, encouragement, authenticity, exploration of questions and engaged participation in learning. Interview analysis indicated four sub-themes: *worship and prayer, congregational culture, learning styles and approaches, and church leadership*.

The communal generativity of learning was described as including more open and trusting relationships, greater recognition of gifts and participation in ministry, movement on a journey or pilgrimage towards faith maturity, more open enquiry and exploration of faith, and more fluid expressions of church as community. There was high value placed on the quality of community life, emphasis on the richness of learning together in community, and positive expectation and celebration of growth in faith.

There are three dimensions of generativity in the church as learning community here:

- The characteristics or qualities of the congregation that provide the foundations or environment for its life as a vibrant learning community.

⁷³¹ Without returning in detail to definitions of *Christopraxis*, we can acknowledge here as well that *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, *didache*, *diakonia* and *marturia* are not discrete realms of activity.

- The life of the congregation as a pilgrimage with God, always becoming more fully a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God.
- The intentional tasks of learning about how to be church and how to grow disciples, not simply as reflective learning or evaluation but as double-loop, adaptive learning.

A congregation is a system, a culture, an environment, an organisation and a community. The praxis of Christian education involves not only attention to teaching and learning approaches and methods, but also intentional development and sustenance of a community which is the relational host, midwife and mentor for learning. Attentiveness to the congregation as a learning community means continual (re)formation of its common life as both the foundation in which learning might take place, and as the *koinonia* which in itself is a maturing, sustaining experience of living faith. Community, communion, communication: the church is what it teaches as it abides in the One who sustains it.

c. Congregation as a Community of Practice

Based on interviews in the sample, I suggest that intentional Christian education requires not only attentiveness to the qualities of a congregation's community life, but also to the practices or habits which both form and express Christian faith and discipleship. To restate, *a generative learning community in this respect is a Spirit-dwelt community of generative practice(s)* with both inner and outer dimensions. The life of discipleship, both individual and corporate, is constituted in part by practices which are responses to the grace of God and participation in the Way of Jesus. As such, practices are missional, since they are purposeful as participation in God's action to bring all of Creation to fulfilment.⁷³² In the culmination of history, some practices (feeding the poor) will vanish, while some (worship and prayer) remain eternal.

Practices of faith provide shape to community life and purpose to ministry insofar as they are expressions of the intimacy and industry of the *oikos* of God and also expressions of the socially transformative nature of the Gospel. Practices are generative spiritually, relationally and ethically. In the study, I noted *worship, hospitality* and *small group fellowship* (including sharing, prayer and

⁷³² Guder says "The missional community is enabled to, and should, understand itself as a parable in the full New Testament sense of that concept. It shows the watching world what the kingdom of God is like." Guder, "Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership After Christendom", p269.

Bible/theology discussion) as three distinguishing congregational practices. Congregations valued and invested in worship as a deeply formative, transformative and participatory event. Hospitality was purposefully and actively a boundary-crossing, inclusive habit, even a strategy. The extent of the congregational focus on small groups as primary units of faith and relational growth was in many cases exemplary.

I concur with other authors that Christian practices are formative in that they teach discipleship through participation, and that they are also educational, in some cases containing intentional teaching, while in other cases providing opportunity for reflective learning. Congregations in the study engaged in certain practices as planned educational opportunities, particularly *biblical and theological teaching; discovery learning through experience; leadership and gifts development*.

I also noted that the ways and extent to which leaders spoke of God in relation to formation, education, practices and mission varied considerably. While this was not surprising given the diversity of the sample, it may also highlight a lack of cohesive language or frameworks for understanding faith development and participation in mission. Although language varied, there were some common features among some of the congregations: practices as encounter with God, practices as encounter with Scripture, practices as group participation, practices as faith-sustaining/developing, practices as missional encounters, and practices as leadership development.

Owens says:

... to say that the church is Christ's practicing himself is to emphasise the corporate, embodied sociality of the church. ... The church is Christ's practicing himself *in the Spirit*. ... The church's participation in God has a shape. It has a peculiar visibility which is the form of Jesus.⁷³³

Thus, church and Spirit are distinct, with the Spirit's adoption and indwelling of the church providing the pulse to the body of Christ. To the extent that the church's Spirit-ed practices embody God's unfolding story in Creation through Jesus Christ, they are teleological. Together, these two aspects provide form and purpose to Christian education in the church as a community of practice.

⁷³³ Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* p184, 185, 186.

d. Leading Communities of Disciples

While recognising that many lay members of the church are the primary leaders of Christian education programs and activities, I have focussed more on the *systemic* educational leadership within congregations, also including the minister's personal style or approaches to teaching and to leadership in general. The study identified *leadership* factors—initiative and experimenting, visionary, permission-giving, relationship-building, listening and discerning; *educational* factors—adult education, minister as teacher, learner-centred dialogue, preaching, equipping others, mentoring and modelling; and *personal* factors—openness to God and growth, authenticity and vulnerability, and ongoing learning. Taking a cue from Wendi Sargeant, I spoke here of leadership *ethos* to encompass the above values and attitudes, beliefs and actions.

Chapter 7 included the metaphor of wine-making as an example of communal craft, learning and leadership. Biblical reflection on the Gospel of John chapters 14 to 17 accompanied this to provide a normative framing of community as abiding in relationship with God in order to do what God calls for. Leadership was described as a certain kind of immersive and inspirational participation in community life; a community purposefully seeking to experience the life of God more fully and express their response to God more fruitfully. The Trinitarian themes in these Johannine texts provide a basis for understanding discipleship lived in the Spirit. The narratives in the study at times spoke compellingly of ministry leadership as helping people to discern and respond to what the Spirit was doing in their lives and in the world.

Ministry leaders in the study were clear about their roles as teachers, and in most instances brought qualifications or experience in teaching or group facilitation beyond the norm. This seemed significant in terms of their expressed vision and passion for learning, and the teaching and group facilitation skills that they brought to their roles. Ministers planned and often also led regular teaching events both within and beyond their congregations. There was a particular focus on adult education, with teaching being learner-centred and dialogical. Clearly, some congregations invested significant energy and resources in Christian education for all generations.

e. Learning and Mission

The Uniting Church's polity affirms that the local congregation is the primary expression of the church in the world; its participation in the *missio Dei* is upheld as integral to the fabric of its

common life. *Christopraxis* encompasses all dimensions of the church's ministry as it shares in the ongoing work of Christ; worship, teaching, witness, service and fellowship intertwine. Formation and education towards growth in discipleship can take place throughout the life of the church, indeed, we are apprenticed in the gestures of the body of Christ through informed and reflective rehearsal and performance of the Gospel in the whole of life itself.

Congregations in the study expressed mission in a range of ways. The three key sub-themes arising from the research were the *congregation as a locus of mission*, *discipleship as mission*, and a *local community focus*. The centrality of congregational mission calls for constant attention to the qualities of intimate *koinonia* and inclusive hospitality. Leaders also hoped to be discerning of wider community needs and of God's call to be engaged in mission in the world. Some congregations were active in calling and sending people to mission beyond the congregation.

Following Dietterich, I have suggested that the church is a locus of mission, in part because its practices constitute participation in the continuing mission of Jesus Christ; the *mission Dei* is embodied in the everyday habits of disciples. Education for mission is both corporate and individual in intent and is not limited by what the congregation might see as its mission goals.

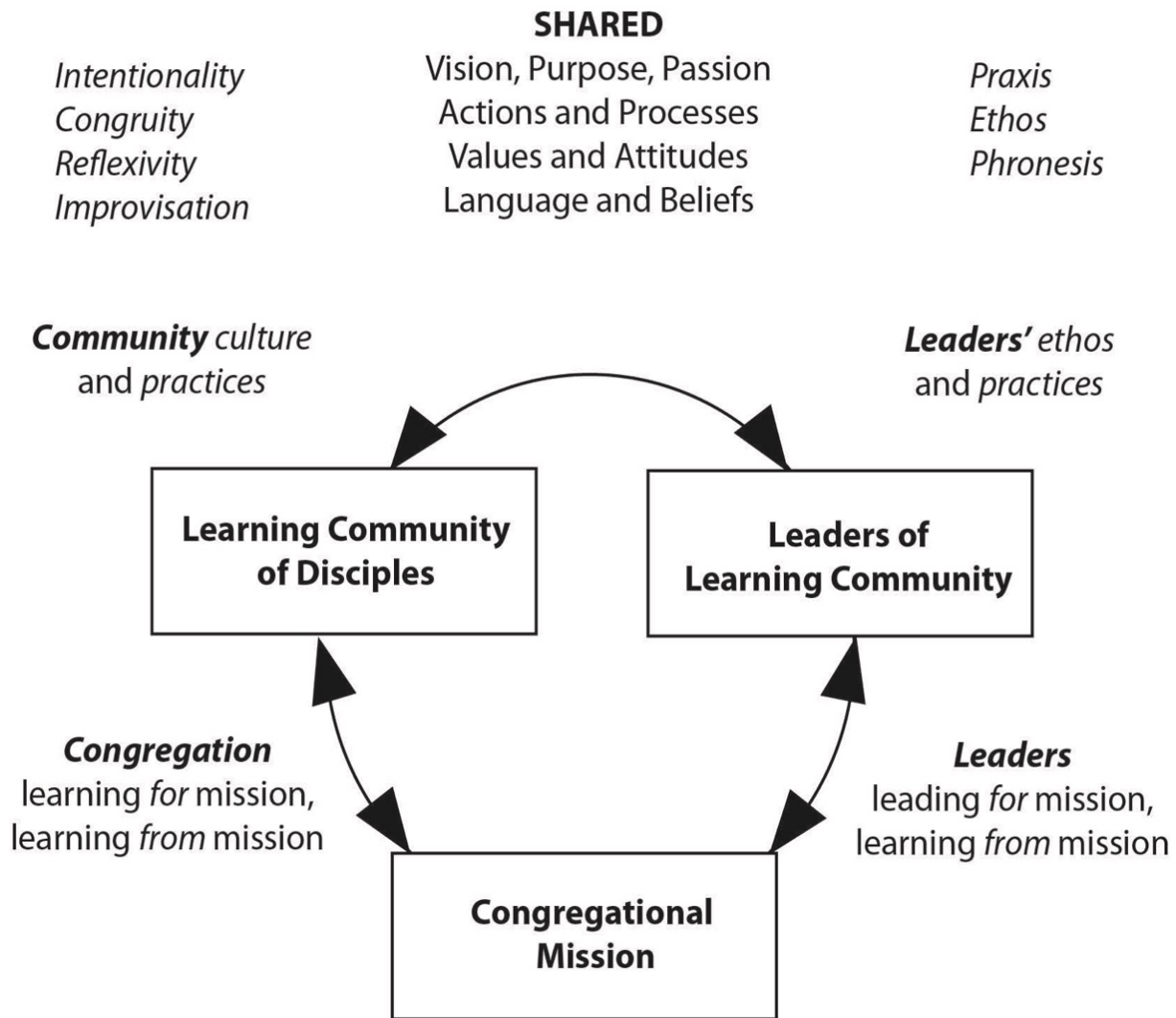
Across this study, the learning that took place in relation to mission was often intentional, sometimes structured and sometimes planned. Action-reflection learning and learning from experience were highlighted, as was the dialogical nature of both formal and informal education. Faith development and mission engagement were seen to be in a circular rhythm of learning by several participants. Finally, most churches in the study looked to resources beyond the congregation to provoke or deepen their learning.

f. A Schema of Learning, Leadership, Discipleship and Mission

The purpose of this study has not been to develop a new model or approach to Christian education, but rather to observe and reflect upon the understandings and practices of a range of churches and leaders deemed by their peers to be effective. Any learnings are as much in the individual cases as in any summative themes, hence the approach of providing a *thick description* of each locale. However, I also framed a research schema to guide the enquiry and analysis of the key themes. The schema suggests that there is a relationship between the ethos and practices of the leader and the culture and practices of a congregation, insofar as each exerts an influence

upon the other over time. The second dynamic is that existing between learning and mission, insofar as congregations and/or their leaders are purposeful in seeing growth in discipleship as related dynamically to engagement in mission.

Figure 8: Research Schema



This study has raised themes of congruity between leaders' and members' visions, values, attitudes and language. There was a notable difference in the narratives between ministers who were new to their roles/communities (less than 5 years—North Lakes, Eaton-Millbridge, Mid-north Coast), those who were medium-term (5 to 10 years—Maroubra, Clare, The Gap, Mapoon) and those who were well-established (over 10 years—Mid-Lachlan, North Ringwood, Wayville,

Nedlands, Queenscliff, Mount Louisa). The development of shared perspectives and accrued trust over time seemed evident as an organic, yet intentional, work-in-progress.

In my view, leaders generally displayed a high level of reflexivity regarding their engagement within the congregation and with the wider community. While this is expected of ministers, the distinction was the attention given to forming and educating people in faith and Christian life. Leaders were also articulate in their reflections on ministry in ways that suggested adaptive learning. I suggest that this indicated the level of importance that they placed on this aspect of ministry, along with their levels of expertise and experience. As the researcher, I also recognise that their responsiveness would have been influenced by the opportunity to be interviewed for this project.

The theme of intentionality was revealed in tacit and explicit ways. I noted the degree to which they were purposeful in developing specific teaching and learning opportunities, in their attention to social learning environments, in cultivating Christian practices through reshaping congregational culture, and in initiating or cultivating fresh mission opportunities. In varied but distinct ways, these leaders and their communities placed a priority on fostering generative growth in faith and discipleship as *a core aspect of* Christian community life, and injecting sustained energy, resources and creativity.

The theme of improvisation versus innovation was explored, with the conclusion that in relation to formation and education, churches displayed the former rather than the latter. Some of the innovations in the wider field of education were not present (for example, use of digital technologies, 'flipped' classroom, intercultural learning). Innovation was more likely to be seen in relation to mission.

While I have offered some discussion of praxis, phronesis and ethos, this study has not examined these in depth as aspects of Christian life. Rather I have focused on seeing Christian education praxis as how the church attends to the quality of its community life, its discipleship practices and its participation in the mission of God. Although the above schema does not represent a model, it may provide a useful tool for engaging ministers and congregations in conversation about the dynamics of formation and education for discipleship and mission.

g. Correlation between Learning Community, Leadership and Mission

A more in-depth, mixed method study of individual congregations would be required to ascertain the degree to which the main themes in the study were correlated over time within the lives of local churches. The following table represents a diagrammatic association of themes which could be further explored. The arrangement of themes across rows denotes possible associations. There were certainly suggestions that such emphases were present and inter-related, however the cause-and-effect of such associations would require more in-depth analysis over time.

Table 15: Theme Matrix

LEARNING COMMUNITY	LEADERSHIP	MISSION
Positive, healthy relationships, welcome, inclusiveness	Building relationships, authenticity, trust, openness	Congregation as a locus of mission
Participation, experience, gifts, permission-giving	Encouraging participation, developing gifts and leaders	Calling and sending people for mission
Conversation, action-reflection, small groups	Conversational learning, enabling learning groups	Starting with where the community is at, listening, partnering
Positive environments and expectations about growth and mission	Vision, leadership culture, permission-giving	Major Mission focus
Patterns, practices, disciplines of spiritual growth	Equipping—teaching practices	Daily discipleship as mission

Together with the previous schema, these themes provide a way to consider the shape of congregational life and learning, and possible relationships between learning culture, practices and mission.

h. Abiding and Following: Discipleship and Mission

The reformation of Christian education is never an end in itself, nor indeed is the church. The church *is* the people of God and it seeks to *do* what God requires. Worship and mission describe and inscribe its relationship with God and the world. In reflecting on John 15 (“abide in me” and “bear fruit”) and Acts 2 (the *ekklesia* and the *oikos* of God), I have attempted to ground the contemporary congregational narratives biblically in Jesus’ call to disciples to follow him (and in so

doing, to know God) and in God's initiative in creating a community of the Spirit who are to be the sent body-of-Christ in the world, for the sake of the world.

Abiding is not stasis: it is living in God's presence in place and through time. "Being" is active not passive, connected contextually in the present and connected cross-temporally to past and future. To be with God is not to sit still, but to see and to walk, to discern and to dare to go. The latter is not hyperbole but reference to Jesus' call to his disciples and his healing of those who were blind and lame. See, discern, know. Follow, act, go.

Two inherent dimensions of Christian community are the particularities of place and time. To abide is to stay here for a while. Time is here just as much as place is here.⁷³⁴ Ancient cultures probably knew this better than contemporary ones. A universal feature of modernisation is travel, constant mobility. In the ancient world, people remained in the same geographic area over years, decades, even lifetimes. When you abide well over time you gain a sense of place which shapes your communal identity. Yet, individuals and groups constantly enter and leave communities, as the biblical records attest. The habitus and ethos of a people has an evolving identity in the here and the now.

Jesus' words about abiding came from a pre-industrial society, yet one in which empires had spanned tribal-nations for centuries. We know from the Hebrew Scriptures that the people of God sought to maintain their identity under many rulers, local and foreign, in many locations, including slavery and exile, and even in response to internal schisms. To abide in a certain area and over a lifetime is to change. The crux of the *being* of a faith community is its attention to following, its intention to be with the one whom disciples follow in the always changing here and now.

Christian education, then, is a constant invitation to the dynamic life of discipleship; abiding with the God who was present in Creation, following the God who is present in *this* time and place, and hoping in the God who invites people to share in the constant movement towards the shalom of a renewed Creation.

⁷³⁴ Mary McClintock Fulkerson says that *place* has a *diachronic* identity through time "defined by ongoing *practices*." She further says that "the social character of a place has to do with its constant fluidity." "No place is ever a fixed place; a place is always in process." Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* p32, 35.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Resolutions, Task Group on the Teaching Ministry of the Church

Minutes of the Triennial Assembly, 2000, Uniting Church in Australia

- 00.28 TASK GROUP ON THE TEACHING MINISTRY AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH**
- The report was presented by Deidre Palmer and Jill Tabart.
- The Assembly resolved:
- 00.28.01 to receive the report;
- 00.28.02 to approve the vision statement as the vision of this Assembly for the teaching ministry and mission of the Church's congregations:
- "A vision -
- (a) of members of all Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia being able to give with confidence an account of the hope that is in them, and to express their faith through word and action in ever-deepening discipleship;
 - (b) of enquirers being welcomed into a learning community in which faith is intentionally developed, doubts and questions are openly explored, and all ages grow in their commitment to Jesus Christ and his ministry in the world;
 - (c) of all Congregations having an active process for identifying members' teaching gifts and for equipping and sustaining them in their teaching ministries, within and beyond the Congregation; and of Congregations being adequately resourced and supported in this ongoing work in education and resultant mission;
 - (d) of all those in the specified ministries of the Church, and all others teaching Religious Education in schools, being adequately equipped through foundational and continuing education for their teaching ministry responsibilities.";
- 00.28.03 to name the teaching ministry as a core function of each council of the Church;
- 00.28.04 to request Standing Committee to explore the possibility of establishing a national website/chatroom through which sound doctrinal teaching is accessible to those surfing the internet;
- 00.28.05 to request the Standing Committee to set up a process, in consultation with the UAICC Executive Committee and the Multicultural Ministry Reference Committee, to discover how the teaching ministry being exercised in Aboriginal and Islander and migrant-ethnic Congregations of the Church may be strengthened;
- Arising from part (a) of the vision:**
- 00.28.06 to commit ourselves, as members of the Uniting Church, to open and honest exploration of how the Word of God informs our daily living and to encourage fellow members of learning communities of which we are a part, including our home Congregations, to a similar commitment:
- Members are invited to prayerfully consider how they might express this commitment. This commitment may include:
- regular reading and prayerful contemplation of the Bible;
 - participating in at least one intentional programme of Bible study each year;
 - seeking access through the local teaching ministry to 'the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith' (Basis of Union, paragraph 11), including listening to the wisdom:
 - of the Reformation witnesses,
 - of scholarly interpreters of Scripture,
 - of the world-wide fellowship of churches in which the Uniting Church sharpens its understanding of the will and purpose of God,

Appendix 2: Benchmarks for Successful Learning Events⁷³⁵

The Minister & Peer as Educator: A Self Assessment Guide	Personal	Peer	Comments
<p>1. PLANNING</p> <p>a: can identify a timely issue or topic as appropriate to address through a learning event or program.</p> <p>b: can prepare a learning program or event that is educationally sound.</p> <p>c: can justify a particular approach to learning events, based upon sensitivity to the diversity of individuals in the group, and a knowledge of the nature of the group as a whole.</p> <p>d: can incorporate opportunities for learners prior experiences to connect with the particular approach adopted</p> <p>e: can communicate evidence of planning for learning, both to the intending learners and to the congregation's leadership/Church Council</p>			
<p>2. PRESENTING</p> <p>a: can be ready to discuss with learners the reasons for the particular approach to learning, being adopted</p> <p>b: can adapt learning plans to allow for learners immediate concerns, and/or underlying pastoral needs which might arise in the context of learning</p> <p>c: can provide opportunities both for group-based and for individual reflection</p> <p>d: can develop a variety of strategies for learning (process/journeys) and apply a variety of methods to aid learning</p> <p>e: can use technological equipment (OHP, data projector, audio equipment, etc) to aid learning</p>			
<p>3. ENGAGING</p> <p>a: can show awareness of the relationships between texts, other resources used, the experiences of learners, and their life setting</p> <p>b: can model critical usage of these texts and other resources</p> <p>c: can empathetically lead learners, by aiming to maximise their safe, effective participation</p>			
<p>4. ASSESSING</p> <p>a: can utilize a variety of means to evaluate and assess needs, selecting those most appropriate to address through teaching and learning</p> <p>b: can identify and incorporate clear goals and appropriately diverse but fair ways of achieving them</p> <p>c: can include elements of learners involvement in identifying goals and in their achievement of them</p> <p>d: can provide transparent accountability for the judgments that are made, whilst respecting the privacy of individuals – that is: can explain why certain actions are intended or have taken to either peers, Church Council or learners</p>			
<p>5. EVALUATING</p> <p>a: can modify learning programs as indicated by regular, systematic monitoring of learners experiences in those programs</p> <p>b: can show reflection upon, and modification of, one's own teaching practices</p> <p>c: can share with learners, Church Council and/or congregational leadership and one's peers the results of both monitoring and modification</p>			
<p>6. ENABLING</p> <p>a: can connect the nature of evaluations undertaken, with their purposes, and with the goals of the educational ministry</p> <p>b: can develop appropriate support activities, relationships or systems to enable learners to modify behaviours, attitudes or practices arising from their learning</p> <p>c: can show evidence of leadership within an educational ministry team</p>			

⁷³⁵ Emmett, *The Minister as Educator*. p6. Used with permission.

Appendix 3: Education Competencies - UCA Ministry of Pastor

Ministerial Education Commission, Uniting Church in Australia

Version 1.1, February 2009

These competencies are applicable to Pastors whose role includes responsibility for “teaching the beliefs and practices of the Uniting Church” [Regulation 2.14.2]

These competencies shall be applied to the particular role and responsibilities of a given Pastor’s appointment. Hence, they will relate to the particular group or groups of people with whom a Pastor exercises an educational role, taking into account the people’s age, maturity, cultural background, and other capacities.

Units of Competency

1. Plan learning programs
2. Conduct and evaluate learning programs

Unit of Competency: Plan Learning Programs

Elements of Competency

1. Assess learning needs

Performance criteria

- a. demonstrate a variety of means to evaluate and assess learners needs and interests
- b. develop clear and achievable learning goals
- c. include learners in determining learning goals and learning processes

2. Plan an educational program or process

Performance criteria

- a. identify a range of teaching and learning approaches and reasons for utilising them
- b. develop a learning program to match congregational (or agency) goals with learners’ needs and capacities
- c. develop plans for individual sessions or lessons
- d. assess resource needs and match needs with available resources
- e. arrange resource provision or negotiate suitable alternatives
- f. communicate evidence of planning to other leaders

Unit of Competency: Conduct and Evaluate Learning Programs

Elements of Competency

1. *Teach Uniting Church beliefs and practices in a manner and at a level appropriate to the particular learners with whom the Pastor is engaged*

Performance criteria

- a. identify and discuss key themes and concepts in Scripture
- b. identify and discuss the contents of key biblical texts and their relationship to one another and to human experience
- c. describe contemporary approaches to biblical study and interpretation
- d. articulate key theological themes in the Christian faith, in particular Uniting Church theology
- e. lead discussion of biblical texts in relation to contemporary human experience
- f. describe and explore practices of Christian faith and discipleship with groups and individuals

2. *Facilitate an educational program or process appropriate to the particular learners with whom the Pastor is engaged*

Performance criteria

- a. establish a safe, positive learning climate in terms of space, resources and relationships
- b. articulate the purposes and processes of a program to participants
- c. adapt a learning plan to allow for participants' immediate learning needs, capacities or concerns
- d. lead a range of group learning processes
- e. manage group dynamics appropriately within the learning environment
- f. set up and use the necessary resources and equipment

3. *Evaluate learning programs*

Performance criteria

- a. plan assessment or evaluation in relation to teaching and learning goals
- b. seek and receive appropriate feedback on learners' progress and satisfaction

- c. modify both teaching goals and teaching practices in response to evaluation
- d. provides appropriate feedback and reporting to learners, to other leaders and to supervisors or councils

Appendix 4: Correspondence - Rev Dr Adam McIntosh

Rev Dr Adam McIntosh, Presbytery Minister, Port Phillip West, Victoria ⁷³⁶

In many of the congregations that I come across, I see Christian education as often not undertaken intentionally and within a disciple making framework. There seem to be many ad hoc forms of Christian education, such as studies of various forms including Bible studies, book groups, prayer and lectionary groups, and other short- and long-term study material being utilised. The effectiveness of these vary. Anecdotally, these groups are useful for the participants, and have the potential to result in effective disciple making.

However, the communities most effective in disciple making that result in a strong missional orientation are not generally associated with one particular study form or structure. I see in several instances that communities that undertake Christian education as a 'way of being community' to be the most effective. That is, Christian education is not undertaken as a program or a series of programs, but as a community of disciples seriously engaged in a variety of practices that nurture discipleship. Discipleship is owned as an ongoing way of being the Christian community with Christian education an ongoing reflective practice permeating the whole way of life of the Christian community. This includes forms of worship that offer reflective opportunities, intentional reflection in different parts of the life of the community, complemented by different studies including Bible studies, book groups etc. In other words, a program per se does not appear to be the key to effective Christian education, but a way of being the Christian community that may include programs.

This means that the needs of congregations over the next 5-10 years would be more in line with assisting congregations to think about their way of being the Christian community that nurtures discipleship, rather than a program or series of programs. I suspect that part of this is reimagining the different possibilities of being a community of disciples, in which Christian education pervades the whole way of being the church.

Discipleship and mission are inextricably linked. I see communities that are experiencing growth in discipleship, in terms of people growing in their life of faith, leading to communities that are actively living out the mission of the church. Likewise, communities that are not showing evidence of growth in discipleship, tend to be lacking in mission drive.... The first step, I suspect, is in promoting and resourcing leaders to promote a culture of Christian discipleship.

⁷³⁶ Email to the author, received 20/11/12. Used with permission.

Appendix 5: Letters of Invitation and Consent Forms



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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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President: Rev Alistair Macrae BA, BTh, M.Phil

General Secretary: Rev Terence Corkin BA, BTh, BLegS

07:TC:JB

January 17 2012

Synod and Presbytery officers and relevant staff

Dear colleagues in ministry,

I am writing to introduce Craig Mitchell, Christian Education Research Fellow at the Assembly of the Uniting Church. Craig will already be known to many of you. He is undertaking a two year national research project on behalf of the Assembly, assisting us to identify possibilities for the role, direction and resourcing of Christian education from 2013.

The research project involves identifying and studying some exemplary leaders and congregations in the area of Christian education, faith formation and discipleship. Craig will be interviewing and observing a sample of such people and situations across Australia in 2012.

I commend Craig and this project to you and request that you provide him with assistance in identifying possible interviewees and case studies. While Craig and the project steering team will make the final sample selection, the broader the initial referrals, the better. Can you please assist the Assembly by providing Craig with the information that he requests as you are able?

It is important to emphasise that participation in the study will be entirely voluntary. You are being asked to provide suggestions of people who may be invited to consider participating.

Our hope is that the findings of the research will be of benefit across the church as we seek to form faith and grow mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Regards,

Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary



Department of Theology

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Brooklyn Park SA 5032

Tel: 08 8416 8420
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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear

This letter is to introduce Mr Craig Mitchell who is a PhD student in the Department of Theology at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Craig is undertaking research regarding the development of Christian education leadership and praxis in congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia as learning communities in postmodernity. The purpose of the research is to better understand how churches can be effective in faith development and discipleship in 21st century Australia.

The Assembly Standing Committee of the Uniting Church has given approval for this research project. Craig Mitchell is a UCA member and is receiving funding from the UCA Assembly to undertake this project.

He would be most grateful if you would volunteer to assist in this project by granting an interview which covers certain aspects of this topic. This would take 60 to 90 minutes.

If you wish, any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and you will not be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Alternatively, you may, if you wish, allow yourself to be identified in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. This choice is entirely voluntary.

Since Craig intends to make an audio recording of the interview, he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications. You may agree to this on condition that your name or identity is not revealed. The form also allows you to indicate whether or not you wish to allow a video recording to be made as well.

Mr Mitchell will ask you to indicate whether or not you are willing to allow the Uniting Church National Assembly to use the audio and/or video recordings and/or transcripts for non-profit educational purposes. You are not required to agree to this in order to participate in the study. You may voluntarily choose to agree to this if you wish.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8416 8420, by fax on 08 8416 8430 or by email andrew.dutney@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof Andrew Dutney
Department of Theology

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5495). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

inspiring
achievement

Appendix 6: Pre-coding Draft Themes

- i. *Congregations identify a primary role as educating or discipling communities, either with the congregation or the wider community, as a core priority and goal for their life and mission. (e.g. North Ringwood's School of Ministry, Christ Church's Effective Living Centre, Maroubra Junction's Discipleship for Young Adults; Mid North Coast NSW, Nedlands)*
- ii. *Congregations act as 'open systems' of discipleship, regularly bringing in outside people and resources, seeing active connections with the wider church and wider world as vital for nourishing lively faith. (e.g. Christ Church, Queenscliff, Mid North Coast NSW)*
- iii. *Congregations are 'calling communities'; they and their leaders are active and permission-giving in encouraging people to discover and develop their gifts in response to God's call to mission. (e.g. Mount Louisa, Queenscliff, North Ringwood)*
- iv. *Congregations are 'sending communities,' actively sponsoring or taking people to new experiences beyond their known community for learning, leadership development, service and mission, and then intentionally being enriched by them. (e.g. North Ringwood, Mapoon, The Gap, Maroubra)*
- v. *Congregations identify a major local community mission focus that reshapes their common life as disciples. (e.g. North Ringwood Community Care; Maroubra's young adults' discipleship community housing; Nedlands' university ministry; Queenscliff's 'hospitality centre')*
- vi. *Congregations give a strong focus to discipling children and young people in ways that creatively mix Scripture, active learning, contemporary culture, and local culture. (e.g. Mapoon, The Gap, North Ringwood, Nedlands, North Lakes, Clare)*
- vii. *Some faith communities are themselves a 'fresh expression' of mission in their community, requiring leadership development, community development, and the beginnings of faith formation. (e.g. North Lakes 'church plant' of congregation and school, Bunbury community development)*
- viii. *Congregations place a particular emphasis on creative, participatory worship as a central dimension of identity formation for discipleship. (e.g. The Gap, North Ringwood, Mount Louisa, North Lakes)*

- ix. *Congregations and leaders see the dynamic activity of the God in worship as the primary catalyst for growth and transformation for their lives for this. (e.g. Mount Louisa, Clare, Nedlands, Mid Lachlan)*
- x. *Some congregations have shifted focus away from Sunday morning as the primary or sole expression of 'being church' in the local community as a catalyst for change and growth. (e.g. Queenscliff, Bunbury, Maroubra)*
- xi. *Congregations foster a culture in which faith formation takes place in relational, conversation; faith permeates everyday interactions, whether on church premises, around church activities, in households or community life. (e.g. Queenscliff, Mapoon, Maroubra)*
- xii. *Congregations pay particular attention to faith development within culture, from culture and across cultures as vital for the formation of Christian identity. (e.g. Mapoon, Nedlands, The Gap)*
- xiii. *Congregations give significant attention to living as intergenerational communities of discipleship, with attention to formal and informal faith sharing, learning, worship and service. (e.g. Maroubra, North Ringwood, North Lakes, Clare)*
- xiv. *Congregations emphasise structured seasons/series of biblical and theological preaching, teaching and learning as foundational in moving adults to mature faith, often with the Minister a teacher. (e.g. Nedlands, The Gap, North Ringwood, Clare)*
- xv. *Congregations are intentional about training and mentoring leaders for education and discipleship groups and programs, particularly small groups. (e.g. Nedlands, Maroubra, Mid North Coast)*
- xvi. *Leaders speak regularly and positively about expectations of Christian growth, learning, and transformation in the journey of discipleship. (e.g. Nedlands, Clare, Mapoon, The Gap)*
- xvii. *Leaders are seen to be learning and growing in their own faith and discipleship and openly sharing this with the faith community in ways that foster a shared journey of faith. (e.g. Queenscliff, Mid Lachlan, Clare)*
- xviii. *Leaders explore and speak of faith beyond traditional language and forms in ways that engage with people both within and beyond congregational life. (e.g. Christ Church, Queenscliff, Bunbury)*

- xix. *Leaders model mission in their engagement with people beyond the congregations—in evangelism, advocacy, community development, hospitality, faith conversations—in ways that are visible to congregation members. (e.g. Bunbury, Mount Louisa, Mid North Coast)*

- xx. *Leaders speak of a strong sense of ‘team’ among the leadership of the congregation and describe a church that is willing to reshape its structures around discipling and/or mission. (e.g. Clare, Nedlands, Queenscliff)*

Appendix 7: Interview Coding Process—First Cycle Coding

The following codes emerged from the initial coding. These are ordered by the number of sources relating to each code.

A. DEFINING CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

- Discipleship	5
- Experiential	4
- Formation	4
- Christian living	3
- Theology, belief, doctrine	3
- Centrality of worship	2
- Intentional education	2
- Action and reflection	1
- Bible study	1
- Focus on God	1
- Growing or deepening faith	1
- Integrated learning and action	1
- Skill development	1
- Spirituality	1

B. LEADERSHIP

Church Leadership	2
- Permission-giving	3
- Teams	3
- Church structures	2
- Discerning	2
- Learning together	2
- Strategic plan	2
- Core leadership group	1
- Firm decision-making	1
- Membership	1
- Quality relationships	1

Minister as Leader	2
- Teaching	9
- Articulating ethos or theology	8
- Conversation and dialogue	8
- Authenticity, vulnerability, freedom	7
- Equipping others	7

- Openness to God or growth	7
- Starting with their questions, needs	7
- Ongoing Learning	6
- Vision	6
- Focus on spiritual growth	5
- Initiative and experimenting	5
- Importance of Bible	4
- Modelling	4
- Permission-giving	4
- Relationship-building	4
- Intentionality	3
- Knowing love or grace of God	3
- Preaching	3
- Values	3
- Worship leader	3
- Community development	2
- Discovering God's call	2
- Fresh faith language	2
- Hopeful	2
- Joy	2
- Leadership development	2
- Listening, discerning	2
- Organiser	2
- Passion	2
- Pastoral Care	2
- Transformational experience	2
- Wider communication	2
- Mentoring	1
- Action-reflection inquiry	1
- Culture and relevance	1
- Critique of leadership	1
- Focus on Christology	1
- Intuition	1
- Minister as Curator	1
- Praying with people	1
- Providing information	1
- Sacraments	1
- Serving the marginalised	1

C. LEARNING COMMUNITY

- Faith practices	22
• Bible study	6
• Prayer, contemplation	4
• Hospitality	3
• Serving	2
• Church seasons	1
• Music, singing	1
• Retreats	1
• Study, discussion	1
- Relationship-building & trust	11
- Free to explore and question	7
- Hearing people's voices	6
- Open, inclusive community	6
- Participation	6
- Belonging	5
- Conversation and dialogue	5
- Intentionality	5
- Permission-giving	5
- Prayerfulness and worship	5
- Small Groups	5
- Action-reflection	4
- Authenticity	4
- Learning styles	4
- Wider community education	4
- Diversity	3
- Stories	3
- Sunday School	3
- Whole congregation activity	3
- Affective learning	2
- Discernment	2
- Explaining Christian faith	2
- Inquiry, questioning	2
- Leadership development	2
- Meals	2
- Spiritual Gifts	2
- Transformed thinking and action	2
- Vibrancy, buzz	2
- Church culture	2

- Choosing to attend regionally	1
- Creative arts	1
- Curriculum and resources	1
- Discomfort is OK	1
- Finance	1
- Grace inclusion, compassion, mercy	1
- Intentional Christian community	1
- Intergenerational	1
- Priesthood of all believers	1

D. MISSION 2

- Congruence between church and mission	7
- Serving the community, the marginalised	7
- Articulating mission	6
- Church facilities	5
- Mission in everyday life	5
- Where is God working in the world?	5
- Worship and mission	4
- Church as a welcoming community	3
- Mission Questions	2
- Vision or Mission Statement or Culture	2
- Church as a community centre	1
- Ecumenical	1
- Evangelism	1
- Faith conversations in wider community	1
- Finance	1
- It's about God, not mission	1
- Learning approaches	1
- Listen for God's call	1
- Mission from discipleship	1
- Mission is God's work	1
- Need to do church differently	1
- Public spaces	1

E. PROBLEMS

- Lacking desire to learn	2
- Minister-centred	3
- Fear of learning	1
- Idealistic minister	1

- Low level of education 1
- More initiative needed 1
- Negative views of church in community 1
- Short of time 1
- Struggle to change views 1

F. POSTMODERNITY 6

G. CHURCH CULTURE 2

Appendix 8: Queenscliff - Point Lonsdale Uniting Churches, Victoria

Rev Kerrie Lingham and Rev Charles Gallacher

Reference 1

Core Values

1. Deepening a Gospel Spirituality.
2. Deepening our sense of community with each other and beyond.
3. Living a different ethic around kindness, hospitality, generosity, inclusivity in a harsh world.
4. Exploring environmental sustainability as an expression of responsibility to creation & future generations and as an example for others to be inspired by.
5. Growing connections with and supporting Indigenous communities and Refugees.
6. Caring for those with mental health disabilities.
7. Support for LGBTI people and their families and raising community awareness.
8. Continuing to grow artistic and creative opportunities to explore meaning and nurture relationships with the wider community, young people and visitors.

Reference 2

Charles:

From time to time we'll have particular installations or displays in the church on a spiritual theme, Advent we had [outdoor] beach huts with installations in them.

Reference 3

Kerrie:

Prayerfulness as thoughtfulness and ... being intentional about thinking about how we're living and what we're doing and why we're doing it, is really for me a strong mark of discipleship as opposed to just reacting all the time. ... In worship I would do that with meditative opportunities, but I'll also talk about it intellectually, like "How about we think about prayer like this?"

Reference 3

Charles:

The best of evangelicalism [was] that it practiced what it preached and ... and it was out there caring for the poor. The best of any Christian community has always been that willingness to put into action what the core values of the gospel were within that community.

Reference 4

Kerrie:

In contrast to a way of being which says “No, we have to do it this way and if other people don’t like it then too bad.” For us discipleship and formation in this more informal way... has led to people being more open to change and opening their spaces and their hearts up to different people. One of the marks is that openness and experimenting. ... So hospitality is a huge value in our congregation, massive.

Reference 5

Kerrie:

We all know we remember things that we’ve felt much more than we remember things we’ve thought.

Reference 6

Kerrie:

I think we have to think about education very differently. ... They’re not going to come to a program. ... All the conversation pretty much is around opportunity, hope and mission. And people now, because we’re six years into this process, trust that the resources will be there to meet it.

Reference 7

Kerrie and Charles: (in conversation)

Spiritual formation happens not in spiritual formation groups. We don’t have any programs as such. ... We’ve just got this life together.

Reference 8

Charles:

Even from ... cleaning the front of the church so that a ... jazz band can occupy the 'holy space'. It's all about doing relationships again and not putting a big chasm between the sacred and the secular, or the ordinary life and the Sunday morning life.

Reference 9

Kerrie:

I think I'm quite orthodox, but I don't need to use the traditional language.

Reference 10

Kerrie:

We've got a variety of people ... from those who basically don't really have a sense of there being any Other or any mystery even, but who love the community and are passionate about justice, right through to a deep contemplative spirituality through to more orthodox to the whole lot.

Reference 11

Kerrie:

That pretty much holds for everyone. Whether it's a mere, "He's my mentor," right through to the more traditional "Saviour language" or whatever.

Reference 12

Kerrie:

There's a lot of people in our congregation who say "I just don't understand any of it. I tried for twenty years to get my head around this whole thing." And we can actually say to them "It doesn't matter. That's OK."

Reference 13

Kerrie:

The wider community know that we're not a church that says we have all the answers, and that we have a very open-minded and hearted sense of the Gospel and the meaning of life. I can talk to people in the wider community about issues of spirituality and faith just as easily as I can to people who are there all the time.

People would know that I'd be happy to say "We're in a very pluralistic world now, and that's fine. I know what my story and my journey is, but yours is different, and we can talk about that."

Reference 10

Kerrie:

It's very much a "Yes." It's an abundance culture rather than a scarcity. We will have what it takes. We don't need to be fearful that we'll run out of energy or run out of resources. ... It's been a fabulous journey, mind-blowingly. If you'd said six or seven years ago [that] this is where this place would have been at. ... It's been good. Long term ministry is a big issue.

Reference 11

Kerrie:

Neuroscience, systems, how people interact around anxiety, the bell curve. ...

Charles

Peter Steinke books. ... It's not like the traditional education where you're teaching the faith. You're teaching life and trying to get the biblical narrative in that as well.

Reference 12

Kerrie:

We're trying to develop and grow leadership around, not a "vowed" life, but instead of having the skills to run the institution.

Reference 13

Kerrie:

We'll grab six people together to help organise something, and they'll be six people that we know intuitively have got depth. And we'll talk about what we're doing, maybe it's an artistic thing or maybe it's a dinner or whatever. It's an interesting model compared to the traditional church council where there's jobs to be done.

Reference 14

Kerrie:

Putting into practice some of the things that we're doing around all of the activities and why are we doing it, is where the learning has been.

Appendix 9: The Gap Uniting Church, Queensland

Rev John Ruhle

Reference 1

Thursday mornings I spend time at the school and it works because ... my kids are at the school. But it's also in our strategic plan of what the church wants me to do. ... I do reading group, then go down to the tuck shop and make cappuccinos for the ladies. Catch up with them, see what's going on. I then do my Kid's Hope mentoring, and then we have RE and then I come home, so for two or three hours at the school on a weekly basis. The relationships we have are just fantastic, and with the chaplain and our twenty mentors, we've got a presence in the school every day of the week. The school just loves it.

Reference 2

"What did we talk about on Sunday? What does that mean in my life?" ... We handed out resources and gave people different things to read.

Reference 3

But we're mature enough and open enough and the relationships are there enough, and the experiences that we share are there enough, that we can then tackle some of this stuff and go, "Let's have a look."

Reference 4

We just haven't given people the permission to do it in a safe place. ... I'm not into just anything goes. There are definitely boundaries and there are teachings of the church. ... The first thing we did when we looked at our month of preaching and teaching, we opened up Paragraph Five of the *Basis of Union*. What's our foundational document?

Only just this last Sunday, a guy who must be in his eighties, ... and we had the beginning of our month of preaching and teaching on Scripture. And he said, "I've had that question for seventy years, but I've never felt I could ask anybody." At the door on the way out, he said, "You've finally touched on a question I've always wondered but I've never felt brave enough to be able. ... People would laugh at me, or people would think I'm not a real Christian or whatever, because I wanted to ask this question." I think the questions have always been there. We just haven't given people the permission-giving to do it in a safe place.

Reference 5

One of the best things I learnt in four years of theological college, a lot of it's a mystery. We don't know. And for me to be brave enough to stand up there and say, "I don't know all the answers." The best thing I ever learned is that it's a mystery. But

man, I believe something great's going on here, and I want to follow this person called Jesus. But let's learn and grow, and if we assume and think we've got all the answers, we're only kidding ourselves anyway. But there's a lot we do know and there's a lot we can [do] to experience in God's Spirit. There's a lot we can do together.

Our kids are taught to be critical thinkers. And so, there's no surprise they're going to turn up to church and be critical,

Reference 6

I think we need to be aware that it's no longer the cultural norm to go to church. ... It's counter-cultural. It's not the done thing. And we've got to respect that and acknowledge but also give people a purpose and a reason for wanting to connect in to what we do. If we ... can't give people a purpose to want to be a part of things, I don't blame them for just sleeping in on a Sunday morning. ... So, we have to really value and honour the people that are a part of it, give them a purpose for wanting to be here and a way of living out who they are and a sense of "Well this is taking me somewhere in life" and communicate that in a way that people can grasp and understand.

Reference 7

I came to the worship team and said, ... "Here's a book that I think is a fantastic resource. Here is a four-week series that I think we could present." And the worship team's gone, "That'd be fantastic. We'll back you up with banners and visuals and whatever else we can do with music in the rest of the service." I provide the content and they help then bring it to life. So, there's a sense of purpose and where we're going with our discipleship.

Reference 8

That's why I'm a part of UnitingWorld and why I love discipleship and Christian education, because that's where my gifts and passions are. ... Operate in the area of giftedness and passion, and I think as a church, you know, you can really flourish.

Reference 9

Permission-give. Support. Sell people a vision and the strategic directions of where we're going and say, "You know, if it fits within this, you've got a team of people and you've got the creativity and the energy, of course we're going to have a go."

Reference 10

We just confirmed a heap of people the other day as a part of our discipleship classes for this year and we've got some adult baptisms coming up. ... I want the discipleship team to have that much ownership in what happens that it doesn't revolve around me to happen, or the worship team to be so committed to what we

do with our months of preaching and teaching that whether I'm here or whether I'm not here, they've still got the vision and can make those things happen.

Reference 11

... and one that I guess is continuing to share that Good News and grace to the community around it, to each other, but also to the community around it. And you know the goal of all the Christian education is not us to feel, not for us to feel smarter or better about ourselves or to have more people even turn up on a Sunday.

Reference 12

So, if we're doing that as a natural part of who we are as Jesus followers, well then I think that's what we're on about.

Appendix 10: Clare Uniting Church, South Australia

Rev Simon Dent

Reference 1

Part of our gift in the community is primarily about priesthood in the sense of being the community that has been given the grace and the gift to know God and to know what God is doing, somehow to not only communicate that through our words to people but also in the way that we go about living, living out the gospel as well.

Reference 2

A lot of our preaching will be primarily based on expounding Scriptures, but also obviously recognising the contemporary significance of that Word for us as well, particularly in relation to participating in Jesus's mission in the world. The goal is not ultimately to be engaged in mission, but ... to know who this God is, who we are as a consequence of who this God is, and what that therefore means for the way that we live our life.

My hope in preaching from the Scriptures is that there would be a sense of life and vitality that gives the church a real sense of sharing in something much bigger than themselves, which is something wonderful and hopeful rather than something that is all about survival ultimately. I think if we can take the fear of the death of the church away from people, that ultimately the survival of the church is how well we do, then there's going to be a much greater freedom for the church to actually engage in discipleship. ... It's about Jesus inviting them into his ministry in the world, and far more hopeful for people to do that.

Reference 3

Discipleship is very much a broad participation in the ministry of Jesus as well as the encouragement for small communities within the bigger community to engage together and to help each other in that discipleship growth process.

Reference 4

Recognising that I can't be all things to all people, and there are certain things that God's called me to do, there's been a freedom for me not to actually have to be the best leader in the world but just focus on well, what's God called me to do. And fundamentally it's about preaching and teaching.

Reference 5

If the church entrusts itself to Jesus and what Jesus is doing, ... it doesn't always have to be in control of the leadership. You recognise that the Spirit's speaking to small groups as well, and that's one aspect of the whole broader mission that Jesus is doing. So there's ... a dance in some ways between the two, a guided intentional

focused teaching that would go into small groups on occasion, but also the freedom for the groups to ... be in the process of discerning what the Spirit is doing amongst their group as well.

Reference 6

God certainly speaks through worship and all the other means that happen in a worship service, but fundamentally there's a moment in which we hear from the will of God, the presence of God amongst us through the preached Word.

Reference 7

Those who are particularly engaged in small groups, in various ministries in the church, in leadership are really engaged in discipleship. They're the ones that will be wanting to engage in the various programs that the church might be doing and engaging in the mission.

Reference 8

Then there's a sense of hope that comes with that and then a sense of trust in the leadership to say "Okay, we recognise the way in which God has led the leadership of the church so far and it has brought a degree of life, and so we're keen to allow that to continue to happen." The challenge with that has been for people to defer the discerning process and ministry exclusively to the leadership team. So that in some ways has been an ongoing challenge for us.

Reference 9

The way that your church is structured, the emphasis of your leadership team and all those sorts of things are a part of that. One of my key emphases as a leader, is looking at the structures of our church community, particularly with a mindset of participating with Jesus in mission. What are the structures of our church that are preventing us from doing that? And what are those structures that can be put in place that can enable that to happen more effectively? One of my key roles as a leader is to facilitate that conversation, particularly amongst our Elders. We have an Executive Team that looks at some more the day to day running, and both groups come together as our Church Council. ... At our council meetings we will begin with a reflection, going back to what we are called to be as the church and how are we best fulfilling that. It doesn't just become about us, but it becomes about the church participating in what Jesus is doing amongst us. That's probably one of my key areas of leadership in those groups. We've changed our leadership as a result of that.

Appendix 11: Mapoon Congregation, UAICC, Queensland

Rev Michelle Cook and Mr James Hughes

Reference 1

Michelle:

On Sunday we did the story of Pentecost in preparation for next week. ... The congregation was divided in to two. The adults stayed out, they were fine. The kids went in to two different groups. One of them had the story of the Tower of Babel. One of them had the story of Pentecost. Then they came back and acted it out for everybody else. And then "What was the main point for the Babel story? What was the main point and the language, see that language stuff?" So Babel, you had one language and went to many different and no one understood each other. Pentecost, many different languages but they all understood through the Holy Spirit. ... One of the elders had some choruses in language. Mapoon doesn't have a lot of language that's spoken a lot. She had some choruses in language, which fits in very well with Pentecost, many languages.

Reference 2

Michelle:

The first Messy Church we did was in March. And I said, "We're going to do Messy Church you know, like a lot of craft and all that sort of thing." ... And M, a twenty-one-year-old in the congregation said, "We should do it on when Jesus sees the disciples on the boat and he tells them to put the net the other side. We should do it on that story," which is a great story for here because of the fishing. And I wasn't even thinking about that. ... Then ... her and some of the older kids came up with different craft they could do. One of them said, "We could make a paper fish that's hollow inside, and we could stuff our prayers inside it." ... I'm like, "This is really good."

James:

And it's a good structure, good mix of interactivity. ... Kids learn things. People learn things. The Bible is expounded. People are able to go deeper in to the story through the Messy Church activities, but through the intentional Bible study that we do as well, bringing in other parts of the Bible and bringing in other reasons why this happened and what the structure of the Bible is. ... It just gives us a good mix of interactivity and as well being able to teach and give some good Christian education to the kids and to the people that come to church as well.

Michelle:

And repetition. If you have the same theme going over four weeks, then you can go a lot deeper. For the Pentecost theme, we're not just talking about the story of Pentecost ... The fellowship night they did ... "What are the things that God does for you? What do you do for God?" Talking about that sort of stuff. Next week, which is Holy Communion, we'll talk about the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. So, it's just trying to talk about the Holy Spirit in a larger way than just that Pentecost story, to make connections across Scripture as well.

Reference 3

We talk to elders [to] ... get some background information about families and situations within the community. ... Certainly, we've talked to other organisations within the community, such as the school, the clinic, the women's officer, the men's officer to give us ... background information or ways that we can work together collaboratively with these other groups to achieve their aims and our aims as well.

Reference 4

James:

The spiritual component I don't think can be taken away from it, because it *is* leadership for life, but it's also... You have spiritual power here. You have spiritual leadership, that you really can't take apart from your social leadership, your physical leadership. ... It adds a confidence and it adds a facet to their lives that really takes it up to the next level.

And it gives them relationships through the church, through church organisations. ... People offer us hospitality in different places. It gives them an understanding that Christian people help each other, and Christian people reach out to each other, and Christian people aren't ashamed of their faith, and express themselves in a whole lot of different ways, not just praying.

Reference 5

Michelle:

We have been changed, not just *I*, but *we* have been changed to bring change. It's my understanding of what Congress is trying to do with their understanding of holistic evangelism, that it's not just about making sure we have robust congregations, but robust communities.

To be a leader in the community, you can also be a leader in the church. It just doesn't mean that it's an upfront worship leadership. ... It's not focused on the tasks that are associated with being part of a faith community but about the faith community itself and its impact on the wider community.

Reference 6

Michelle:

Some of those right choices would parallel with what the school wants them to do to make right choices, like go to school every day. Some of them are about just welcoming stranger, which is not a choice necessarily that other groups in the community would want them to do, but something that is a Christian imperative. And sharing, non-violence, because violence is a way of life.

Reference 7

James:

It seems to me that spiritual growth and maturity of faith is not meant to stay still, and it's not meant to exist for itself, but it's meant to exist for the mission of the church. ... Spiritual maturity and growth in gifts of the Spirit and fruit of the Spirit feeds into what the Spirit is actually leading you to do in the world.

Reference 8

James:

And that's intentional. We don't have as many boundaries as some other ministers in other places might have, you know. Ours is not "sacred place" or you know, place that people can't come to. We're not sacred people. We try to get as much involved in the community as we can and encourage as much culture as we can.

Because part of the history of Mapoon has been [that] the church has been responsible for loss of culture, and loss of language and loss of a lot of this stuff. We really don't want to be seen in that role now. It's certainly been a blessing that the Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress has done a lot of theology around the idea of faith and culture, and God and creation ... which is holistic and is "life in all its fullness." ... We've really benefited from that understanding.

Reference 9

James:

We've run discos. We've helped out with research projects. We've cooked food for families who are undergoing Sorry Business. We've been with them and sung songs with them. We've sung at funerals.

Reference 10

James:

So often the stereotype for Koreans is to be quiet and reserved and not to interfere or to say anything in to a situation. But these young people just insert themselves... "We're here. We'd really love to get to know you. Let's do some stuff together. Let's pray together. Let's sing together. Let's just have fun." And I think it was exceptional. The most powerful thing was "Let's get some kids from Naprahum, let's get these Scotch Oakburn [College] kids, give them a basketball." ... They played basketball. Then they started dancing. Then they started telling stories. Then they started telling crazier stories. By the end of the night, they were the best of friends. They connected in a way that I could never ever have imagined. It was fantastic the way that the kids up here really welcomed them, really were able to convey their culture and what goes on in their lives from day to day. And the Scotch Oakburn kids, apart from their minds being blown, really made an effort to learn and to listen and to relate to those kids and to ask good questions. ... We went fishing. We went to the beach. We went to church. We went to meet elders up here. All of those things were really good. Nothing came near giving them a basketball and saying, "Go play together."

Michelle:

Similarly with the Koreans, most of those kids from here had never had interactions with people from Asian backgrounds. They'd never really had that opportunity to talk to people from a ... totally different culture... The first time we went somewhere, we went to *Summer Madness* [camp], some of the kids were billeted with a Thai family ... And they freaked out. We didn't even think, "Oh, this will be an issue." ... Since then it's been really good seeing these guys interact. Now you don't hear so much slagging off at other cultures...

James:

No, there's a lot more respect.

Reference 11

Michelle:

Give some information, give some sort of pathways to get there. But say, you know, you don't have to do it this way. "You can do it. What's the way that you would do it?" ... Working with children, mostly as the leaders in this congregation here, it's a bit more directed than what I would do with adults.

Reference 12

James:

Because we're not trapped in our situation, we have resources. We have the resources of the Uniting Church in Australia, which is not a little thing. We have people of goodwill. We have our amazing God. Above all else we have our amazing God who will lead us and take us to where God wants us to go. And if we can tune in to that and align our compasses with what God wants us to do, we'll get there. There's going to be wilderness. There's going to be things that we'll have to overcome. That's OK. We can do that. There's going to be sad times. There's going to be hard times. We'll get through them together, and we'll support each other through them, and we'll get to where we want to go, and where God wants to take us.

Appendix 12: Hope Uniting Church, Maroubra, New South Wales

Rev Andrew Johnson

Reference 1

We've had some people who have been really not connected with the church or the faith community for a number of years, but there's still something that they're asking. ... They come for a year ... but it's not where they want to stay. But it helps ask the right questions, and usually provides really good relationships that are ongoing. ... It's almost like a staging point for them, to keep exploring, and that's okay.

Reference 2

That Christian education experience of the 70's and the small group practice, really important for me, and it makes sense that that's where people grow relationships. That's where you can ask questions of each other and a regular practice of that allows you to ... be doubtful and critical and faithful questioners. And that's really crucial.

Churches invest in each other, to use that language, by spending time with each other on those things. ... People meeting together over a meal, over a glass of wine, whatever it might be, where you can ask the real questions of each other. ... How do you develop those sort of relationships? You get them I think through shared experience, time together. Small groups make sense to me and I've had the benefit of that.

Reference 3

And people who are open to exploring those questions really benefit from it. ... We are a bit of a niche group for people who are asking questions, who don't fit necessarily the big mainstream groups, who are asking questions about gender and power, politics, sexuality.

Reference 4

It wasn't about a static sense of faith, of believing in what's always been, and keeping the church as it's always been. It was about God being dynamically involved and calling us to transformation for issue of issues of justice, for the intimate concerns of my life, for a range of these things.

Reference 5

"What does prayer look like?" Working with people between the ages of 20 and 30, so many of them are clear that they know it's an important thing, but they just don't really know what it is or how they've done it. ... Who's actually sat down with them and said "Well, what's it like? Or how do you do it?"

Reference 6

How do you pray when depression has got a hold of you? What does it mean to pray? Should I pray about my relationship? ... Should I pray about my exams? What are the things that it's good to pray about? ... For so many of them there's this question about "Oh I shouldn't pray for that. Surely I should be praying for the poor children in Africa?" It's like "Well, yes, but maybe it's more than that. What if prayer is actually shutting up and being silent for 45 minutes? What if prayer is what you do when you're riding your bike back and forth to uni?"

What if it involves exploring a traditional thing of prayer four times a day at set times? What if it means journaling?" ... How do we give people those resources? How do we offer them those resources so that, and particularly in a university context, in four years they might have moved on, whatever church community they do or don't find, they've got something to carry with them? Now in the end, every congregation and faith community should be doing that.

Reference 7

Some of them have for a number of years been volunteers in a homeless persons' shelter. We get people with mental illness and who are homeless wandering through our doors almost every week, but to then see what the reality of that life looks like for people, again starts to round out what our Bible studies might talk about.

Reference 8

We've got ex-students now who are working in refugee camps around the world, working in homeless centres in Sydney, and they keep coming back and offering reflections on "This is the stuff we've thought about been formed in here, and now we're actually doing." It means it's harder to fall into that trap of just having the language and the cliché of justice and community and faithful living when you've got people talking about the reality of doing it, and you've got opportunities to go and explore that.

Reference 9

We have some Tongan families. We've got kids who've never been to Tonga but are Tongan, who actually don't want to go back. We've got students who are very Anglo-Australian who now want to go back and who are in a youth group together or in a small group together working through all those questions about identity and what do you want to do. When we talk about church that's just inherently a part of what they're talking about. Being a smaller community, it's always there.

Reference 10

We need to keep doing that sort of thing. Experiential-based learning has to be a core component... If we were to make one of our core focuses. ... that we want to spend our time and effort and our prayer life, and all of our faith goes into growing people, not programs or buildings. ... How can we help people grow into their faith,

into the things that have been called out of them? How are we a part of that process? If that's what we are as a church, that just shifts the way we think about what we do with our budget, what we ask of our staff time, what we think our priorities should be.

Reference 11

To be in Tonga with the students at the same time as I've got my family including my four-month-old son, so that they see me not just as the tour leader but as someone working through "How do I be in a different cultural context in an awkward situation?" And they end up, obviously wanting to be there to support you, so you end up being challenged by things together. So, I think that relational stuff is really important.

The Villawood Detention Centre visits are a great example. A lot of people [are] very concerned about immigration policy and how we're working with asylum seekers. Encourage them to get involved in action plans and policy discussions, that's great. As a congregation we want to be in relationship with the people actually in detention, so that we might form relationships, get to know them, and that might be the basis for all of the things we talk about and pray about. So that's where mission and discipleship connect, I think: to be in relationship first, and out of that discern how we might act and pray.

Reference 12

I don't think that the congregation has a mission in the sense that "we are called to do this particular thing." But we're called to be faithful, to witness. ... They use a lot the words around hospitality and community. ... "How are we in the midst of this incredibly diverse area and in this huge university being a place that is not here to do something *to* people but is rather here to open up its arms and be in relationship with them?"

Reference 13

Yes, you've only been in Sydney for one month and King's Cross sounds scary, but you know what, we'll travel up there together and you'll meet Marcus and some of the guys there and it's going to be OK." Help them take the first steps. Get some really exciting experiences.

Come to School of Discipleship in July and meet other students doing the same things. You're offering people not just "Come along to our church and our program" but "Join the wider perspective of things that can be happening and can be exciting about faith and discipleship." ... It actually benefits us as a congregation. One, because it's fulfilling what we're supposed to be doing, but two, because we actually get leaders who are better resourced and a bit more excited by going away to these things.

Reference 14

Our job is not necessarily to suddenly start the mission or to necessarily be the ones at mission, but to be the ones growing in faith to trust in God, to listen to each other with the expectant belief that God is calling something out of us to participate in that with God.

I believe that a key part of faith is that God calls out of us as individuals and as a community [is] responses to God's love, responses to who Jesus is for us. ... That we're not being called out of life. We're not being called away from the world or into the church, but we're called more deeply into life, more deeply into engagement with relationships and people and things around us, and more deeply into engaging with Jesus through the Scriptures and through prayer.

In the end I believe passionately about church because that's where we discover our calling. What does it mean to build together a community, build together a church that wants to ... offer people the spiritual disciplines, not as a way of controlling them, but as a way of resourcing them to be engaged more deeply in life?

Reference 15

It's radical in the sense that God didn't just call me so that I might be safer by my connection through Christ, but that we might be called with God into the world in a very transformative way. ... One of the questions that clicked for me early on in my time here was "Say you've got people for three years, what would you want to offer them? What would you want them to be able to walk away and say, 'These are the experiences and resources and learnings I got from being there.'" What do you need for your faith to be able to survive as you move around between different places if you're not staying in the one community and the one church? I want people to ask critical questions of the Bible. ... So, some tools to read the Bible and do it regularly and some ways to learn how to pray. And some people to travel with. If you can get those three things I think the rest, you know, the rest is add-ons.

Reference 16

There is a real sense of "What are the spiritual disciplines of prayer and listening and waiting and worship that help us try and be transformed and attuned to who God is and where God is active?" combined with the sense that discipleship leads us to engagement with people and relationships, particularly on the edges of society.

Appendix 13: Nedlands Uniting Church, Western Australia

Rev. Steve Francis

Reference 1

I think sometimes what I sense is that that you kind of have to have a high view of Scripture. And I don't mean inerrancy or anything like that. But I mean that you have to value Scripture greatly, and if you do then it becomes foundational. If you have a much more sceptical view of Scripture, then its place, I think, is more marginalised in the life of the church, or the life of the congregation. Well my view of Scripture is very high. And so I'm not a fundamentalist or anything like that, but I have a very deep love of Scripture, and I think that forms me as a person, and I want it to form other people.

Reference 2

It's never one size fits all. There's a whole variety of ways in this church. We study Scripture, but we *study* Scripture. ... It might be in someone's house. It might be with a resource. It might be without a resource. ... The challenge is to be creative and to think "How do we make this Living Word come alive for people?" And anyway we can do it, we'll do it.

Reference 3

And last year some of the people who were baptised here that I mentioned earlier, were in that category. ... After six, eight months, up to a year, they'd said "Well, the Christian faith is true. I believe in it. Jesus Christ is changing my life and my outlook. I want to be part of this church. I want to serve in his mission. I want to be baptised."

Reference 4

We run café-churches once every few months. ... A couple of years ago we did "Buddha and Jesus: are they on the same path?" We got someone in who knew a lot about both. We probably had a hundred people and it was a public forum, and the conclusion was at the end of that seminar, they weren't on the same path.

Reference 5

In the end we think God has blessed us, and we're just hoping that we've been faithful. I wouldn't want to say it's our cleverness. We believe in prayer and that we do what we can, and we look to God to do His work. And it's that faithfulness to God that we think is core to who we are. I think we've had a clear vision, and a clear set of values about who we are as a church, and I think that's attracted some people and not attracted others.

Reference 6

If you don't have those things, or if you only have one or two of those things operating, probably it's not a healthy congregation. I often go back to the early statement of Acts about some of the marks of the early church and I think if you've got four or five of those in place, and if your leaders have that, then it's like putting a plant in healthy soil, there's a chance it'll grow.

Appendix 14: Mount Louisa House of Praise Uniting Church, Queensland

Rev Anne Harley

Reference 1

If we just need to wait for a little while... And some mornings when there is just a lot happening and it *is* a program. Other mornings, we just try and create that space.

Worship is to bring joy to God's heart. Is God happy with this? Is this totally disruptive and destroying what God wants to do, or is it actually enabling what God wants to do? We've had people laughing, and sometimes it's great. We have people crying. We're not afraid ... of a physical demonstration of what... I mean, that whole Spirit of God living within you, that is incredible power, no wonder there's some sort of physical manifestation sometimes!

Reference 2

We've got to get our worship from here to here (*points from head to heart*). That's part of it, I think. We have banners and flags, and people pick up those with the kids. Percussion instruments. Tomorrow is "Joy is the flag." I mean, old songs. The kids will march around the church, and it just sets a tone of worship before we even start.

We've got kids much more excited, much more on board, and a few other things. We bring them forward right at the beginning of worship. We do, our worship team does worship with the kids, so it's got some quality to it, and a bit of fun with them up front. And everyone's part of that. Probably good for the whole congregation.

Reference 3

I think "When else do you sit and listen to a lecture?" It doesn't happen today. ... Even in preaching, ... we've got to be aware that it's not a form that the congregation are used to. Even education nowadays, there's so much visual stuff and interactive stuff, and so I think we've got to change our models of how we do it.

Reference 4

We've got three worship teams and we're trying to grow those. In terms of education, I brought a guy in who has some skills in the worship area. ... People came Friday night, but the numbers had halved by Saturday morning. ... I don't think they have the time to give or the motivation.

Reference 5

We've got someone who got excited about prison ministry. So, went through the whole processes, which was not easy for her, but pursued, because that's what she felt God was saying on her heart, to get into the prison ministry. So she does that and then gets the training from the in-service training that they do in that area.

Reference 6

I don't think greediness is the gospel. We put out units of food for the kids for morning tea. They don't just have a plate of biscuits, because the first two people would eat the whole lot. ... It's all put on a serviette, and there's two biscuits, ... because all that behavioural stuff does not create community, it destroys community.

Reference 7

Steer it and slow it down or ... Someone came to me the other day and said, "Anne, I really feel lately I want to preach." ... I said, "That's good," I said, "but you've got to start walking the walk." I said, "I can't put you up there until you're really walking."

Love is just key, you know. ... It's got to be done out of a love and a desire for them to reach their full potential in God.

Reference 8

Elijah House ministry is an inner healing training course. It's at Aitkenvale [Uniting Church], something we do across the churches, across the Uniting Churches here particularly, and it equips people to minister, not counselling, but the prayer ministry into people's lives, to see some of the deep roots, to see why they behave the way they do.

Reference 9

It started here about thirteen years ago and within three years grew beyond us and we were invited by the Council to take it to the Strand. It started in a big tent where we recreated the Nativity scene plus other scenes around that. There could be an angel scene. There could be shepherds on the hill, wise men, etcetera. It's moved beyond that now to where we actually build a town of Bethlehem, where we have shepherds. We have marketplace. We have marketeers. We have Roman soldiers. It takes a large area of the park plus a carnival atmosphere with stages. We've had merry-go-rounds.

Reference 10

I'd like better support structures here. I think I'm doing a lot of that. But I think the nature of the church is that the leadership, the leadership is probably our weakest area, though it's building and growing and developing but...

Reference 11

There's a neighbour to neighbour program here. ... I'm forever encouraging people to find their ministries and get out. ... Get out beyond the church to be and do what God's called.

I do like to look at it as a plant or as an oasis or as a, you know, that where the ingredients are right, there is just life. Life will be there.

I think speaking positively, I do think honouring people, or honouring people's ministries, honouring what they do.

I think there's a fear of the Spirit or not wanting to get too fruit-loopy or freaky. I was there but I'm a bit over that now. It's about God and it's God's church and we've got to give Him His place in it. I see myself as sort of just nurturing and pulling in here, and encouraging there and lifting up, and sometimes pulling them together, pulling them forward. That's probably how I see my role in it.

The whole worship, the whole Spirit of God ... where there's freedom for the Spirit of God then a lot of this will just begin to happen I think. A lot of people are scared of the Spirit, a lot of people don't know how to... I'm fairly keen to give lots of room.

Appendix 15: North Lakes Uniting Church, Queensland

Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant

Reference 1

They'll come and watch a Nooma video or something, and then we sit around and talk about it. We used Dave Andrews' *Plan Be* and had a meal and have some games and then had a chat. The kids are in there and they're putting in their two cents as well on all those kinds of things.

Reference 2

I developed that because I think in a post-modern society we've lost a theological position for Christian education in the church. ... Christian education as formation, needs to sit in the context of a worshipping community.

Reference 3

I think that the post-modern idea says we don't have to stick to reason. We don't have to stick to a logical argument all the time. We can actually now embrace more of spirituality because we can say "This is my experience. ...This is what happened to me and it doesn't make sense logically or reasonably or whatever."

Reference 4

I think that's what Christianity is about too, I think what modernity did was to make Christianity into sort of a book subject in the worst possible sense of the word. But yeah, I think people are hanging out for ways of "walking the walk."

Reference 5

Someone who's listening on many levels, not just coming in and saying this is what you need, but open to that action-reflection inquiry style of learning and so on, but with a good grasp of a foundational theology, a systematic approach.

Reference 6

How do we make meetings intentionally teaching times? How do we not only just have a little devotion at the beginning and then go on with our meeting, but also teach about how to be in a meeting, and what you do and why, the ways that you behave and how that's sort of structured?

Appendix 16: Mid-Lachlan Mission Area, New South Wales

Rev Tom Stuart

Reference 1

This great awareness that I have, I mean I knew it in my head but now I *feel* it. ... That's why I come back in to this word *phenomenology* is that I actually almost sense it.

Reference 2

I just remember a particular occasion where a lady came up to me. I don't remember her words any more, but I sort of remember thinking to myself ... "Here is a person who is now seemingly able to give articulation to how faith connects to what was going on in a way that I'd never experienced before." They were forced in a way to engage their daily experience in to the context of their faith.

I'm sure every minister has had those sort of experiences, where you say, "What am I telling the story for?" The story's already there, that's been a continuing lesson for me.

Reference 3

I've desperately tried to figure out how to define God, and I think the best definition I've come to, which isn't a good one, is that God is the password that we type in when we want to access our computer. ... Well of course that's not God, but that's the word "God," and whatever else it is once you get behind there. There's this sense where it's so intrinsic to human experience.

Reference 4

You're thinking you're going to learn something new and ... you're giving articulation to what I'm observing, which was sort of exciting, because it certainly gave me a sense of a bit of imprimatur, that I thought maybe this is the sense that we're heading in the right direction.

It's being a very active component in the observing. I'm not good at pure theorising. It's pretty much bound in story.

Appendix 17: Christ Church Uniting Church, Wayville, South Australia

Rev Sean Gilbert

Reference 1

This was about *our* transformation. It wasn't just the church being on mission. And that's progressively what took place, because the programming and the people we invited in, they weren't always from a Christian perspective. But people have grown in integrity and stature, always calling us to places, I think, of a common humanity, or a broadening of humanity, and a more compassionate expression of life.

Reference 2

It was very much an experience of the heart, but it wasn't mindless either. It was well thought through, but it was touching something deeper than simply the intellect. So, it was more than just information; it was actually experience that [was] releasing something I of their personality, as they might have yearned to express but didn't quite know how to.

Reference 3

The people I spoke of earlier, who ... almost had fear and trepidation about re-entering the church, but when they discovered that the church, this community, was offering this ... experience, ... they welcomed it.

Reference 4

Orthodoxy is ... about right praise, it's not about right information. It's somehow hearts coming into communion with one another and offering thanksgiving for that. ... That's where I get my impetus from, my inspiration from, the love that's embedded in ... that understanding of God. To offer anything is to offer something out of that experience, not beyond and above it, but from within it. And that's where that metaphor of breaking bread comes from, that same self-giving out of what's grasped me.

Reference 5

You don't set out to speak from those places but when you do, with some sense of hope or grace, or dignity, then I think there's a power in it that you don't even seek. There's humility in it. And I think ... that's healing in itself, that's encouraging in itself. Difficult stuff. It's a costly place to lead.

Reference 6

Part of my theology is that this Spirit, this God we worship is Creator, so therefore, if we are created in His image, then hopefully, a natural tendency and an actual by-product of that is that we actually honour creativity.

Reference 7

I want the church to take the soul more seriously, if I can be so bold, and be soulful in its Christian education, without being wet and sloppy. It doesn't have to be subjective.

Reference 8

I saw that as more important than people who could quote text and verse or could rattle off what theological tome they'd just written. I mean how does it translate? How does it affect something?

Appendix 18: Mid-North Coast Region, New South Wales

Rev Dr John Squires and Rev Dr Elizabeth Raine

Reference 1

Elizabeth:

You also need a vision because a church without a vision is a dead church. If no vision enlivens you and nourishes you and inspires you then you're going on the road to nowhere. Undergirding with a vision that grips people and inspires people is really, really important in a healthy church.

Reference 2

Elizabeth:

By making these tweaks in their normal life they can actually influence, quite a lot, somebody who's doing it really tough in a developing nation somewhere on a tea plantation.

Reference 3

John:

[Elizabeth] made *Just Add Salt* have some kind of practical thing you could do each week.

Elizabeth:

And yeah, I did. ... People didn't have to do any or all of them, it was up to them, but I always like it when someone comes back to me and says, "I can't look at this the same way again, and I've had to change my practice." That's really good when that happens, and it's happened quite a bit, hasn't it?

Reference 4

John:

We want to use this as a platform. There are other congregations across the Presbytery that are really committed to social justice and Fairtrade.

Elizabeth:

We're going to link them up.

John:

In the wider community there's a network of people that are interested in [Fairtrade], so we're kind of plugging into that.

Reference 5

John:

And despite my anxiety early on, like always wanting to go into things prepared, I realised that we could just roll along to that, and with *With Love to the World* and the Bible and our stuff, we could just have a conversation about it and ... it worked.

Reference 6

Elizabeth:

Part of that is pragmatically teaching people how they can look at it through different eyes, finding new ways for them to explore it, to read it in different ways and settings and contexts and to share with it stuff I know. ... People get excited about trivia. I get excited about Biblical trivia. ... It's the foundational document of the Christian faith, and understanding it surely, surely should be a priority, and enthusing people to read it. Not many people actually read their Bibles.

Reference 7

Elizabeth:

We've spoken out on gambling, on climate change. We've picked up topical stuff and we have been who we say we are. The Uniting Church says it believes in these things and wants to support these things, so that's where our integrity's come from.

Reference 8

Elizabeth:

I don't think it's sensible just to give people always what they want and I don't think it's sensible always to preach at them what you think is right. There's got to be a meshing of it somewhere.

Reference 8

Elizabeth:

The Uniting Church has got some of the best mission plans on the planet, and they're called Assembly policies and Synod policies. ... We've picked up some of the

social justice ones ... We've just been reviewed recently, and one of the strong things that came across in that review process was people saying how much they appreciated that John and I educated them about the policies of the Uniting Church and why those policies were important.

Reference 9

Elizabeth:

If we are this beast that says, "We have these core values" and that says "We believe these things", surely our ministers should be educating about how we teach that. And what that means, and what that could look like and who that is for us.

Reference 10

John:

It's not a matter of any kind of persuasive approach like that. It's actually "We're all in this together. We all have gifts and we all have roles, or functions, or responsibilities." ... "Resource Ministry" is the buzz word in this Synod. ... Because I've been in education, ... the way I've thought of ministry all the time has been resource ministry.

Reference 11

John:

They now exist in a variety of forms. They can be anything from a one-hour short immersion, through to a four to four and a half hour, day-long thing. ... The original one started as an 'eat your way through the Bible' culminating in the Passover feast. So there was a dish from each of the major periods, patriarchal, Egyptian.

Elizabeth:

Babylonian exile.

John:

We developed six in the end. There are three major Jewish festivals, so Passover, Pentecost and Booths ... and there's various activities that are associated with that, child friendly and adult friendly.

John:

Grinding grain, weaving.

Elizabeth:

Spinning wool. I've got a whole set of drop spindles and wool. ... We made them bake bread one day.

John:

Even building a booth for the Festival of Booths. ... So, there are those three ... set in the household of Deborah and Boaz, first century Palestinian followers of Jesus. There's three that are set in the diaspora churches, using Paul's letters to Corinth, Galatia and Rome. ... The days are eating food throughout the day, activities, input. The Jewish ones have a Rabbinic debate that we write in the style of a Rabbinic back and forth. The Hellenistic ones have small group preparation, discussion, report back, debate.

Elizabeth:

The good thing about their local culture immersions is that it puts people in the world of the Bible. All the recipes are quite authentic. ... They come out of ancient cookbooks and things like that. It introduces them to the hospitality, the customs and the different rites of the Bible.

Reference 12

Elizabeth:

So it's about risking transformation and it's about risking doing things differently and allowing yourself to be changed and continuing the dialogue differently between church and community and you as a ... disciple person.

Reference 13

Elizabeth:

We also have to be more biblically based in the Uniting Church. And I think if we're going to take our Bible seriously, if we're going to be Uniting Church people in society, then we have to take our policies as a Uniting Church seriously. I think that the Uniting Church can live if it actually did what it says it believes in.

Appendix 19: Eaton-Millbridge Mission Project, Western Australia

Rev Karyl Davison

Reference 1

I could certainly see not too much further down the track, if there is some sort of community need in terms of a memorial service or a celebration or if another tsunami wipes out thousands of people, a place where people can come and express what they're feeling at that time. ... Certainly, it's not about bums on seats, it's about being with them where they are and building that trust which I think people need.

Reference 2

My experience and evidence over the last 10 years or so now, is that while for some it still works the old way, for most people, and certainly for people who are not currently involved in the church, it's a completely different ball game. We know that people don't come to programs any more. ... If I wasn't already involved in the church, I can't imagine turning up to an Alpha course for instance. Like, why would you?

Reference 3

Part of what I've done deliberately, but I think it's probably part of who I am as well, is that I'm a bit different. People relate to me because I'm an ordinary human being and the trust stuff happens, and then you can talk about it. But it's got to be at their instigation. ... I'm certainly not into the "narrow package." So I'm very accepting of people, where they're coming from, and I think that makes a big difference too. Other people's experience might be different, but that's certainly mine. I utterly rejoice when someone says to me "Ooh, you're nothing like a minister," or "I've never met a Christian like you before," because for me that's the breaking down barriers stuff that enables the emergence of some of those faith conversations that you wouldn't otherwise have.

Reference 4

Even just the simple stuff that we know in terms of emerging church is about really providing hospitality that's relevant to the time we live in. I said this morning, "We'll have to get some coffee pots and some proper coffee." "Really?" "Yes. That's what people expect now." So, helping them work through that the daggy church hall with the tapestry of the Last Supper, that it really isn't that welcoming in terms of what people in our communities might [expect].

Appendix 20: North Ringwood Uniting Church, Victoria

Rev Dr Ian Hickingbotham

Reference 1

Now we put an audio message up, the message that's up on our website each week. We'll get to the video eventually, and what I hear is a number of people now, they, that's how they listen to it because the child's squirming in their seats right, so they listen again, or when they're travelling they listen to it, a number of people have told me that. They listen when they're travelling. Or a number of people are out with KUCA, and they can't get in to the message. They listen in during the week. So, we're trying to say, and they're saying they want to be in there, but they're using that as their way of staying in touch, if you like. But I think there needs to be an intentionality which is, how do we provide, and using the new technologies is a great way, but are we being intentional or not?

Reference 2

And I would say, "Okay, it's 9:45 Sunday morning, what are you doing at 9:45 tomorrow?" ... They would then describe their workplace, what they do, and I would then discuss that with them. "What are some of the stresses you're under? How can we pray for you?" So we journeyed down that, depending on the type of work, and the last question was always "How does what we do here, connect with what you do there?" ... "What's the connection between what we do here and what they do there?" And what of course I'm asking is for the whole congregation to reflect upon that question, "How does what we do here connect with what you do there?"

Reference 3

In all the messages I give notes that go with the message. ... The method is ... aware of attention span, and people just sitting for twenty minutes listening to a talking head, by crossing between ... yes, I use the voice. "Oh, the screen! Bang, got my attention!" Then I say, "Now take out your notes. ... Look at this." Back to my voice. By moving around all the time, I'm grabbing your attention again, rather than just sit and listen to Ian for twenty minutes, and they might doze off.

Appendix 21: Educational Leadership Competencies

Luther Seminary, Minnesota

May 2008

Dr Mary Hess, Luther Seminary⁷³⁷

1. Knowledge competencies

- a. able to articulate a clear statement of their vision for providing leadership in supporting faith nurture across the lifespan
- b. familiar with basic faith nurture and learning theories: faith development over the life cycle, multiple intelligences, constructivist learning design, developmental learning principles, cross cultural learning, etc.
- c. familiar with the integration of biblical narrative, theological inquiry and ritual practice within religious education
- d. familiar with the history and trajectories of faith nurture, particularly in the student's primary denominational/faith community context, so as to be able to assess a specific context and develop learning strategies within it
- e. familiar with a variety of ways of supporting, structuring, facilitating and troubleshooting learning communities
- f. familiar with multiple models of faith nurture

2. Attitude competencies

- a. inquires easily into, and responds openly to others' ideas
- b. easily and constructively surfaces and questions assumptions underlying ideas, feelings, and actions
- c. comfortably uses their own experience to critique expert opinion AND uses expert opinion to critique their own experience

⁷³⁷ Email correspondence with the author, August 2008.

- d. nourishes personal curiosity about God's activities in the world, and is able to wonder with awe at God's activities
- e. comfortably engages diversity with personal integrity
- f. is deeply engaged in lifelong learning

3. Skill competencies

- a. capable of adequately developing, critiquing, and tailoring curriculum materials for use in a specific context (this includes denominational issues)
- b. capable of supporting theological and biblical reflection in a variety of contexts, and with a variety of people involved
- c. capable of supporting cross cultural engagement in at least one specific cultural context
- d. capable of supporting intergenerational learning
- e. capable of engaging at least one pressing contemporary learning challenge from within a faith community framework (denominational pluralism, interfaith dialogue, media culture, environmental pressures, socio-political unrest, peace and justice issues, race and class issues, gender, disability, etc.)
- f. capable of recruiting, training, supporting, supervising, evaluating and affirming volunteers in the shared ministry of Christian faith nurture

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