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# Christian Community: A Theology for Restructuring

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*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology  
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## Abstract

A church is a living and breathing body nourishing and nourished by the community where it resides. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand is experiencing decline in affiliation, an ageing demographic, some church buildings not meeting increased earthquake standards, and the effects of the rise of postmodern non-denominational church attendance by young people. Congregations may lose viability and some are facing amalgamation and the closure of buildings. Conflict is the catalyst for change, seeding transformation (growth) or division (decline). Relevant research is drawn from New Zealand, England, and the United States.

The restructuring of Anglican communities must be a well-managed process that potentially seeds growth in congregations, or decline will be exacerbated. The nature of *conflict* associated with restructuring is explored and how theological reflection might support changing Anglican communities as they transition through the restructuring process. The primal source of conflict is found in the differentiation inherent in identity formation, which is in unavoidable tension with the need of identities for relationship. Together differentiation and relationship bring exclusion and embrace (Miroslav Volf) into community life. How we meet others (Martin Buber) and how we recognise others (Charles Taylor) benchmark how we ideally structure our Christian relationships. The process of transition (William Bridges) from business theory is focused on transitioning of congregations. The change experienced through transition is conversion.

From research, it is known church closures exacerbate decline, decline begets decline, and a lack of conflict reinforces decline. In contrast, growth begets growth, and conflict may contribute to growth. Conflict if uncontrolled may result in breaking down of relationships, and people leaving the church. This historical narrative of a congregation holds the past in its hands, and affects a congregation's ability to change. Losing the power of any remembered pain, together with a well-managed restructuring process, enables a move into a changed and transformational future. Seeding growth is the primary aim of church restructuring and may be strategically created through the synergy of two or more elements that together create more than either can alone.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Background

I am writing this thesis in New Zealand where I live. I grew up in an English village and was born into the Church of England, attending the church school, and at the age of 11 moved to a Catholic secondary school. I now regularly visit the United States so am able to experience the differences in church life provided by the material in this thesis.

My first degree is in Business with later study of Theology. My background in both fields informs this thesis. Personal experience of my own church's closure lies behind my focus on the restructuring of congregations. Anglican churches are fundamentally missional yet church closure may oppose the great commission (Matt 28:19).<sup>1</sup> I continue to live with this apparent contradiction.

For this thesis, I am investigating the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand from within Tikanga Pākehā.<sup>2</sup> The Anglican Church in the regional town of Whanganui, when I arrived in 1998, comprised twelve churches. These churches stand in a district with a current population of 42,150 at the 2013 Census (including 9,684 Māori). They were all once thriving churches built by their local communities. In 2014, the Tikanga Pākehā Bishop of the Diocese of Wellington requested a restructuring process be undertaken of the eleven Anglican churches under his

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<sup>1</sup> "Evangelism is Central to being the People of God, says Archbishop Justin," accessed 29 November 2014, <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2014/11/evangelism-is-central-to-being-the-people-of-god,-says-archbishop-justin.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, is a constitutionally autonomous member of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia encompasses the area described by its title. The 1992 Constitution of this Church provides for three partners to order their affairs within their own cultural context. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, Tikanga Pākehā comprises seven Dioceses, Tikanga Māori comprises five Hui Amorangi, the boundaries of which differ from those of the dioceses. Tikanga Pasefika encompasses Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and the Cook Islands, and is known as the Diocese of Polynesia." [www.anglican.org.nz/about](http://www.anglican.org.nz/about), accessed 22 September 2015. The Anglican Church of Melanesia remained part of the Church of the Province of New Zealand until it became an ecclesiastical Province in its own right in 1975.

authority in Whanganui. As well as the Anglican churches, Whanganui is also home to many other expressions of the Christian faith.

### **Changes within the Anglican Church**

Despite its two hundred year history, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand has shown decline in affiliation and attendance, to the point today where a reduction in the number of churches has to be considered to maintain viability.

The New Zealand 2013 Census confirms the net decline in traditional Anglican Church affiliation as the older generation, brought up in the denominational church, ages and new people joining do not maintain attendance numbers.<sup>3</sup> This net decline is already resulting in change through amalgamating congregations, church closures, new initiatives, and disposal of unused buildings. The New Zealand Anglican Church faces not only decline in church attendance but also as a result shrinking revenue. Individual congregations may dissolve down to non-viable units in terms of attendance and the resourcing required. Yet small churches, where sustainable, are a valid and valued part of the Christian community.<sup>4</sup>

It has been proposed that the Christian religion is transitioning somehow into a new Christian era and trends are now becoming evident.<sup>5</sup> The main trend in New Zealand is the rise of Christian non-denominational churches - in this thesis referred to as the “new wave non-denominational churches” (NWND) - which are developing their own way of being church, one characterised as essentially postmodern.<sup>6</sup> By contrast Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches are included under the title “denominational.” This spiritual lifecycle is represented in

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Lineham, "Look for the Silver Lining," *Anglican Taonga* 45 (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Jason Byassee, *The Gifts of the Small Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010). This text comes direct from experience of small churches rather than academia and is a useful reminder of the contextual experience of small churches and their contribution to community (US United Methodist).

<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012). Also Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The NWND churches include Destiny, Life, City Impact, C3, Arise, Equippers, Vineyard, Church Unlimited, and numerous similar postmodern NWND churches. I include Pentecostal and Apostolic churches in this grouping. Details on Destiny Church can be found at [www.destinychurch.org.nz](http://www.destinychurch.org.nz). This is an indigenous New Zealand church. Also refer to Peter Lineham, *Destiny: The Life and Times of a Self-Made Apostle* (Auckland: Penguin, 2013).



New Zealand by the symbolic importance of the *koru* or silver fern.<sup>7</sup> As each frond is unfurling and reaching maturity another new frond is already forming, in a continuous process.

My thesis is that the restructuring of Anglican communities must be a well-managed process, which potentially supports growth in congregations, or decline will be exacerbated. I explore existing research about changing congregations, theory from other academic disciplines, and I include my own analysis of this scholarship. Because the practical decisions involved in restructuring congregations are context-dependent, I do not attempt to provide answers at this level. I focus on the nature of *conflict* associated with restructuring. In doing so, I aim to provide Anglican communities experiencing change with a framework for discussion. This is to enable reflection on what a well-managed process leading to transformation might look like and how to mitigate risks that might arise. I also examine elements of this process that potentially contribute to future growth.

The Church of England research *Anecdote to Evidence* states that amalgamations, however they are structured, tend not to be successful and may exacerbate decline.<sup>8</sup> Therefore New Zealand needs to seriously consider whether or how it should approach amalgamations as a strategy. Changes to the Anglican Church's structure can affect the wider community where a denominational church provides the centre for community life. A church, as a mediator of religion, should be considered much more than numbers of people attending church services. A church is a living and breathing body nourishing and nourished by the community where it is placed. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative evidence has been drawn from New Zealand, England, and the United States. This evidence is explored in Chapter Two.

In searching for academically rigorous case studies of congregations undergoing change, I discovered *Congregations in Changing Communities*, a US research project, led by Nancy Tatom Ammerman.<sup>9</sup> This research comprises twenty-three in-depth case studies of

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<sup>7</sup> Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, "Māori Creation Traditions - Common Threads in Creation Stories," *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2013), accessed 22 September 2015, [www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/2422/the-koru](http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/2422/the-koru).

<sup>8</sup> David Goodhew, Ben Kautzer, and Joe Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church," *Church Growth Research Programme Report on Strand 3c* (2014), accessed 23 August 2014, [http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress\\_findings\\_reports](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports). The final report of the Church Growth Research Programme is titled *Anecdote to Evidence* and this has become the generic name for the reports.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

congregations' responses to change. The following quotation from Ammerman's research focused my research on the role of conflict:

Perhaps most striking in the processes of change we have observed is the association of conflict with change. Most congregations are accustomed to thinking about conflict as a sign of distress, perhaps even as a sign that they are drifting from their proper mission. Quite the contrary. Congregations that systematically avoid conflict are also very likely to avoid changing ... Adaptation can take many forms, but it is not an easy process ... and often involves fighting among people who love each other. Most congregations do not choose adaptation. They choose not to fight and thus not to change ... This may be a determined and principled decision that the identity and mission of the congregation must be preserved for as long as possible, or it may be the result of a prolonged failure to decide. After a period of slow decline, these congregations are likely to disappear from the scene ... as with any other ecology, death is an inevitable part of the life cycle.<sup>10</sup>

I have of necessity separated the research area into three topics:

1. Conflict, resistance, survival, and growth
2. Amalgamating and re-forming congregations
3. Closing or changing sacred places

This thesis concentrates on the first topic but looks toward amalgamations and closures as part of the restructuring environment in New Zealand.<sup>11</sup> The second two topics are separate theses in their own right.

The complexity of restructuring should not be underestimated. Particularly important is the effect of restructuring on the people of God, and on the bonds they have with their church community as well as their sacred place. For these reasons, this thesis is a theological reflection *from the pews*, positioning itself for and of the people of God in Christian community. This is the positioning of Ammerman's research. Support also comes from Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, who influenced the changing theological direction at the Second Vatican Council. For Rahner, religion is formed first from the call of the living God to the people, and therefore "church must be understood in such a way that it springs from the very essence of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 344-345.

<sup>11</sup> The word *amalgamation* used in this thesis in the New Zealand context is congregational amalgamation where two or more congregations join together to become a single identity.

Christianity.”<sup>12</sup> Rahner explains that ecclesial community of the people of God is quite independent of “how [the organisation] must be constituted more precisely in the concrete.”<sup>13</sup> Today, this positioning *from the pews* is also supported by the increasing impact of social media. Social media provides the people in the pews a greater level of connectivity and platform for opinion. Due to the positioning *from the pews*, new initiatives and leadership are not covered in this thesis, as both tend to be targeted decisions by the Anglican Church. Neither do I cover the effects of restructuring church administration or priestly and lay ordering.

This thesis is a first step on the journey of restructuring and its possible effects on the people of God. Each congregation develops a unique culture and identity over time. Bringing two congregations together, however similar they may appear to be, needs to be a well planned process. If the potential of diversity is not achieved through amalgamation then the process may not bring transformation to the community. A clash of identities could bring division.

The nature of conflict, particularly arising for individuals and their Christian community when identity and beliefs are threatened, is at the core of the discussion. The word *conflict* is problematic in its dictionary definition and everyday usage. In this thesis, and in Ammerman’s research, the nature of conflict needs to be understood primarily in terms of its potential contribution to growth and transformation, and not necessarily as divisive and destructive. The conflict emerging from change and transition is the catalyst for transformation. The consequences of any conflict determine retroactively whether the conflict was helpful or not in moving a congregation forward to a new context. Conflict may be so diverse and disparate that linking a specific conflict situation to a specific outcome may be impossible, and the task possibly unrewarding. Ultimately conflict is necessary and “part of the mutual struggle toward shared community.”<sup>14</sup>

To guide the analysis of change and transition, I have turned to the work of William Bridges in *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*.<sup>15</sup> Bridges is an authority on change and managing change in the workplace.<sup>16</sup> He says, “Managing during times of unprecedented change

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 343.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth: Spirit in the Household of God* (St Louis: Chalice, 2000), 141.

<sup>15</sup> William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, 3rd ed. (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

is one of the most difficult tasks a leader faces. In adapting to new realities, people need a guide to chart a course through chaos.”<sup>17</sup> Restructuring itself, from a business point-of-view, repositions an organisation to maintain its viability and its fit to future technology and potential markets. Restructuring may be beneficial for an organisation’s continuity despite the inevitable upheaval during the transition from one state to another. The US case studies on changing congregations did not cover a process through change, and Bridges’ theory provides the structure for discussing congregational transitions.

The words *change* and *transition* are often used interchangeably, yet their use by Bridges and in this thesis is quite specific. *Change* is situational: the move to a new building, the retirement of the vicar, reorganisation of the vestry roles. *Transition* is psychological: “it is a ... process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation that the change brings about.”<sup>18</sup> Change happens (the deckchairs are moved) but congregational transition is about leading people through the transition (people moving voluntarily to the repositioned deckchairs, and sitting in them) and is essential if the outcome of change is to transform. The tenets of change in the paid-employment situation, which Bridges writes about, are quite different from that of a voluntary association of people in the church who can freely walk away at any time. However, Bridges adds important insights that are supported by his own belief that people matter and their successful transition is important.

While there may be benefits to be gained from adopting business models of analysis, these are not always aligned with the nature and values of Christian community. However, Bridges’ theory is based on Arnold van Gennep’s *The Rites of Passage*.<sup>19</sup> This establishes a connection between Bridges’ work and the ritual and social life of Christian communities. This thesis will explore the critical points in Bridges’ transition process and then provide theological reflection that may inform Anglican communities, developing a vision of a community of unity, free from division, and open to the possibility of “becoming” and being One in Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Theology is an expression of Christian identity and how the people of God understand their lives. This thesis as a theology for restructuring cannot, of itself, provide unity or a specific list

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<sup>17</sup> Homepage of William Bridges and Associates, accessed 19 September 2015, <http://www.wmbridges.com>.

<sup>18</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage: A Classic Study of Cultural Celebrations*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 (1908 original)).

<sup>20</sup> I use the word *One* to represent a divine place (Gal. 3:28). This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

of actions to be pursued, but it may provide a place where communities face and question themselves and are then able to plan and adopt change together. Yet, there are the two fundamental dichotomies in community formation that are held in unavoidable tension. First, a person's and a community's identity involves identity formation in contrast to each other (exclusion). This contrast inevitably creates an implicit "them" and "us" culture and it is in this contrast that identity is established through differences. Another way of viewing this contrast is that others define our identity.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, relationship (embrace) brings "them" and "us" together and therefore relationship is between differentiated identities, creating the tension.

A congregation may be held in the past by emotional memory and this thesis will explore how past experience and nostalgia affect current decisions, and how these decisions may determine growth or decline in the future. The sacred stories, or narratives, offered by the case studies of Ammerman's research provide insights into the emotional impact that change evokes in a congregation. A congregation's identity can never remain constant and their story is being written daily, offering an uncertain future. However, it is possible to break with the past, and determine a future trajectory through the considered selection of a potential narrative story with its own script. Such a narrative rooted in the congregation's context provides meaning and a level of unity and cohesion, which build resilience for change and transition.<sup>22</sup> This narrative will not be presented as literal or prescriptive and the approach deliberately leaves each congregation and their leaders free to develop a context-dependent narrative and to determine meaning.

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<sup>21</sup> Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 72.

<sup>22</sup> Definitions: *Unity* is a state that is not divided. It may be the outcome of belonging to a group; it may be falsified or temporary; it may be learned or constructed within a community.

*Cohesion* refers to forming a united whole, from the Latin *cohaes*- "cleaved together," and in Christianity and other faiths includes the emotional and spiritual aspects of a common belief system.

*Resilience* is the capacity of a community to respond, mitigate, and adapt to crisis. People who face challenges reach out to their neighbours, friends, family, communities of faith, and other networks to handle issues emotionally, financially, and logistically. Adapted from Daniel P. Aldrich, "Some Communities are Destroyed by Tragedy and Disaster. Others Spring Back. Here's What Makes the Difference," *The Washington Post*, 9 December 2015.

## Discussing the Methodology

This thesis uses the Pastoral Cycle to focus on the social change that the Anglican Church is experiencing.<sup>23</sup> This methodology is a guide, adaptable to context, providing the flexibility to reinterpret and offer changes to church practice in relation to congregations and the wider community.

The cycle is described more accurately as a spiral since there is always a more developed starting point as the process moves forward.<sup>24</sup> This is more than a simple reiteration as there is openness to freedom and creativity along the way, allowing a weaving of the model's elements.<sup>25</sup> It is the *moving forward* of community life that is an essential reason for the choice of the process in this method. The real life case study presented by Paul Ballard and John Pritchard illustrates a congregation adapting to a changing environment.<sup>26</sup> The cycle also searches for peace and justice from a foundation of living tradition and offers "a unifying force because it compels us to work out of the concrete reality in which God has placed us."<sup>27</sup>

Alongside the pastoral cycle, the lens I will use is "seeing, with faith." Opening our eyes to understanding, to perception, to implicit life, and the visual, enables us to *see* with empathy the dynamics of community and individuals during the process of restructuring. *Seeing* looks forward, and only forward, grounded in the context of the seer. People can all *see*, even the blind, and though one's perspective and distance may differ, what is seen is identical before imposing any interpretation. To this extent at that point it is truth. In the Christian religion, the contemplative tradition teaches and develops the ability to see. To see is the active choice of an individual. Thus seeing is a metaphor - a metaphor for spiritual realisation, and the word of God, as well as what is literally seen. Visual experiences may never need to be communicated verbally such as a mother's love for her child. To see is the ability to recognise for oneself through one's own eyes using perception, understanding, and possibly inspiration that are ours alone. A world presented to us by others is a risk in restructuring. Assumptions when observing silence are also a risk.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 73-86.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

The interpretation of silence is imperative. The unity of a Christian community may be seen, but not verbalised – there is no need. This is implicit recognition. Silence may be *seen*, but this is subject to critical awareness. To interpret silence, first an act of silence must be actively chosen quite specifically as silence surrounds us; also there has to be awareness that it is possible to read and interpret silence. Emotional responses may not be spoken, yet they may be critical to successful change and transitions.

Particularly relevant and necessary in the Aotearoa New Zealand context is the avoidance of interpreting one's own culture as representative of other cultures, and assuming any superiority of one culture over another. Honouring the other is an important ideal of both New Zealand identity and the Anglican Church comprised of its three Tikanga.<sup>28</sup>

## **An Overview of the Chapters**

The steps of the pastoral cycle provide the four major chapters. Following in Chapter Two are the research findings foundational to this thesis. The research covers relevant data from the New Zealand Census 2013, and the findings in the Church of England research report *Anecdote to Evidence*. The US research project *Congregations in Changing Communities* adds congregational experience of change. Chapter Three uses Bridges' *Managing Transitions* to theorise about the process of restructuring congregations. The work of Martin Buber and Charles Taylor brings the importance of identity and the meeting and recognition of others into the dynamics of Christian community life. Chapter Four engages with Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*.<sup>29</sup> Here I develop an interpretation of "being One with Christ" - the place where no conflict exists. Being One is the life-giving scenario for Christian community (Gal. 3:28). As noted, a precise plan for action can only be developed for a specific context. However, two necessary aspects of action are discussed in Chapter Five: Moving Forward. First, the narrative of a congregation will come from the remembered emotional past. Secondly, people leaving, and leaving the past behind, need narratives that are able to guide and not hinder the chosen trajectory of a congregation.

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<sup>28</sup> Kevin Clements, *Honouring the Other: The Quest for Respect, Equality and Small Goodnesses in Aotearoa New Zealand*, The 2010 Quaker Lecture (Christchurch: The Religious Society of Friends in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

The concluding chapter draws from the results of the Pastoral Cycle. Firstly the results summarise the constituents of a well-managed process involving the analysis and mitigation of potential risks arising from *conflict*. Secondly, they suggest how seeding growth may be strategically created through the synergy of two or more elements that together create more than either can alone.



## Chapter Two: Learning from Experience

This chapter explores issues relevant to restructuring found in published data and case studies. Learning from this experience is the first step in the process of the Pastoral Cycle methodology.<sup>1</sup> Relevance to the New Zealand Anglican context determines the shaping of the information. The approach is much more than fact finding. Ballard and Pritchard in their approach to researching experience stress the need for openness, humility, and empathy in seeing and understanding what may underlie a response.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding the situations of potential conflict is of primary interest. Some seemingly important issues have been omitted due to the lack of conflict, such as the issue of children's ministry. By comparison, the conflict situation of generational transfer is particularly relevant with its potential for transformation and growth.

A combination of three factors evidence the argument for restructuring:

- The most striking evidence in New Zealand is the continuing reduction in the number of people affiliating with the Anglican Church.
- The relatively new issue of non-compliant church buildings. This is evidenced following the disastrous Canterbury earthquake on 22nd February 2011,<sup>3</sup> when the national New Build Standard was strengthened, increasing the number of non-compliant church buildings throughout the country.<sup>4</sup>
- The NWND Christian churches attracting young people who might in previous ages have joined Anglican congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 87-103.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 88-90.

<sup>3</sup> Melissa Parsons, *Rubble to Resurrection: Churches Respond in the Canterbury Quakes*, Revised ed. (Auckland NZ: DayStar, 2014), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Structural Performance Scoring is the percentage that a building's earthquake damage performance is assessed with respect to the New Build Standard (NBS): NBS ≤33% is considered 'very high risk.' Over 33% is 'high risk.' From 67% to 80% is 'medium risk.' From 80% to 100% is 'low risk.'  
[http://www.nzi.co.nz/Documents/NZI%20Earthquake-prone%20building%20booklet\\_Dec2012-compressed.pdf](http://www.nzi.co.nz/Documents/NZI%20Earthquake-prone%20building%20booklet_Dec2012-compressed.pdf), accessed 18 April 2016.

## Research from New Zealand

The New Zealand Census was to be held in March 2011 but was cancelled due to the Canterbury earthquake.<sup>5</sup> The Census is usually taken every five years; the previous one was taken in March 2006. There is therefore a seven-year gap between the 2006 Census and the 2013 Census. The next Census is due in 2018.

The 2013 Census reveals that the Anglican Church, once New Zealand's largest denomination, has dropped below the Catholic Church in terms of affiliation numbers.<sup>6</sup> The Anglican Church has reduced by 95,154 people over the seven years to 459,771. The Catholic Church by comparison reduced by 16,332 people to 492,105. To set these numbers in context, there were 4 million people in New Zealand in 2006, increasing to 4.2 million by 2013. The change in traditional denominational church numbers are summarised as follows:

Figure 1: Comparison of Changes 2006 to 2013<sup>7</sup>

Traditional Denominations	2006 Census	2013 Census	Change	% change	% of Total 2013 Popn
Anglican	554,925	459,771	- 95,154	-17.1%	10.8%
Baptist	56,913	54,345	- 2,568	-4.5%	1.3%
Catholic	508,437	492,105	- 16,332	-3.2%	11.6%
Methodist	121,806	102,879	- 18,927	-15.5%	2.4%
Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed	400,839	330,516	- 70,323	-17.5%	7.8%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,642,920</b>	<b>1,439,616</b>	<b>- 203,304</b>	<b>-12.4%</b>	<b>33.9%</b>
Total people, New Zealand	4,027,947	4,242,048	214,101	5.3%	100.0%

Significantly, all traditional denominational churches have declined in affiliation since 2006, with Presbyterians showing the greatest percentage decline, followed in order by Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic. The decline of the Anglican Church has been particularly evident since the 1966 Census.<sup>8</sup> A comparison of religious affiliation from 1966 to 2013 highlights the decline in those identifying as Anglican, reducing from 33.7% of the population in 1966 to 10.8% in 2013.<sup>9</sup> This widening gap comprises two elements: the change in Anglican

<sup>5</sup> Note the Census includes Anglican church affiliation within New Zealand. The NZ Census does not include the Pacific Island populations outside of New Zealand.

<sup>6</sup> "Statistics New Zealand 2013 Census," *Statistics New Zealand: Tatauranga Aotearoa*, accessed 30 January 2015, <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2013-census.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix I for the full list of Religious Affiliations.

<sup>8</sup> Lineham, "Look for the Silver Lining," 24. Lineham considers 1945 as the year the decline started for the Anglican Church (as a percentage of the total population rather than actual numbers of adherents).

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix II. The "Religious Professions" table for 1961/1966 is located at: [http://www3.stats.govt.nz/New\\_Zealand\\_Official\\_Yearbooks/1968/NZOYB\\_1968.html](http://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1968/NZOYB_1968.html), accessed 30 January 2015.

affiliation (declining) plus the change in New Zealand's total population (increasing).<sup>10</sup> In a striking contrast the Catholic and Baptist Churches have both increased their affiliation in terms of numbers while Anglican Church numbers have almost halved in the forty-seven years. During the last seven years, the rate of Anglican decline has increased from the previous average of 8,669 per annum to 13,593 per annum.

Figure 2: Comparison of Changes 1966 to 2013<sup>11</sup>

Traditional Denominations	1966 Census	2013 Census	Change	% change 1966 to 2013	% of Total 1966 Popn
Anglican	901,701	459,771	-441,930	-49.0%	33.7%
Baptist	46,748	54,345	7,597	16.3%	1.7%
Catholic	425,280	492,105	66,825	15.7%	15.9%
Methodist	186,260	102,879	-83,381	-44.8%	7.0%
Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed	641,167	330,516	-310,651	-48.5%	24.0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,201,156</b>	<b>1,439,616</b>	<b>-761,540</b>	<b>-34.6%</b>	<b>82.2%</b>
Total people, New Zealand	2,676,919	4,242,048	1,565,129	58.5%	100.0%

It is valid to assume a continuing decline in Anglican affiliation because of both reducing affiliation and the recent increase in the rate of decline. However, affiliation will vary depending on each individual congregation's context and demographic. Census data does not separate affiliation numbers between the three Tikanga of the Anglican Church, and thus the relative decline within each Tikanga cannot be measured from this data source. However, it is quite invalid to assume that the Anglican Church will become extinct, as some writers have suggested.<sup>12</sup> Census data cannot evidence this fact. Congregations form complex networks of people comprising many activity levels with affiliation and attendance only two numerically based measures.

I argue that over all expressions of the Christian faith there is growth hidden under the "net" figure. The Census figures show that even though the number of people with at least one religious affiliation of some kind has decreased between 2006 and 2013, there remain 50.6% New Zealanders with at least one religious affiliation, and 45% in Christian religions, including

<sup>10</sup> Note that the Presbyterian Church number above for 1966 includes the combined figures of Presbyterian 582,976, Congregational 12,101, and Protestant (undefined) 46,090. Reformed was not a category in 1966. Protestant (undefined) was not a published category in 2013. Therefore Presbyterian numbers above for 1966 may be overstated. The Protestant (undefined) category has been included to give completeness of overall mainline denominational numbers.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix II for the full list of Religious Professions from the NZ Census 1966.

<sup>12</sup> As one example from England, see Siobhan Fenton, "Church of England 'One Generation Away from Extinction' after Dramatic Loss of Followers," *The Independent*, 19 August 2015.

the 1.2% in the Māori Christian Religions of Ratana and Ringatū.<sup>13</sup> This level of affiliation does not align with the common view that New Zealand is a secular country.

The rise in the NWND group in New Zealand is recent and has not been researched directly with adherents. I argue that in the 2013 Census data, this group is not only under-represented but also not able to be clearly defined. In the 2013 Individual Census Form the question “What is your religion?” can be answered as “Christian” but the then listed traditional denominations could not be answered by NWND people, except as “other.”<sup>14</sup> This may account for some of the 216,177 categorised as “Christian nfd” in 2013 (186,234 in 2006).<sup>15</sup> This category increased 16% and was the only category to increase between 2006 and 2013.<sup>16</sup> The other question is, at what point does someone reach a level of formation when they are prepared to call themselves “a Christian?” This question cannot be answered from existing information. The NWND group is successful with young people, with *success* measured in terms of their influence and numbers attending church.<sup>17</sup>

The success of NWND churches at the expense of Anglican churches can be evidenced anecdotally. The Anglican church of All Hallows’ Castor Bay, Auckland, was deconsecrated on 17 March 2013 due to dwindling membership (a maximum attendance of twenty at the Sunday service). Nearby in Browns Bay is City Impact Church with 4,000 members.<sup>18</sup> The City Impact senior pastor is quoted as saying “young people like it here because there’s no traditional baggage or old-fashioned mindset” and that “even though churches aren’t businesses, they have to operate like them these days.”<sup>19</sup> This example illustrates both the reality of decline for some Anglican churches, and the strength of the NWND movement.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix I for the list of religious affiliations.

<sup>14</sup> See the 2013 Census Data Dictionary, accessed 24 April 2016, at <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/info-about-2013-census-data/2013-census-data-dictionary.aspx> for Level 1, 2, and 3 coding.

<sup>15</sup> “nfd” stands for “not further defined.”

<sup>16</sup> Using my definition of NWND, Pentecostal numbers should be added to the “Christian nfd” category 74,256 in 2013. There is another category of “Other Christian Religions” which may also include some NWND. The Census categories are set out in Appendix I. The “nfd” group were 5.1% of the population in 2013.

<sup>17</sup> As only two examples, Destiny Church in Auckland seats 1,600 and Equippers fills the Auckland Town Hall every Sunday morning. Arguably the largest of the NWND churches is Life, which has twelve centres in Auckland each with three or four services on a Sunday (plus online and TV coverage). NWND churches (particularly in Auckland) have reached (in my opinion) a level of influence where they are attracting the unchurched.

<sup>18</sup> Details on City Impact Church can be found at [www.cityimpactchurch.com](http://www.cityimpactchurch.com).

<sup>19</sup> Maryke Penman, “Churches Struggling in Tough Market,” (2011), accessed 3 October 2013, [www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/5590267/Churches-struggling-in-tough-market](http://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/5590267/Churches-struggling-in-tough-market).

In summary, the New Zealand Census confirms the increasing decline in affiliation to the Anglican Church. This decline is attributed to both the loss of the traditional demographic source (the children of Anglicans) and attrition due to ageing congregations.<sup>20</sup> However, the decline is also being exacerbated by both the growth in the NWND movement, and by church closures (whether unavoidable or strategic).

## Research from England

*Anecdote to Evidence*, the most recent English research, was published in 2014.<sup>21</sup> It rapidly reached the New Zealand Anglican public.<sup>22</sup> The following comments for the application of this research in New Zealand were noted by Peter Lineham, “despite significant differences between us and the UK ... we share enough of the same challenges to make this clear, professional analysis worthy of our attention.”<sup>23</sup> The Church Growth Research Programme, which ran for 18 months between 2011 and 2013, “sought to investigate the factors influencing church growth within the context of the Church of England. It focused on finding areas of ministry which were showing numerical growth – and finding out why.”<sup>24</sup> In the report, the researchers rightly acknowledge that numerical growth is only one aspect of church growth.

As in New Zealand, affiliation is declining in the Church of England and the reason for the decline is given as the failure to replace older generations of churchgoers with their children, so that “retaining children/youth is critical.”<sup>25</sup> The research findings relevant for restructuring and conflict were as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> Lineham, “Look for the Silver Lining,” 25.

<sup>21</sup> Church of England Spending Plans Task Group, “From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013,” (2014), accessed 23 August 2014, <http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report>.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Lineham, “Traces of Gold Amid the Grey,” *Anglican Taonga* 46 (2014).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction to the Church of England Spending Plans Task Group, “From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013”.

<sup>25</sup> David Voas and Laura Watt, “Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors,” *The Church Growth Research Programme Report on Strands 1 and 2* (2014), accessed 23 August 2014, [http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress\\_findings\\_reports](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports).

for there to be growth, the existing congregation must be *willing to experience change* ... growth involves new people disrupting what might be a cosy club ... shifting lay leadership towards younger and more recent arrivals. Such changes are uncomfortable.<sup>26</sup>

In the statement *willing to experience change*, *willingness* implies change may be the precondition to reversing decline. However I suggest that willingness alone is not enough. Disruption (conflict) is acknowledged as necessary.

Linked with this is another aspect: “growing churches have more positive views, declining churches more negative ones.”<sup>27</sup> This finding anticipates a reinforcing of growth or decline so that growth begets growth and decline begets decline. The tipping point, I suggest, is both (a) between resistance and acceptance of change from within the community, and (b) between decline and growth imposed by external factors. A useful insight is that “doing things by default and not by choice” is a factor in decline.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, *choosing* to experience the conflict of growth is potentially rewarding in itself.

As a measure of growth and decline, affiliation numbers may be more accurate. Attendance numbers are deceptive, particularly in a long-standing denominational church where decline in attendance of the older generation is caused by the inability to physically attend.<sup>29</sup> Similarly children’s sports practices may keep young families away.

The existence of conflict and its possible effects were dealt with by asking a specific quite focused question:

During the past five years has your church experienced any conflict concerning....

- Finances or budget
- Worship style or content
- Priorities for activities or mission
- The issue of gay priests/bishops
- The issue of women priests/bishops
- Priest’s leadership style or personal behaviour

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 3. [Emphasis added]

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>28</sup> Church of England Spending Plans Task Group, "From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013". 30.

<sup>29</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 15.

- Members' personal behaviour
- Use of facilities
- Other area?<sup>30</sup>

The summary analysis of the answers is given as:

Worship style was the most frequent cause of conflict, with close to half of churches reporting problems in this area. The issue of gay priests or bishops was the least likely to cause conflict at a parish level, though even so one church in six had experienced some difficulty. An *impact on growth* is only apparent when there have been problems with finances *or the priest*. It is worth noting that in most cases the reported conflicts were not serious, though roughly one church in nine had had people leave because of disagreements over worship, leadership or members' behaviour. Some of the causes of conflict appear to be related; with the exception of the items on women and gay priests, the variables can be combined to form a single scale.<sup>31</sup>

Expanding on the comment about the ordained minister, the analysis noted:

Managing (and avoiding) conflict may be important; people leave when disputes get out of hand. Knowing how much a church can change is no small skill; the most serious conflicts can actually concern, or be caused by, the ordained minister.<sup>32</sup>

This question was asked of congregants at a point in time, in a known church environment, and no question asked of restructuring or amalgamation at the time of the survey. However, the summary confirms that conflict (in its raw dictionary definition) is related to decline. There was no discussion on the nature of the conflict or, for instance, whether decline in one church might result in growth in another. The question above on conflict and its summary presents nothing new - these are the everyday facts of church life. For a congregation unable to accept or resistant to a change such as gay/women priests/bishops, a polarising "them/us" dichotomy may entrench positions. This dichotomy is discussed further as part of the nature of identity and conflict covered in Chapter Three.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. [Emphasis added]

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 50.

As noted earlier, a congregation must at least start with a willingness to change.<sup>33</sup> The alternative is continuing decline or amalgamation.<sup>34</sup> However, amalgamation was not the answer. David Goodhew led the section of the study on the effect of amalgamations.<sup>35</sup> The study found the following:

churches where there is a single minister [an appointed leader of any status, lay or ordained]<sup>36</sup> for a single church are markedly more likely to grow than churches which are amalgamated with others. And the more churches amalgamated together, the more likely that those churches are to decline. In addition, the propensity for amalgamation-related decline increases as churches get larger.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, if a large (100+ usual Sunday attendance) church has smaller churches added, it declines to a greater degree (despite the increased size of the congregation). By comparison, in smaller churches that have other churches added to them, decline is slower.<sup>38</sup> The study acknowledges that this is a broad generalisation, but the correlations are statistically significant.<sup>39</sup>

The one exception is that,

very small churches (those under fifteen members) behave differently to the rest of the data ... they are all performing better [particularly where there is a dedicated leader] ... they are more likely to grow than other churches – but contain only a small fraction of the membership of the Anglican church ... mainly situated in small rural communities ... [and] contain very few children.<sup>40</sup>

Because of such small numbers, this group cannot be used as a model for larger churches. The lack of children in these small churches is seen as *the* key factor in future decline.<sup>41</sup> The relationship of children to decline is not and I suspect cannot be directly validated as the single

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<sup>33</sup> Church of England Spending Plans Task Group, "From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013". 11.

<sup>34</sup> Note that the word *amalgamation* in the context of this UK research may mean, for example, the amalgamating of two congregations into one, and it may also mean a situation when one ordained minister becomes responsible for two separate congregations. The list of seven official terms for *amalgamation* is at Goodhew, Kautzer, and Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church". 41n59.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 40-92.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 135-136.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 90. Note that correlation does not prove causation.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



key causal factor for small churches. The comment regarding lack of children appears to restate expectations from a previous age. What is important for the mission of the Christian faith, and any size congregation, is a report from the Evangelical Alliance that 84% of church members become Christians by the age of twenty-five, and 72% by the age of nineteen.<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, attendance of those under twenty-five years of age in any Christian church environment is vital.

The English study acknowledges that finance and the shrinking pool of clergy drive amalgamations, not theology.<sup>43</sup> Theology for amalgamation of congregations and theology to support weathering change are not given in this study. The study specifically recommends an increase in the number of lay and ordained church leaders in the local church as a strategic response to avoid amalgamations.<sup>44</sup> Finance however remains an issue. The study found that theological tradition made no significant difference to growth or decline.<sup>45</sup> This is also apparent in the US research.<sup>46</sup> I have therefore not compared theological traditions.

The conclusion to the section on amalgamations notes, “There are many factors that cause churches to grow and decline. The data is not sufficiently detailed or robust to prove causation categorically.”<sup>47</sup> The inability to prove causation is quite a limitation when one particularly wants to prevent further decline and seed growth. The study had hoped to examine what effect reorganisation had on amalgamations.<sup>48</sup> However, such analysis was not possible and suggested that a “detailed examination of a single diocese as a case-study would provide sufficiently nuanced data to discuss how reorganisation affects growth trends in amalgamations.”<sup>49</sup> To fill this gap, I have included the US study *Congregations in Changing Communities*.

Related to amalgamation is the issue of church closure. There is little support for closure in *Anecdote to Evidence* with the main reason given as being “when a church closes many of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 24. For full details see The Evangelical Alliance, "Confidently Sharing the Gospel? A Snapshot of the Beliefs and Habits of Evangelical Christians in the UK," (2012), accessed 21 March 2016, [www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/confidently-sharing-the-gospel.cfm](http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/confidently-sharing-the-gospel.cfm).

<sup>43</sup> Goodhew, Kautzer, and Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church". 92.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>45</sup> Church of England Spending Plans Task Group, "From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013". 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Goodhew, Kautzer, and Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church". 90.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 85-87.

congregation will not transfer to another church, but simply stop going to church.”<sup>50</sup> In the qualitative section,<sup>51</sup> the most helpful comments were in the footnotes: “there is evidence to suggest that those dioceses which close most churches are more likely to decline.”<sup>52</sup> A mitigating option is to continue the concept of “Festival Churches.”<sup>53</sup> These comments relate to rural parishes and are particularly relevant for New Zealand.<sup>54</sup>

In summary, there are relevant points for New Zealand from this English study. Amalgamations are unlikely to seed growth in congregations, and closures will exacerbate decline. The study was unable to prove why amalgamations *per se* generally did not work. For growth, at least the willingness to change and to experience change with its associated conflict must exist. The conflict generated from change has to be managed or people leave. Amalgamations and closures have generally been driven by decline of people, finance, and a shortage of clergy, rather than by a strategic response. As case studies were not part of the Church of England’s research study, the difficulty was to find (a) root sources of *conflict* inherent in change and transformation, and (b) why decline is sourced from a lack of *conflict*. These questions are illustrated in the experience of the US congregations that follow.

## Research from the United States

*Congregations in Changing Communities* took as its starting point the relationship between social change and congregational life.<sup>55</sup> The relationship between congregations and community change was seen as a cause of dislocation for churches, synagogues, and other local religious gatherings: an indicator of possible decline or growth. Nancy Tatom Ammerman led the research

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 132n171. See Carol S.B. Roberts and Leslie J. Francis, "Church Closure and Membership Statistics: Trends in Four Rural Dioceses," *Rural Theology* 4, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>51</sup> For the qualitative section, eighty lay and ordained leaders from team ministries and amalgamations came together in a series of day conferences. Their experiences and views were surveyed using a mix of questionnaires and focus group discussion. Goodhew, Kautzer, and Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church". 114.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 129n166.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 130n169. Festival Churches would avoid closure by having worship on festivals and perform occasional offices as requested. The village community would take responsibility for upkeep. For a more detailed discussion of this idea see: <http://alwaysperhaps.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/festival-churches-a-step-towards-sustainable-rural-church-ministry-into-the-future/>. Accessed 21 December 2014.

<sup>54</sup> See also the New Zealand study by Laurence H. Ennor, "Effects of Closing a Small Rural Church" (Dissertation, Master of Ministry, University of Otago, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 3.

team. The first book published out of this study was *Congregation and Community*,<sup>56</sup> followed by *Studying Congregations*,<sup>57</sup> and *Churches in Transition*.<sup>58</sup>

First, the survey identified geographical areas “where changes were fundamental enough to have produced perceived dislocation.”<sup>59</sup> Racial change and white flight were specifically excluded.<sup>60</sup> Recent church placements were also excluded.<sup>61</sup> Of the 449 congregations found, 300 were surveyed for a complete history and programming, and these covered over 60 denominational identities.<sup>62</sup> The focus congregations were chosen from these to give eighteen congregations where more nuanced information was to be gathered. To this group was added a further five small struggling congregations, to give the final twenty-three churches surveyed in depth.<sup>63</sup> The range categories included nine churches with less than 100 members, eight with 100-499, and six over 500. The dislocations identified in the geographic areas included immigration, integration, significant factory closings, suburban growth, African American socio-economic stratification, and a gay/lesbian influx.<sup>64</sup>

Ammerman’s *Congregation and Community* recounts the unique and complicated stories of each of these twenty-three congregations based on the theory that “the theology of a congregation is best understood as its own telling of sacred stories.”<sup>65</sup> The focus was “how the congregation had changed, especially as a consequence of the changes in its context” by “learning how the members tell their story and what their primary theological tenets are.”<sup>66</sup> For this thesis, while looking for expressions of the nature of conflict, its source, and outcomes in the case studies presented, I also found examples of unexpected enmity, courage and insight. Throughout the case studies there is conflict mainly evidenced in the issues of changes of identity. This conflict

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman et al., eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 4. Ammerman states that racial change is fraught with difficulty and previous studies have looked at this issue exclusively.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 41. Table 1.12 lists the study congregations by size and denominational family.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 36-43. See Table 1.1 pp. 5-7 for the geographic areas chosen and the identified major social change being experienced.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 42. See Appendix A pp. 371-376 for the questions asked, and Appendix B p. 377 for the Congregational Survey.

is shown through resistance to change, nostalgia for a past identity, and through anticipation of letting go of a past identity and adapting to a new identity positioned for the future.

Churches offer members a strong sense of identity through the facets of their tradition. An individual's place in their church is also a place of identity in the power structure. Each congregation has a unique culture of its own, built up as a characteristic way of doing things, "developing a complex network of signals and symbols and conventions."<sup>67</sup> As Ammerman states, "the small things of everyday life give shape and identity to a particular congregation, and those small things will prove the most resistant as the congregation faces new challenges and incorporates new constituencies."<sup>68</sup>

The following analysis focuses on potential conflict situations related to growth or decline. The congregations are grouped in the study by their main response to change, although there is some overlap. The issues discussed are relevant in the New Zealand context. Appendix III lists the twenty-three churches under six responses to change.

## **1. Persistence in the Face of Change**

These five congregations faced decline in their numbers and possible closure.<sup>69</sup> Habit, tradition, and the weight of the past blunt their ability to imagine a changed future. Expressions such as *inertia*, *obsolescence*, *loss*, *memories*, and *hanging on*, are found in the analyses. In the counter-story, there is an implicit sense of the congregations being *blamed* for their situation, and a negative bias toward older age (over sixty years). As in New Zealand and England, the natural inflow of a demographic constituency has dried up, or the demographic of their geographic catchment area has changed, eventually isolating the existing congregation. Little involvement in the wider community has resulted in a lack of appreciation by the congregation of the distance between themselves and those outside. This may be an inevitable fact for elderly members whose own personal sphere of influence is shrinking. For these congregations, each from a different denominational tradition, there is "a perception that change in their core identity is unnecessary, impossible, or both."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 63-106.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 65.

A sense of powerlessness ensues not only from age but it may also ensue from the decision-making structures of the overarching denomination, and from the control of long-term tight-knit committee members. In all cases decline is begetting decline; to change identity and remove the barriers to outsiders is obviously a very painful thought, akin to bereavement, and it must be questioned whether change is necessary while a congregation is viable. These congregations appear to be past the point of actively making a change in their trajectory. Eventually, all things being equal, death will come and the churches will either be sold, or handed on to a new congregation.

The issue of decline emanates from their avoidance of conflict, and by their allowing *the past*, however that is constituted, to dominate. The power of the forces that create this inertia should not be underestimated. Much can be learned from these congregations and how despite their faithfulness their pathway has been one of decline, not always of their own making.

## **2. Relocating: New Places, New Identities<sup>71</sup>**

For this group their existing identity has become paramount. These congregations facing ethnic change in their area are endeavouring to avoid decline and stay together. In essence, they are avoiding the struggle of changing identity. Three congregations were considering relocating at the time the research was being carried out. A further two niche congregations have unique identities and are growing, by not changing their identity and by not relocating.

Generational transfer (replacing those in positions of influence with newcomers or younger members) and the conflict of identity inherent in this change have been consciously avoided so far at East Lynn Disciples of Christ or are being worked through at First Baptist. The power-base of the long-term members acts as a barrier to younger or newer people coming into leadership roles. Decision-making structures also affect this group of congregations, as in the previous group. Generational transfer is discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

Insider/outsider issues exist but South Meridian Church of God evidences a more fluid boundary and thus more potential for growth. Barriers come in forms such as tradition, and ways of doing things that have been shaped over time. Barriers once formed become part of a congregation's

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 107-160. This category title given by the study is somewhat ambiguous.

identity separating them from *the other*. Barriers may then be further entrenched by the developing culture of the congregation. For two congregations, relocation may not solve decline as they are not resolving existing barriers. The difference between *barriers* and *boundaries* is discussed further in Chapter Four under the heading “Self Protection.”<sup>72</sup>

### **3. Adaptation: Integrating Gay and Straight**

Three congregations are included in this grouping.<sup>73</sup> The issues they face and the way they approach their identity provide useful insights where congregations reposition for a new future by amalgamating existing and new people. Ammerman comments, “their paths have not been without struggle, and they have often encountered conflict and failure. But what has emerged ... is a new sense of who they are.”<sup>74</sup> Rather than ignoring their gay members, with the assumption that conflict can be avoided, these three congregations faced the potential conflict and adapted. Members who did not agree left, and the congregations became open to previously excluded members. These congregations do not want to be defined by sexual orientation but tension comes from retaining a balance between gay and straight members. The openness to conflict and adaptation of these congregations help ensure their future, although unity appears hard-won for the pastors.

The use of distinctive words is more apparent in this group. These congregations are openly inclusive in the biblical concepts they model. Reported examples are “God cares for everyone” and “no-questions-asked acceptance” both from St Matthew’s Catholic; “no one has to believe what everyone else believes” and “open and affirming” from First Congregational. And from First Existentialist, “here those otherwise without a voice can speak freely” and “respecting one another’s differences.”

The approach to management of St Matthews Catholic avoids the powerlessness resulting from what could be an autocratic denomination. This congregation generates the energy required by giving their people a voice in the freedom of lay ministries.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The definition of “self protection” in this thesis relates to identity protection. It does not encompass physical protection.

<sup>73</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 161-197.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

#### 4. Adaptation: Integrating Across Cultures

These three congregations have integrated cultural groups of different races, languages, socio-economic class, and heritages so that the congregations are so diverse they do not share a common identity; their meeting point in diversity is their religious fictive kinship.<sup>76</sup> Conflict is deemed inevitable at this level of diversity.

Diversity is celebrated among these people and is reflected in the words they use: Brighton Evangelical's "each one has received an invitation from God to God's table," and City Baptist's "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek" and "without distinction." City Baptist in particular uses music relevant to each of its cultures to aid a cohering narrative and identity.

Hinton United Methodist is surviving despite the nearby Hebron Baptist that has three thousand members. Hinton's membership is growing (seventy-five members) by preserving some of the old along with the new. However, Hinton and City Baptist each have a narrative that includes the pain of a schism caused by a previous pastor's theology and this pain remains with the congregations' longer-term members and continues as part of the narrative of each church. *Leaving* is discussed further in Chapter Five.

#### 5. Adaptation: Creating New Internal Structures

These three churches are adapting to the changes that became necessary in their internal administrative systems.<sup>77</sup> From Ammerman's summary, "the most clear common denominator is a strong pastor, willing to weather conflict in the pursuit of a new way of doing the congregation's business."<sup>78</sup> These churches have congregations of "500+" but it is difficult to establish if *weathering conflict* has enabled this level of growth.<sup>79</sup> For Carmel United Methodist, conflict arose when the unofficial power-brokers were ignored. Hope Baptist's pastor runs the church as a theocracy (the majority is not in charge) and this has quite dramatically changed the way the church is run administratively. The conflict that ensued meant that some people left and thus the conflict left with them. However, the remaining congregation appears to feel they are

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 198-228.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 229-260.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 41. Table 1.12 "Study Congregations by Size and Denominational Family" define the largest congregations as "500+." See Appendix III for the list of congregations.

not valued due to the lack of consultation (evidencing conflict avoidance on the part of leadership).

Grace Baptist ran into financial difficulties under a tight-knit leadership. A new pastor was appointed and led the church back to financial security. Tithing and generosity from the whole congregation has since given everyone a sense of ownership. Opportunities now exist for the congregation to question and discuss, drawing on the whole congregation particularly for important issues. Grace Baptist is noted as having televised church services (in 1992) and new members are often new converts. There is an air of perceived secular adversity (them/us) encouraging members to centre their lives on the church and its members.

## **6. Innovation: Birth and Rebirth**

Two *reborn* and two new church plants make up this group.<sup>80</sup> The reborn congregations, after a radical break, changed their identity. The new church plants were free to come into existence, starting with a blank slate. These four growing congregations have strategically chosen their futures.

Good Shepherd Lutheran is an example of a congregation positively supported by its denomination in its chosen *resurrection*. The use of this biblical narrative describes their journey forward, as does their openness to the gay community, racial tolerance, and use of inclusive language. Their mission statement is “embracing the diversity of God’s creation and celebrating our oneness in Christ.” This congregation works through conflict toward consensus before voting on an issue. Conflict arose from generational transfer exacerbated in a them/us dichotomy of *old* and *new*.<sup>81</sup> *Reborn* is now their new unifying narrative.

Epworth United Methodist’s conscious decision to radically change its identity was quite recent at the time of the research. In their story, being reborn is full of struggle as transformation takes place. There is honouring of the past, generational transfer, new pastors that fit the profile of the potential congregation, and an acute awareness of context. The narrative is a new church built on the original foundation.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 261-309.

<sup>81</sup> The word *old* in this context refers to ideas and ways that are no longer appropriate given a *new* narrative. It does not refer to chronological age. *Old* retains its honour; i.e. there is no derogatory implication.



It stands out that the two new church plants have freedom to develop their own identities, without being hindered by any prior identity and without the conflict of changing identity. Yet, there is not complete freedom. These identities are formed as a considered strategic response to the demographic in their locale, deliberately matching a religious style that attracts the younger demographic. St Lawrence is Catholic and Northview is effectively an NWND. These identities have both spiritual and religious formation, but would not be termed transformational as congregations, although this may well be the case for individuals. Both these congregations show how successful a strategic church plant can be from nil to an average attendance in the category “500+.”

## **Summary**

The main themes in the research findings from New Zealand, England, and the US are synthesised below. Although many themes could be chosen, the following relate to change and conflict. The potential energy of conflict is shown to be life giving for many of the US congregations and is to be embraced. Also and equally, the response of the declining churches can inform us.

The main themes relevant for New Zealand are:

- a) Embracing Change and Conflict
- b) Avoiding Change and Conflict
- c) The Use of Narrative
- d) Power
- e) A Strategic Future
- f) Amalgamation and Closure

### **a) Embracing Change and Conflict**

Negotiating religious identity has been evident in formation and re-formation. Conflict arises when identity is threatened. The process of working through conflict, in a life-giving way, has shaped the eventual transformation. In some of the US congregations surveyed, a level of

conflict is assumed, thus constantly reinforcing change as a way of life. The level of this conflict does not appear to threaten overall stability. Well-managed conflict contributes to survival.

Conflict appears, not only where there is transition in identity, but also where there is a high level of diversity resulting in no clear identity other than *religious community*.<sup>82</sup> This is evident in congregations where there is no common denominator such as race, language or heritage. Some congregations are uniting this diversity through music, cohering narratives, and clear structures for decision-making. Learning to continuously adapt will bode well for their future.

Consensus, or at least the existence of an overwhelming majority before voting, is shown to be a necessary criterion to give life and energy to a decision. The comment made by the researcher at Incarnation Episcopal evidences the truth that a majority vote does not mean a wholehearted adoption of a new programme and that more is needed.<sup>83</sup> Voting on a change has the potential to force a divide and thus increases the potential for conflict and breakdown rather than transformation.

Well-chosen pastors are shown as able to lead congregations out of the past, to face the future, to negotiate conflict, and to determine a congregation's future. The most serious conflict situations in the US case studies came from schisms between pastor and congregation. This is echoed in the English research.<sup>84</sup>

## **b) Avoiding Change and Conflict**

From the research on the US congregations there are valuable indicators of why and how conflict is avoided and decline is reinforced. Decline *per se* is not an issue, unless it is made an issue to be solved. Where decline is coming from an unwillingness to engage in conflict, and the pain that will be engendered, then these congregations will remain relatively unchanged and will continue to reinforce their existing identity. The description of these congregations is "peaceful," a description that has some theological validity.<sup>85</sup> They are unable to recognise a need for change and/or are powerless to change. There is certainly unwillingness to engage in anything

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<sup>82</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 198.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>84</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 50.

<sup>85</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 335.

contentious with other congregation members. Decline is exacerbating decline (from both England and the US). The congregations relocating are avoiding the potential threat to their identity. By contrast, the niche congregations are able to reinforce their unique identity and are growing.

Of the congregations that have resisted change, one is described as a *remnant of the past*. These words leave an unnecessarily negative impression on the reader, and the narrative could have been worded to honour the ageing demographic of the congregation and loyalty to their tradition. These “persisting” churches are valid worshipping communities. For instance, St Catherine's has three hundred people attending Mass over a weekend and supports a church school; Brighton Avenue Baptist was moving toward a rebirth with a Brazilian congregation already renting space. The Quaker congregation is loyal to its identity and much can be learned from this tradition, particularly from their consensus approach to decision-making. Carmel Wesleyan is competing with forty other churches in its geographic area. In Carmel United Methodist's history is an attempted merger - this was successful initially, but the new members had left within a year. One cause for this lack of success may have been inexperience with mergers.

Change *per se* is not a predictor of success or growth (England and the US). The English research found closing churches exacerbates decline, which is possibly a counter-intuitive finding. When faced with change individuals may choose to leave their congregation. Their leaving removes conflict and thereby enables the possibility of transformation for those remaining.

The fact that leaving is even mentioned in some of Ammerman's case studies exposes the significant level of pain carried in these congregations' narrative history. By contrast, all congregations have people leave and these less painful events may not be carried in narrative. The English research found that one church in nine had people leave because of disagreements.<sup>86</sup> Of the US congregations, St Matthews Catholic could not have transformed if the resistant members had not left. The congregation that has had members leave may well experience the pain of broken relationships. The implicit narrative of broken relationships may include feelings of sin and guilt on both sides of the division, particularly if some leaving members have left Christianity altogether. Broken relationships are discussed further in Chapter Four.

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<sup>86</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 49.

### **c) The Use of Narrative**

The US and English research found a congregation's theology is not a predictor of its response to change, or of growth or decline.<sup>87</sup> A necessary aid to adaptation for St Matthews was the congregation modelling Jesus' openness, acceptance, and concern. Ammerman explains that congregations have to "discover elements in their own theological heritage that could be turned to the task of explaining and encouraging change."<sup>88</sup> The theology of a congregation becomes the foundation for the reshaping of its future. Each congregation owns its theology as sacred story shaped in the past and it is from this foundational theology that reshaping theology is drawn. The narrative a church uses may act to cohere disparate issues.

The narrative grows out of a congregation's embryonic identity giving substance and understanding to the future identity. A temporary narrative may be useful, for instance during a restructure. Ammerman's work with the congregations' sacred stories has resulted in the reporting of the narratives that congregations are using as identifiers of their religious stance. This stance is a position of strength. These narratives appear key to unifying a congregation, and setting perspective for the journey ahead. For this reason, further discussion on the use and criteria for narratives is included in Chapter Five.

### **d) Power**

Power appears in various guises across all congregations, whether avoiding or embracing conflict. Church hierarchies dominate, support, or are invisible. The position taken by the hierarchy determines the response in the congregation ranging from powerlessness, to energy and vitality – a sense of being in charge of their own destiny. As well as this hierarchical position, the pastor's approach may result in similar outcomes. Within congregations, power resides with influencers, the power-brokers, those with the strongest voice, those with the numbers, etc. In contrast there are the silent voices of the elderly, the young, the newcomers, women possibly although not always, and the culturally determined voices of gentleness.

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<sup>87</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 342.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

In terms of internal structures, in some cases there are overly prescribed rules that appear necessary to restrict people to their roles. Voting may be a required procedure despite the potential of voting to force division and exacerbate conflict. Justice can be subverted within a voting environment, particularly in an imbalanced voting pool. Christian theology supports consensus.

Generational transfer is an issue rooted in power. The US case studies, and the English research,<sup>89</sup> confirm the difficulty of moving long-term members out of positions of power and relinquishing their roles to a younger generation and newcomers.<sup>90</sup> Generational transfer may relate to any ministry position. The power of the long-term experienced members is found in the identity that has developed around them, as well as the financial stake they may have made in the church and its buildings. Understandably, they may “feel” a sense of ownership.

#### **e) A Strategic Future**

In the three countries, it is acknowledged that congregations are not replacing their numbers from their traditional source – children and geographic communities. Carmel United Methodist is a congregation that acknowledges the children they are teaching will not be part of the congregation as adults, nor will the church be the centre of community life. This perspective has allowed them to plan a non-traditional, creative and more open future “across different polities, different theologies, different cultures, and different levels of resources.”<sup>91</sup> The pastor at Epworth United Methodist acknowledges that churches of the future will not be made up of people who have known each other for fifty years.<sup>92</sup> There is now an expectation of continuous turnover. Once continuous turnover is accepted, then again creative planning opens to a non-traditional future. A non-traditional approach relevant for the people of the future will provide the new narrative. This gives much broader possibilities than concentrating solely on children’s ministry.

There will be future issues for some congregations, which have not been acknowledged in the research cited. These issues may become issues for future congregations to deal with. One is the

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<sup>89</sup> Voas and Watt, “Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors”. 3.

<sup>90</sup> New Zealand now has limited term tenures for wardens and vestry in the Anglican Church.

<sup>91</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 260.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

*traditional family* orientation of many Christian churches in Western countries. Traditional families are becoming the minority in society, with single people in New Zealand overtaking in terms of numbers.<sup>93</sup> This change in demographic has repercussions for churches that continue to preach a theology of what is right and what is wrong. Another issue is all-male leadership that exists in some congregations in New Zealand, England, and the US case studies. Again, this goes against societal trends. There will be generational and cultural transfer in the future as new generations arrive and globalisation possibly brings together more ethnicities and cultures. The Bible's stories will be reawakened in these new contexts.

#### **f) Amalgamation and Closure**

The English research found little support for closure and found that closure exacerbates decline (in both numbers and presumably finances). Already-closed churches were not part of the US research. Business models with a profit motive would close churches to achieve rationalisation and efficiency. This approach is in tension with a theological approach that freely may ignore these tenets. The New Zealand data suggests that closure of some church buildings will be inevitable for congregations that cannot maintain financial viability or where buildings are an earthquake risk. For New Zealand congregations, amalgamation is the precedent most likely to be followed where amalgamation and re-formation of congregations is the precursor to the final closure of church buildings, despite knowing that such closures fuel decline. As stated in Chapter One, the amalgamation of congregations and closure of sacred spaces are not covered in detail as they are thesis topics in their own right.

#### **Why Theory?**

What is missing from the above research is the theory of the process of transition during restructuring. Change may be from church closure, a cultural shift in the demographic, overcoming socio-economic distinctions, or changing the style of the music. A foundation in the theory of transitions is required to build an awareness of how conflict may come into play, caused or ameliorated by the process of change. An understanding is also required of how

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<sup>93</sup> "Statistics New Zealand 2013 Census". Table: Legally Registered Relationship Status - 1,586,949 Single people (this includes Divorced/Separated/Widowed etc.) and Married 1,469,814.

religious identity comes to be formed, why threatening this identity causes the conflicts apparent in the case studies, and how identity may inform relationships.

I have identified issues relevant to New Zealand congregations. As stated, no one denominational theology is more successful. Once denominational theology is put aside, what becomes apparent is that the culture of a congregation and the extent to which a person identifies with that culture is most relevant, particularly for newcomers. However, I argue that theology is an important perspective when a denomination is looking at restructuring and should not be ignored. A foundation in theology supports the authentic way a denomination is presented to the world. A best-practice model balancing theology and theory from other disciplines aims to produce a well-managed restructuring process that supports the potential for growth and the reputation of the Church in the wider community.

In the next chapter, I bring in the theory from other disciplines. Chapter Four forms the theological reflection.

## Chapter Three: Exploration

The second step of the Pastoral Cycle explores academic disciplines that will contribute to the learning experiences found in Chapter Two.<sup>1</sup> For this thesis, the academic disciplines are applied from business and philosophy.

First, the process of transition from the business world is brought to the congregational context. I argue that a process for transitions is required to identify how and why conflict may become apparent at the different stages in restructuring. The process is also valid for everyday issues, such as changes in worship style and generational transfer. William Bridges' practical experience implementing change in business, builds on Arnold van Gennep's structure of ritual that locates meaning at each stage of change.<sup>2</sup> Donelson Forsyth's study of group dynamics adds further understanding.<sup>3</sup> In the practical context of a restructuring church, legal matters, earthquake codes, and building consents may also be important at this stage.

Secondly, I have built from the discipline of philosophy a framework for discussing relationships in Christian community. This framework provides a brief, but necessary, benchmark. Individuals are able to live in harmony during change through understanding. I argue the natural tension that inherently exists between identity formation and relationships needs to be understood when restructuring congregations. Identity formation and relationships are the primal sources of conflict. To provide the illustrative benchmark I have turned to the work of two philosophers, Martin Buber and Charles Taylor. Movements away from the benchmark allow social boundaries to be explored and understood, revealing the reasons conflict may be evident. In the practical context of a restructuring church, the people of the congregation are known and the level of conflict anticipated. Their actions may be measured against this benchmark.

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 104-110.

<sup>2</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*.

<sup>3</sup> Donelson R. Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, Sixth ed. (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014).



What is apparent from the US research in Chapter Two is that change cannot avoid conflict if transformation is the required outcome, and where there is unresolved divisive conflict people tend to leave their congregations. In a worst-case scenario, congregational members who refuse to let go will fight back. Published examples exist in Australia<sup>4</sup> and the US<sup>5</sup> of closed church congregations who have done just that. Failure caused by restructuring is well-known in the business environment and is encapsulated in the following quotation from a professor at the Harvard Business School, “a bungled corporate restructuring can turn a good idea into disaster.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, well-managed restructuring is extremely important as a foundation to seed the potential for growth. Well-managed restructuring should minimise divisive conflict situations, and the pain that may be instilled in a congregation’s narrative (Chapter Five).

## 1. Managing Transitions

The perceived threat in restructuring is the possibility of change. This perception is the change in identity. Destabilising identity presents the greatest challenge in the church environment. The definition of an identity crisis is “a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person’s sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society.”<sup>7</sup> Identity goes deeper than this due to the family nature of a congregation. Therefore, a congregation’s response to change is key. When a baby is born into a family, transitions are willingly made. By contrast, having to welcome into a congregational or family setting those who are “too different, too poor, and too dirty” is more difficult.<sup>8</sup> *Change* may be easy (the practical side) but *transitions* (the psychological process) are where the potential for conflict to transform or to divide a congregation is very much present. Even in congregations that appear not to change, there is change: pastors retire, people move into care, people die and new people may join. No congregation can avoid these changes, or the transitioning effects they may experience.

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<sup>4</sup> Regina Lane, *Saving St Brigid's* (Carlton South, Australia: Bridin Books, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). And, Philip Marcelo, "Judge Orders Protesters to End 11-Year Vigil Inside Closed Church," *Huffington Post* (2015), accessed 14 September 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/15/11-year-vigil-closed-church\\_n\\_7291942.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/15/11-year-vigil-closed-church_n_7291942.html) [sic].

<sup>6</sup> Stuart A. Gilson, "How to Make Restructuring Work for your Company," (2010), accessed 2 November 2015, [www.hbswk.hbs.edu/item/2476.html](http://www.hbswk.hbs.edu/item/2476.html).

<sup>7</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Second Revised ed. (Oxford University Press), Kindle Edition, s.v. “identity crisis.”

<sup>8</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 202.

Nancy Tatom Ammerman grouped the US case studies by the response of congregations to change. In these case studies, the pastor is often recorded as leading the transition process. In business, changes follow a planned pathway possibly with qualified change managers appointed and with staff on the payroll. By contrast, in the freedom of association of a congregational environment, congregational change is fuzzy, unpredictable, and ideally focused on the transition of the people in the congregation. For every person in a congregation there will be an opinion and each response is important. In a naturally cohesive congregation, change may only be fully accepted once consensus is more or less reached. With an amalgamation of congregations and the influx of new identities, I argue that consensus is the ideal path when congregations chart their way forward together.

I have set out the transition pathway under five headings:

- Planning
- Process
- The Transition
- The Ending
- The Beginning

## **Planning**

In the context of New Zealand Anglican churches, the assumption is that restructuring is most likely to be caused by a lack of viability, resourcing, and closure of unsafe church buildings. First, the need to restructure must be accepted, so that the associated need for personal change is also accepted.<sup>9</sup> The leadership paradigms for business and church environments differ. Businesses generally use a “top down” process; the church has servants, which is the opposite. Restructuring is a time to make unavoidable changes, yet it also provides an opportunity to make further changes. This planning is invisible to congregations; leaders must understand the process first. The transition commences as soon as the possibility of restructuring is made public.

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<sup>9</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 16 and 111-112.

## Process

Van Gennep identified the process of rites of passage as “endings,” “neutral zone,” and “beginnings.” He did this based on anthropological observation of tribal behaviour where progression from one state to another state is accompanied by special acts enveloped in ceremony. Each stage of a ritual provides clear meaning to what stops and what starts. Bridges uses the same three-step process in his development of a structure for understanding and managing business transitions. Rites of passage are particularly relevant in the Christian tradition, and can be seen in baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Rites may also be developed within congregations for special events and may be performed where there are passages from one state to another, such as in restructuring.

In dialogue with Bridges’ material, this thesis discusses the process of rites of passage as a way of managing congregations in transition. This enables observation of the likely points where conflict may be either part of transformation and growth, where it may divide people, or where avoidance results in decline. The use of a process enables structure to be given to the US research, which would otherwise be a collection of congregational case studies unable to be analysed in terms of transitions.

In an amalgamation of congregations, there is the practical ending (for instance, the last service as a distinct congregation), and there is a new start (the first service as part of the new congregation). The transition itself (the psychological process) for leaders, individuals and the congregation is from the minute restructuring is mentioned as necessary. The *ending* (of the *old*) and the *beginning* (of the *new*) may conflate in time, psychologically and physically.<sup>10</sup> A discussion of each of the three phases of Bridges’ model is useful for understanding the process of change and transition. In reality in a congregation all three, or any of the three phases, may be happening at any one time.<sup>11</sup> I will use the terminology of *transition*, *ending* and *beginning* (each as a psychological process) specifically in relation to congregations facing restructuring.

The complexity of transition should not be underestimated and particularly not for leaders. Leadership continues from the planning stage and through all three phases, not necessarily in a

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<sup>10</sup> The word *old* refers to ideas and ways that are no longer appropriate given a *new* narrative. It does not refer to chronological age. *Old* retains its honour; i.e. there is no derogatory implication.

<sup>11</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 9.

linear fashion. For a pastor this means leading all the people into the transition/s, and into the new beginning, with the ending anywhere between.<sup>12</sup> This may be a continuous reiterative cycle with possibly more than one transition at a time or continuous transition as a way of life. While pastors are the single focus of many of Ammerman's case studies, there will be groups such as elders or vestries around them. These leaders face their own personal transitions, and at the same time they are forming the transition process for their congregation. The *beginning* for leaders is the commencement of restructuring of their own congregation.

## The Transition

The transition of a congregation is not based on *chronos* time but on both the psychological and spiritual place of each individual. In a case where a congregation moves from its church to join another congregation, the transition does not occur during the week inbetween. The transition exists from the point identity is threatened, to a point in the future where people will form and solidify a new identity, whenever that might be. If there has been coherent planning, then unrelated and unexpected changes may be avoided that are likely to cause upset (conflict). There can be purpose to this time in transition, which may need to be reinforced by a fresh narrative. For congregations this narrative will likely be spoken from the pulpit, enabling the sense of identification and connectedness with one another. This is the time when *old* identity moves to dis-identity (negating identity) and is then able to grow through to the new identity.

The action of *moving forward* is the underlying imperative in the methodology of the Pastoral Cycle. Leaving a church is one response of those who do not want to change their personal religious or social identity, and for those remaining the transition may be a confusing and uncomfortable place. However, in this confusing place lies the opportunity for innovation (more confusion) in trying out new ideas. Transition is the formative stage of a transformation and the resulting chaos is hospitable to new ideas while reorientation and redefinition take place.<sup>13</sup>

During times of transition, there is a strong likelihood of congregations reverting to the *old* ways and the *old* identity, given the opportunity. This is evident in Ammerman's case studies mainly where congregations are relocating and on the cusp of a beginning. Bridges identifies this

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 158-162.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 43.

reversion and resistance coming partly from removal of the *old* ways, and the risk of sabotage.<sup>14</sup> Also identified is the divergent wish to rush forward in order to escape the confusion. This wish to either revert or rush forward may produce a polarising them/us dichotomy among the congregation. Such a situation is the opposite of what is required. Through transition, there is time for healing from an ending and for moving forward, together, toward transformation.

Bridges stresses the need for communications to “keep people feeling included in and connected to the organisation.”<sup>15</sup> Communication also stills the misinformation. Ammerman’s case studies reflect many churches (apparently successfully) using extremely open forums for discussion. By contrast, Hope Baptist is run as a theocracy and major changes may happen without discussion (causing some conflict). For those experienced in restructuring, a common occurrence is for every voice to know a different answer. Bridges repeats this same proposition “one person says one thing and someone else says something completely different.”<sup>16</sup> Even the leaders at any particular point may not know the answers, and this needs to be communicated honestly to counteract the second-guessing. Bridges recommends “win-win arrangements,”<sup>17</sup> and this could be reworded and repositioned theologically for a congregation using the term *co-creation*, where everyone is recognised as having equal potential to contribute. This sense of a common journey that involves everyone will contribute to uniting the people in a common narrative.

## **The Ending**

Following Bridges’ methodology, the transition process includes an “ending.” The planning stage has identified exactly what is to practically end, what is to be emotionally let go of, and which members will lose or be upset. In the church environment, the simplest transition is in an environment where letting go of *old* ideas and *old* ways is already part of the congregation’s narrative. This letting go may be imperceptible, such as changing the order of service every week; it may be more distinct as in reframing the church’s music style. However, identifying what ends may be a significant part of the planning process, particularly before an amalgamation

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 44.

occurs, so that mitigation strategies can be developed and implemented beforehand. Risk analysis is a useful model used by science and business.<sup>18</sup>

In a congregational setting, as in business, it is common for any change to bring out unresolved issues from the past.<sup>19</sup> The raising of unresolved issues is recognised by Bridges as one of the *gifts* of transition: a place where barriers come down and a place to heal old wounds enabling a fresh start.<sup>20</sup> The healing of past hurts and the forgiveness now possible is the gift to a congregation. Being prepared for such unresolved issues will help ameliorate the issues that transformational change brings to congregational life.

Those congregations least likely to raise unresolved issues will be those in decline and possibly those showing resistance to change. The avoidance of conflict and an unwillingness to change may mean that such a declining congregation is eventually amalgamated, unless it chooses to die naturally. However, because of the existence of resistance to change, and reluctance to confront change in becoming a new identity, an amalgamation is not likely to be successful simply because these traits are not resolved. Amalgamation is a difficult process as two congregational cultures and power structures are brought together. It is much more than physically attending a different church. As stated earlier, the research from England found that amalgamations rarely work, and this thesis can only touch on possible elements of the cause of amalgamations to fail. In fact, amalgamating declining congregations together exacerbates decline.<sup>21</sup>

Declining congregations may eventually die out.<sup>22</sup> Yet, if they can change, the congregation will continue transformed into a future, through struggle and pain, life and growth. Death is a natural part of life and is as acceptable as change. In this choice, there is no blaming. In the case studies, it is evident that the pull of the past is very strong. At Gray Friends Meeting, the pastor's style became a source of conflict and a group of members left. The pastor and his followers were then forced to leave, and the members who previously left returned. Gray Friends chose continuity with the past as their future.

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<sup>18</sup> Risk Analysis - first identify the possible risks to be faced; against each one identify the likelihood of the risk happening; then identify what each is likely to *cost* (in human or financial terms) if it happens in full. This ranks the relative importance of each risk. Against each, mitigation strategies can be developed.

<sup>19</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 110-111.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>21</sup> David Goodhew, ed. *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, Ashgate Contemporary Ecclesiology Series (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 3-35.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35. Goodhew's argument is that decline should not be assumed to be inevitable.

“Resistance to change” fits within the definition of *conflict* and therefore engagement with resistance is necessary if the aim is to transform a congregation. This experience is seen in the US case studies of decline. Bridges provides insights from his experience of endings in businesses, some of which are relevant in a congregational setting.<sup>23</sup> The main point made is that resistance to change arises from feelings, not from the practical change (moving deckchairs requires no emotional commitment). People’s resistance arises from perceptions of what the ending might be, and what it may mean. Since people perceive differently, their perceptions could be quite varied and possibly incorrect. They may be facing their own personal losses as well as the losses of the group. Moving a congregation forward toward the point of letting go will take time, persistence, and courage.

In a congregational setting, resistance is sometimes a form of denial. For example, the possibility of closure may not have been part of a congregation’s biblical understanding. When the facts collide with this understanding dissonance may produce resistance. Resistance may be perceived by leadership rather than verbally transmitted to them; it may sit in the silence of no response. Resistance may come from nostalgia, and sacredness of the past. Resistance may also be a response where a dominant narrative is silencing people’s voices. In addition, as Bridges notes ironically, resistance may come from having to let go of what made the organisation successful in the first place.<sup>24</sup>

Declining congregations were at one time successful. East Lynn Christian Church is in serious decline yet is planning to move sites. As the pastor says, “Jesus knows something good about us, something we have yet to discover because we are still becoming.”<sup>25</sup> Good Shepherd Lutheran identifies God in its successful resurrection. Good Shepherd was near death in the recent past and identifies with the story of the resurrection. Often Ammerman’s congregations align themselves to biblical stories, and to the outcome of that biblical story. They may birth a theological understanding to find meaning in change and transition. In *Studying Congregations*, Robert Schreiter comments that congregations do this instinctively.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 23-38 and 159-160.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>25</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 110.

<sup>26</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation: Discovering and Doing." In Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations*, 28.

Businesses may not gain traction from biblical narratives but congregations are able to. Without adequate biblical answers from church leadership, resistance may come from a congregation protecting the religious world where *their* God resides, protecting *their* God from the onslaught of the evangelicals, or protecting *their* traditional God. Conversely, as in Incarnation Episcopal, resistance does not appear to exist despite strikingly different theological perspectives from diverse cultures. From this congregation, it can be intuited that not having a strong identity may enable adaptation to change. Resistance is *self* protection and this is discussed further in Chapter Four.

## The Beginning

The new beginning for a congregation is the emotional commitment to a new identity and way of being.<sup>27</sup> Bridges distinguishes between the *start* (the change) and the reality for the people: “beginnings involve new understandings, new values, new attitudes, and – most of all – new identities.”<sup>28</sup> Restructuring is aimed at the start, and a focused transition through the start will ensure movement toward emotional commitment. Bridges discusses the difficulties of managing transitions when inevitably individuals will be at different stages of their own personal psychological transition, and all are working through this at their own speed.<sup>29</sup> In a congregational setting, and using amalgamation as an example, the actual start may physically happen next Sunday, with six days in between, while the transition may have commenced years previously. Some people may still be (or are entrenched) in their *ending* phase even though the physical change, the start, has commenced. This start reinforces and has the effect of ratifying the ending.<sup>30</sup> The emotional beginning is yet to come. The *old* identity must be on the way out, and the new identity is embryonic. As the beginning is not found in *chronos* time, its meaning may be located in a rite of passage.

Bridges cites van Gennep’s *Rites of Passage* saying that business organisations experience an *unritualised time of passage*.<sup>31</sup> In the church context, however, congregations are conversant with rituals, symbols, customs and ceremony, all of which are available to give consistency,

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<sup>27</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 57-75.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 56n01.



form and meaning to the process of transition.<sup>32</sup> The new identity may be clearly visualised in this process of transition, although not in its final form which is developing in the people. Every congregation is different in the many facets of the people in a congregation. The leaders in context carry the burden of planning and re-planning as their congregation moves into the start while the ending, the transition and the beginning will be co-existing for some time.

Bridges points out the ambiguity that exists in new beginnings as people look forward to and fear them at the same time. The beginning confirms the ending producing a feeling of loss and the realisation that there is no way back. Where happiness is anticipated for the beginning there may well be grief. For some there may be ambivalence. The beginning may be perceived in many ways, all of which need to be corrected by leaders. Bridges uses the analogy of cultivating the ground and providing nourishment, which is a biblical narrative.<sup>33</sup> Dealing with embryonic identity means narrative pictures are able to fill the temporary gap without overwhelming people. Questions may be asked, such as, “What do we do next Sunday?” “What is the [new way of being]?” The answers will help the congregation to understand and be more at home in the new environment.<sup>34</sup>

The part for each person to play is allocated in a business organisation (with formal job descriptions) in contrast to the possible void individuals in a congregation may face. Following the methodology of transitions, the congregation should feel they are part of the solution giving life, not of a problem being solved. As an example, where there is generational transfer, the part of long-term members in the solution may be to use their particular skills to complete a specified project for the new identity, while the newcomers are thus freed to establish the new ways. Bridges’ methodology stresses the need to reinforce the new ways: the *old* has to be gone, and not re-invoked. This is to reinforce the continuing development of the new sense of identity – to keep people moving forwards.

In restructuring, the letting go of ideas and ways that are no longer appropriate may mean separating from former power structures and former attitudes toward gender roles, race, ethnicity, and culture. The past is still to be honoured, as it is farewelled. As stated earlier, each

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<sup>32</sup> For further discussion on Rites of Passage see Edmund Leach, *Culture & Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 77-79.

<sup>33</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66.

congregation has its own unique culture so that any amalgamation will be an amalgamation of different cultures, however identical they may appear to be. In order to affirm the new order, the theological narrative adopted clears the way to point to the new ways and the new identity.<sup>35</sup>

To explore what holds congregations together as a group, and to expand on Bridges' ideas, I will now turn to the concept of *group cohesion* as defined by Donelson Forsyth in reference to sports teams. The importance of cohesion is relevant to congregations as it builds resilience to change:

A cohesive group will be more likely to prosper over time, since it retains its members and allows them to reach goals that would elude a more incoherent aggregate. The group that lacks cohesion is at risk, for it may break into sub-groups at the first sign of conflict, lose members faster than it can replace them, and fail to reach its agreed upon goals.<sup>36</sup>

What Forsyth defines as *collective cohesion* is the sub-type most likely to be operative within congregations and is defined as "members' identification with the group ... based on shared identity and belonging."<sup>37</sup> The aim for a sports team is for "each player to identify so completely with the team that division between self and other [becomes] moot."<sup>38</sup> Drawing on Sigmund Freud's replacement hypothesis, Forsyth points out the willingness of cohesive group members to sacrifice personal interests for the good of the group and, at the extreme, *fused identity* produces self-sacrifice, such as suicide bombers.<sup>39</sup> Freud speculated that cohesive groups could replace an individual's family (and in fact many congregations provide this level of support).<sup>40</sup> Viewing cohesion in this way explains why belonging to a church becomes central to the self-definition of "I am a Christian." The nature of cohesion for a Christian community starts with their common belief in God. Forsyth extends this understanding (for a sports team) through the theory of *behavioural synchrony*, which is found to increase cohesion where members "engage in practices, rituals, and collective activities – such as collective singing, chanting, praying, [and marching] – that require behavioural coordination."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, cohesion is likely to be a

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<sup>35</sup> Criteria for choosing theological narratives is covered in Chapter Five of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

natural product of everyday church life.<sup>42</sup> For Christians, cohesion also includes the development of an emotional and spiritual nature implicit in their faith.

Forsyth then describes Bruce Tuckman's five-stage lifecycle model of group development comprising orientation, conflict, structure, performance, and dissolution.<sup>43</sup> Conflict is placed early in the process (as in an amalgamation). Forsyth recognises that conflict is a key ingredient for creating group cohesion: "conflict is the yang to the yin of group harmony."<sup>44</sup> This supports Ammerman's finding. There is a recognised correlation between conflict and cohesion and Forsyth confirms that conflict is a key ingredient for creating group cohesion.<sup>45</sup> However, Forsyth acknowledges that if conflict escalates out of control, it can destroy a group.<sup>46</sup>

Cohesive groups can have both positive and negative outcomes. They may be positive in the sense of providing psychological support as in a family, but negative as in examples found in Ammerman's case studies where there is resistance to change. When people leave highly cohesive groups due to conflict, as Forsyth states, the remaining members may be "reluctant to establish emotional ties with the newcomers, partly in fear of the pain produced by separation."<sup>47</sup> The pain of separation may cause the remaining members to form an isolated sub-group, and those who leave may form their own sub-group, with the same fears. While there is the pain of separation in a church closure there may also be a feeling of rejection and dissonance from withdrawal of the Christian narrative of "welcome." Ammerman expresses concern when no conflict exists in a congregation, and Forsyth reiterates this concern. Forsyth notes that low levels of conflict or absence of conflict most likely means that group members are "uninvolved, unmotivated, and bored."<sup>48</sup>

In a congregational setting, there is a tension to be managed between cohesion and diversity. Diversity stimulates conflict, brings variety and provides a broader range of outlooks so that the

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<sup>42</sup> This is confirmed in research from Oxford University which suggests that religious groups benefit from corporate singing. Eiluned Pearce, Jacques Launay, and Robin I.M. Dunbar, "The Ice-Breaker Effect: Singing Mediates Fast Social Bonding," (2015), accessed 29 October 2015, doi:10.1098/rsos.150221.

<sup>43</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 146-151. Tuckman describes the processes of the Conflict Stage as "disagreement over procedures; expression of dissatisfaction; tension among members; antagonism toward leader" and the characteristics as "criticism of ideas; poor attendance; hostility; polarization and coalition formation."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>48</sup> B. Aubrey Fisher, *Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980). Quoted in Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 148.

greater the variety of people and their backgrounds, the greater the potential to be more attractive to others. A team, or congregation, made up of similar people tends to be naturally cohesive,<sup>49</sup> but as a tight-knit group may tend to view newcomers as outsiders.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, diversity may produce less natural cohesion but have fluid boundaries with outsiders. Forsyth notes research from the work of Mannix and Neale that usefully delineates diversity in six general clusters of differences: social categories, knowledge and skills, values and beliefs, personality, status, and social connections.<sup>51</sup> Within these clusters, there are distinct measurable differences (such as age, race, and gender), and acquired functional differences (experience, knowledge and skills). With any level of diversity, there is the potential for separation along these *fault lines*.<sup>52</sup> For Brighton Evangelical, social-class differences create greater problems than their visible cultural and ethnic diversity. The pastor's cohering narrative of "Everyone in the church is special ... each one has received an invitation from God to God's table" provides movement toward cohesion and a common identity, and away from potential division.<sup>53</sup> This narrative supports equality and negates possible power positions, real or illusory.

In the Summary of Chapter Two, I noted some of the guises of power. I now explore Forsyth's work to support and add to Ammerman's findings. Power relationships are effective within congregations. Power when exerted may result in power being given to others or power being withdrawn. The feeling of having power "activates people – it causes them to experience increases in drive, energy, motivation, and emotion – and often leads to positive consequences."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, a feeling of being in power may aid a congregation toward planning for growth.

Power may be observed as powerlessness, existing as lack of control, passivity, conformity and a lack of action. Powerlessness in a congregation and decline appear strongly linked; conversely power, when given as permission and support, is linked to growth. Power, and the adaptation to power by congregations and individuals, infiltrates into identity and relationships. However

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<sup>49</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 414.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Mannix and Margaret A. Neale, "What Differences Make a Difference? The Promise and Reality of Diverse Teams in Organizations," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 6, no. 2 (2005): 31-55. Quoted in Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 413.

<sup>52</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 414. Forsyth defines *fault lines* as "hypothetical divisions that separate the members of a heterogeneous group into smaller, more homogeneous subgroups."

<sup>53</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 207.

<sup>54</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 266.

power operates, power is inherent in a congregation's past narrative, and continues as part of the current narrative. This embedded power construct may affect a congregation's ability to grow, and thus their future trajectory. This is discussed further in Chapter Five.

## **2. Identity and the Formation of Conflict**

The narrative that congregations tell of themselves, their unique sacred story, is their theology and their self-understanding. A congregation's identity is revealed in this narrative. Each congregation has an identity of its own, formed by its leadership, memory, and a subculture "that gains its own logic."<sup>55</sup> Sacred identity forms in place through memories of experiences and encounters with God in each individual and in relationship with each other. Thus God is spiritually part of this relationship.

To explore identity, relationship and conflict further I am turning to two philosophers who will frame the discussion - Martin Buber and Charles Taylor. I draw from them in order to explore the identity paradigm of differentiation, how people seek the other and bring the other into relationship and into relationship with God. I argue that individuals can learn to live in harmony, and the possible social boundaries are identified from the work of both philosophers in their concepts of *recognition* of the other.

### **Meeting Others**

Martin Buber (1878-1965) the Jewish philosopher published *Ich und Du* in 1923, which was translated as *I and Thou*.<sup>56</sup> Buber's philosophy provides the operative framework for discussion in this thesis of how relationships may be viewed in Christian community. For Martin Buber, the "eternal Thou" exists only in an "I-Thou" relationship and I argue that this is the touchstone for how "I" and "Thou" meet in Christian community. "I," as subject, am in relationship with "Thou," as subject. Relationship is only possible through the interaction of discrete identities. Mere existence can be sufficient for the interaction of identities; one affects the other and even in silence there is the possibility of reciprocity. Contrast (differentiation) is essential for identity: a

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<sup>55</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Second ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

single identity has no meaning unless held in contrast to another. This may explain Buber's lack of a direct I-God relationship since knowledge of relationship with another subject must first exist for God to break in and be known.

Once I treat Thou as an object, the relationship shifts; power is self-instituted in "I" over "It." When objectifying through categorisation, stereotype, projection or other ways, It acquires boundaries and is isolated aligning It-self with others objectified in the same way. Thou has no such boundaries and is free to "become" and yet ironically becoming is only available to an I and Thou, as differentiated identities, when they are in relationship. "It" is caused and divides, "Thou" is not. The distinction rests in the choice and the action of I. Thou remains Thou in reality with the same choice also available.

In the abstracting of a subject Thou where Thou becomes It, it turns what was once a unity between I and Thou into grouping It among similar objects.<sup>57</sup> Buber addresses the eternal Thou through every Thou. Therefore, by objectifying any element of God's creation, recognition of the relationship with the eternal Thou may be broken by I alone. Language and speech are not mandatory for relationship; seeing, perception and other senses are available. The language and use of the word *other* in a specific context may refer to either Thou (subject) or It (object) and is therefore less particular and open to misinterpretation. The reader's interpretation, when the word *other* is used, may determine whether the other is treated as a Thou or diminished to an It. However, the relationship expressed by the eternal Thou is never diminished.

Buber is strikingly unforgiving when referring to institutions: "but the severed It of institutions is a *golem*,"<sup>58</sup> and "that institutions yield no public life is felt by more and more human beings."<sup>59</sup> The business world operates predominantly in an I-It environment, particularly when change is taking place and profit is the motive. I-It does not come from evil, but left to its own devices "the relentlessly growing It-world grows over [I] like weeds."<sup>60</sup> I argue that the use of business models must proceed with caution. Business looks to itself and to its own rewards; whereas Christian faith looks to the transcendent God and the Word of God as the model. The Brighton Avenue Baptist offers an example where the pastor deliberately changed the I-It relationships

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 59. Stereotyping would be a typical example.

<sup>58</sup> The word *golem* is "an animated clod without a soul." It is in Jewish legend a clay figure brought to life by magic. Origins from Yiddish *goylem*, and from Hebrew *gōlem*. Ibid., 93n07.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 95.

among those businesses renting church space by seeking with them reciprocal I-Thou relationships.

For congregations in transition, it will be the God interface that is sought – namely the countenance of the Thou and God’s response. By contrast, when businesses are in transition, there is a place for I-Thou, but without God or Spirit in the interface. For Buber, (Christian) community exists when all stand in “a living, reciprocal relationship to one another” where “the [B]uilder is the living, active centre.”<sup>61</sup> This definition as a way of viewing true community is life-giving and therefore has the potential to seed growth.

Buber identifies the two elements in tension; the natural process of differentiation (contrast) and the necessity for relationship. Relationship involves mutual recognition of each other, however different, with Thou bringing in the presence of the eternal Thou. Mutuality does not exist in a situation when someone is objectified. Because conflict is a relational activity, and is the catalyst for transformation, the I-Thou relationship is necessary since transformation is from the eternal Thou. The recognition of others as subjects is important in Buber’s philosophy to ensure that diversity may exist in a mutually transformative state. Transformation is possible within a group of subjects but not when some are objectified.

In Ammerman’s case studies, at a congregational level, there are examples of two differentiated identities within one congregation – St Catherine’s and St Matthew’s provide separate English speaking and Spanish speaking Masses where there is no recorded conflict. This language differentiation was no doubt an expedient way for two languages to worship, but there is a recorded lack of relationship and learning between them and relationship would be the ideal. By contrast, City Baptist and Hope Baptist have used music deliberately in a way to integrate the diversity (conflict) in their congregations and build cohesion. This allows individuals the freedom of their own identity, and allows relationships to form.

## **Recognising Others**

How others are *recognised* is a political action. I argue that the political action controls the placement of conflict. Recognition when applied to culture is particularly relevant for New

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 94.

Zealand which comprises 213 ethnic groups.<sup>62</sup> I now explore the way recognition operates in a multicultural society through Charles Taylor's essay *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition."*<sup>63</sup> I continue to use Buber's construct of I and Thou. Taylor argues that the way recognition takes place is a political choice and forges the identity of I by others, whether that recognition is correct or not. Subjugation, dominance, and power exist in mis-recognition and reinforce the objectivity of personhood.

The conflict of objectivity is not the conflict that births transformation and growth. Rather the conflict of transformation is located in Buber's I-Thou relationship with the eternal Thou. Therefore, recognition of a subject must be first seeing the face of God in the other, providing the other with respect, dignity and veneration. This recognition of a subject includes a sense of equality with the unique identity of every individual and their ways of being in all their diversity. This also means not automatically extending the recognition of identity similarly to all persons of the same gender, race, ethnicity or classification. The uniqueness of each individual is about the contrast between each identity, not homogeneity. Striving or competing for recognition may silence others in the same place. Therefore, recognition must be equally given for recognition not to dissolve Thou into It. Tight-knit leadership groups may mis-recognise their congregational members by using classification - a sign of dominance.

Recognition values the other and learns from the other, allowing the other to change him or herself and to be changed. Therefore, when people are together there is synergy; each contributes to the understanding of the other; indifference and tolerance do not exist. This is the ideal for an engaged, growing congregation, where synergy exists in the relationship between I and Thou and between all subjects in a congregation. This ideal is only possible where there is true recognition of each other that is not politically actuated. I argue that two of the subversive elements acting against true recognition in Christian community are moral superiority and contrived innocence, discussed in Chapter Four.

Misrecognition from Taylor's perspective is a form of oppression and indifference, visible by its lack of engagement, oppressing by not engaging. Indifference does not take a clear stance and

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<sup>62</sup> Brendan Manning, "Census 2013: More Ethnicities than the World's Countries," *The New Zealand Herald* 11 December 2013, accessed 30 January 2016, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11170288](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11170288).

<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).



may be confused as tolerance. Both indifference and tolerance lack engagement and therefore neither result in relationship. Whether a relationship exists is determined by how recognition engages and participates in a relationship of I and Thou. In mutual recognition there is tension between the “I” of self-recognition and the recognition of “I” by others. There is also a tension between recognising and accepting identities generally and in the recognising of particular cultural identities. People with different cultural identities may work toward their uniqueness by contrast, ensuring their survival by differentiating from others. They are defining their identity on their own terms. For how their identity should be recognised by others there is no right or wrong answer. The answer, if there is one, lies in acceptance of differences, where both true and false may exist in harmony despite any perceived paradox. Acceptance of differences is an issue in the amalgamation and re-formation of congregations. Concentrating on similarities ignores the importance of differences.

Another facet of recognition is the concept of justice, which is implicit in the identities in an I-Thou relationship. Despite justice being implicit in recognition, it cannot prevent self-depreciation or self-colonisation by an individual.<sup>64</sup> Individuals thus put themselves into an objectified place. Individuals through an attempt to avoid conflict may accept “de-meaning” images of themselves thus allowing their own colonisation.<sup>65</sup> Narratives such as “remnant of the past” may be reflected images placed from the outside on the inside and the narrative may (or may not) reflect the truth of either oppression or self-colonisation. The researcher of Brighton Avenue Baptist may have applied the description “remnant of the past” indirectly. Counteracting such a narrative is an imperative for justice.

The extreme struggle of two differentiated identities may lead to one person exerting power over the other and thus causing oppression.<sup>66</sup> This form of oppression may be one issue in generational transfer and in a dominant church hierarchy. Conflict, in this struggle, may polarise identities. As the two identities move closer to reconciliation, the descriptions begin to dissolve, as the *slave* does not offer the differentiation, the recognition, required by the *master*. Where both identities co-exist in acceptance of the other, there is possible a living paradox and a place where there is no conflict. Without indifference and tolerance and with everyone recognised in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> For an example of the master-slave dialectic, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller and J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

their unique identity, then there is the possibility of Buber's I-Thou relationship, with the presence of the eternal Thou.

There is no extreme relationship of master and slave today in congregations, yet power is evident as discussed in the summary of Chapter Two. The exercise of power is inevitable in a hierarchical organisation as the very structure delineates levels of power to levels in a church's organisation. Allocating power in this way may be consensual. However, when I have been identifying outcomes in the case studies, I have noted levels of powerlessness and this powerlessness acts as a marker to the presence of a dominant power. There is collusion when one party takes and exercises power and the others accept this authority so that power begets power. This is not overtly described in the case studies but the tight-knit congregations reflect such a situation. Where a pastor sets up his own church, as in the case of Northview Christian Life, power may be given to the pastor, whether it is real or illusory. At Northview, the pastor has developed a broad leadership, which appears to counteract this risk, along with the "500+" membership.<sup>67</sup>

Taylor notes two changes in society (in 1992) that contribute to the study of *identity* and *recognition* (a) the collapse of social hierarchies, and (b) democracy ushering in a politics of equal recognition.<sup>68</sup> Social hierarchies are now collapsing through the proliferation of social media. These social hierarchies were based on natural or derived inequalities that produced an *honour* system. Honour had power and because people were not all equal, inequalities ensured that honour was pursued. Today if there is equal recognition between each person, this will counteract the honour system. Equal recognition is about the dignity and respect that everyone shares in and ideally everyone is equally recognised, no matter how different they are.

Taylor's essay points to these two changes in society and in effect highlights the social ideals of two different generations, with the older generations still seeking honour and its power, and the younger generations revelling in the freedom and power of the non-stratified social media. While this distinction between generations is not clear-cut, the use of this dichotomy aids the understanding of how the expectations of different generations might contribute, for instance, to

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<sup>67</sup> "500+" is the name of the largest church category used in Ammerman's study *Congregations in Changing Communities*. It is not an actual attendance figure. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, 26-27.

the conflict inherent in generational transfer within congregations, or the conflict between worship styles.

In another way, recognition when applied to the politics of difference raises issues of identity and of the human need to differentiate. In this case, it may be necessary to recognise distinctions and apply differential treatment, even to the extent of positive discrimination.<sup>69</sup> Positive discrimination may have the effect of forming stratifications and introducing new forms of differential status. In a congregational setting positive discrimination may be divisive but is subject to consensus of the whole. As an example of a compromise, St Matthew's has provided Spanish-speaking services for the majority of the congregation, yet this is apparently no more than is provided for the original members, the separate English-speaking congregation, now the minority. If these congregations were combined into one, the majority (Spanish-speaking) could potentially overwhelm the minority. By contrast, congregations such as Incarnation have moved from being an all white congregation to a majority of African Americans, without the use of positive discrimination. This and similar changes to identity happen organically, provided the existing congregation is open to the changes that ensue. Changing identity may explicitly encourage positive discrimination such as the congregations that opened themselves to the gay community. Social-class disparities appear to be more difficult to unify. As one example, Brighton Evangelical has collaborated with community and government agencies to reach out to the poor people in their geographic area, and at the same time welcome whoever enters their doors for worship.

Such a level of facilitation and collaboration acts as social mediation which disempowers a politics of difference by bringing people to a sense of equality where each is recognised as Thou. Reciprocal recognition among equals is the ideal. In the life of the congregations that celebrate their diversity, recognising each *other* as equal is often carried in their public narrative rather than through explicit positive discrimination. However, social-class disparity cannot be celebrated or avoided and the mediation of Brighton Evangelical becomes an example of bridging across an economically disparate congregation.

The formation of identity in such an environment is one in which each person is recognised as Thou, with value and worth. However, mis-recognition, particularly of others not considered

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

worthy in some way, does oppress their identity as subject and groups together those similarly unworthy. The imposition of mis-recognition may be reproduced by mimicry - learning by copying attitudes. In New Zealand, some early colonisers imposed their preconceived images on the indigenous people. The dignity of the indigenous people was not always honoured. There was an imposed narrative and thereby a separation between *them* and *us* with the stance of moral superiority enhancing the colonisers' self-identity. The natural differentiation of identities living in contrast to others is taken a step further when identity is defined and objectified through a system of classification and naming, producing distinct *outsiders* and *insiders*.<sup>70</sup>

Secular adversity, in defining outsiders as named others, may strengthen the common bonds of insiders but builds a dividing wall forming a barrier to outsiders becoming insiders. There is also the potential for outsiders passively accepting the dominating culture in order to avoid conflict. Grace Baptist members "expect the world to be a hostile place."<sup>71</sup> This example of secular adversity encourages members to "band together for comfort and assistance" also for material and social support.<sup>72</sup> This church classifies itself as independent fundamental. Their bridge to the outside world is through televised church services, and this opens the path through the dividing wall for newcomers – a path of least resistance. Without televised services, the question must be raised how this church could evangelise to what they consider a hostile world when there is such an explicit them/us dichotomy. To negate any barrier to outsiders, the I-Thou relationship is necessary and outsiders deemed worthy of equal respect and dignity. The I-Thou relationship is necessary regardless of any unavoidable category under which a person is born. The roots of this fundamental "hostile world" perception, or what Taylor would call mis-recognition, are found in the persecution of Christian communities during Jesus' ministry. I suggest that secular adversity, with possible attributed honour and moral superiority, is misplaced as an interpretation in today's context.

The two major sections in this chapter have provided (1) a process for change in congregations and (2) a benchmark structure for relationships. Both discussions locate potential conflict situations. The criteria for how meeting and recognising one another may play a part in congregational life and the wider community reflect power and political struggles that may be transformative but which may also be divisive. In such a culturally diverse country, New

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<sup>70</sup> The construct of insiders and outsiders is further explored in Chapter Five "Disengagement."

<sup>71</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 248.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Zealanders need to be able to interact without producing barriers between each other. This is in the acceptance of individual identity and differences. When congregations face restructure, in imposing a change of identity on individuals and a congregation, however unavoidable, there is the possibility of conflict in the response. A well-managed transition process requires a positive response to begin to seed growth.

Understanding transition as a process will help locate where conflict may become apparent. In restructuring, the worst possible result is when conflict in the process of transition and conflict in the mis-recognition of the other converge, possibly found in an amalgamation, a schism or similar. The most likely risk in restructuring is when members leave during the *ending*, and the pain this will cause may be remembered in a congregation's narrative. By contrast, the congregations who welcomed the gay community undoubtedly expected some members to leave. This could then be managed so that any pain was mitigated.

The tension between the natural process of differentiation between individuals (exclusion) and the need for relationship (embrace) allows and invites conflict. However, once conflict is invited, a known place without conflict (a place of retreat), and the ability to experience no conflict in community, is also required. This exploration forms part of the theological reflection following in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Four: Theological Reflection

The third step of the Pastoral Cycle is theological reflection shaping both thinking and practice in church life.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I reflect on the experiences found in congregational change and restructuring identified in Chapters Two and Three. This is the start of a journey and a place to begin producing parameters in theological debate in the context of any particular congregation. In practice, theology is fundamental to any debate on church restructuring.

How congregations may be held in God's embrace during times of conflict, change and restructuring is the underlying focus. Through an understanding of what may constitute exclusion and embrace of others, there is the ability to learn and strengthen community life thus providing resilience during times of change. Reflection on the risks of people leaving due to restructuring or resisting to a point they possibly fight back is included. Following the signs of where divisions may form identifies other concerns. As noted earlier, the re-formation necessary in amalgamations is essentially outside the scope of this thesis.

### Exclusion and Embrace – the Inseparable Twins

I first discuss the concepts of *exclusion* and *embrace* to describe the theological tenets of community life that may be operative during change and restructuring. When individuals or a congregation take political positions, a them/us dichotomy is formed thus increasing the potential for conflict. Both unity and/or division may result. I explore the theology of Miroslav Volf.<sup>2</sup> He writes out of his own first-hand experiences in Croatia during the war in former Yugoslavia. At the centre of Volf's theological reflection on social realities are identity, otherness, and reconciliation. I consider it important to develop theology from both sides of

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 117-135.

<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf is a member of the Episcopal Church in the US and the Evangelical Church in Croatia. Yale Divinity School website, Faculty and Staff. <http://divinity.yale.edu/volf> accessed 2 February 2016.

struggle, as both sides (in war or in congregation) may consider themselves “right” or “innocent” in the actions they take. Fundamental to Christian community life is the equal embrace of others, and in any embrace at the same time there is a counterstory of exclusion.

Volf’s starting point for his theology is Romans 15:7 “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you” where Volf defines (metaphorically) the process of Christ’s welcoming as *embrace*. Volf’s interpretation of *embrace* seeks to express:

*... the will to give ourselves to others and “welcome” them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, [and this] is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity. The will to embrace precedes any “truth” about others and any construction of their “justice.” This will is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable; it transcends the moral mapping of the social world into “good” and “evil.”*<sup>3</sup>

Volf explores, within the complexity of identity, the question:

*... what kind of selves we need to be in order to live in harmony with others. My assumption is that selves are situated; they are female or male, Jew or Greek, rich or poor – as a rule, more than one of these things at the same time ... often having hybrid identities ... and sometimes migrating from one identity to another.*<sup>4</sup>

In order to draw from the richness of Volf’s theology, it is necessary to understand the contradistinctions inherent in exclusion and embrace. The words *exclusion* or *embrace* express extreme dichotomies but in everyday life exclusion and embrace never exist on their own. In a congregational setting both will exist to varying degrees, but in ethnic cleansing exclusion and embrace are mutually exclusive (either/or). Ethnic cleansing is where others are objectified and killed as animals and where complete separation exists. At this extreme level of exclusion there is, to use Martin Buber’s expression, an I-It world, without human relationship. Exclusion at this extreme has no embrace, being totally devoid of intrinsic values of humanity. There must be self-embrace in existence producing a barrier that does not in any way welcome difference. Ironically this perceived ideal world of pure race, ensures it becomes impossible for the formation of differentiated identity in a place where there is no relative contrast of race allowed. This concept of an ideal world, of total self-embrace, will likely form fault lines in other ways to

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<sup>3</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 29. [Italics in original].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21. [Italics in original].

compensate, such as divisions between rich and poor, or racial purity expanding to neighbouring countries so that cleansing can continue its narrative of conflict.

There is, fortunately, no “ideal” congregation to act as a control against which to measure other congregations. However, in the ideal world of embrace, mirrored in diversity, there is a willingness to embrace otherness, and there is validity and flourishing without cost and without exclusion. All congregations in Ammerman’s case studies do express a “welcome” in the context of Romans 15:7 yet the full potential of Christ’s embrace is lost where a congregation may not be prepared to adapt to change.

In the exclusion of others and their behaviour, there is always an opposite reciprocal action of embracing the self, which is political. Thus in putting others down, there is also at the same time the raising up of our own dignity and self-awareness even if this is *not stated*. In narratives of embrace, the counter or shadow story of exclusion exists in the silence of *not stated*. This is where either embrace is fed by the main argument of exclusion, or exclusion is fed by the main argument of embrace.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Ammerman’s tight-knit congregations self-embrace to the extent they feed exclusion; strong identity and strong tradition self-embrace and feed exclusion. The converse is also true of these congregations: their exclusion contributes to their self-embrace, rather than embracing others and the differences of others. Self-embrace is neither “welcoming” in terms of Volf’s definition of Christ’s embrace, nor fulfilling, as others are unable to feed community life.

In welcoming, but not adapting to change, “them and us” are together, which includes at least connection to people even though there is a negotiated difference. Phrasing this dichotomy as “them and us” is deliberate to avoid exacerbating the dichotomy. The alternatives that may be seen at the extremes are “us against them,” “their gain – our loss,” “either us or them” – Volf describes such alternative positions as “stark exclusionary polarity.”<sup>6</sup> These positions may well be evident in restructuring multiple congregations where competition becomes a survival mechanism. Competition may be as divisive as voting. Volf also comments that the apparently embracing phrase “both us and them ... unites the divided parties in a perverse communion.”<sup>7</sup> The narrative of “both us and them” is not the answer for congregations, where the operative

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



word *them* expresses the division. Ideally, embracing others is as undivided people. In amalgamating congregations it will be necessary not to create or emphasise any division; where there are known divisions, the divisions need healing.

### **The Division of Salvation**

In the Christian faith, there is at least one prominent division from other faiths. In the Christian model, other faiths cannot receive salvation, as salvation is only available through relationship with Jesus Christ. Speaking of Christian salvation in a way that separates Christianity from other religions through biblical interpretation is unnecessarily divisive, particularly when “moral superiority” is added further increasing division between faiths. Volf comments that Paul is too particular and that “[Paul] is unduly privileging the Christian way of salvation and thereby denying radical equality.”<sup>8</sup> I suggest an acceptable interpretation is available. The one Christian God gifts salvation. Salvation is not something that can be earned – this view is a central tenet of Paul’s theology. Salvation is a hope for Christians, not a certainty.

### **Selves Living as Community**

The conflict inherent in adjusting to new identities or differences arises particularly with those endeavouring to live in a transforming community. I argue that criteria are necessary for living in community as a reconciling and transforming place. I look to Volf who considers the four actions required to mutually embrace in any community are as follows:

- repentance
- forgiveness
- making space in oneself for another
- healing of memory<sup>9</sup>

These four actions are to co-exist in a continuous mutuality wherever possible in a less than perfect world. The four actions together potentially ameliorate divisive conflict and also

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 46n09.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 100.

incorporate the conflict required for transformation. To mutually embrace requires the relationship of I and Thou, thus allowing their communion with the eternal Thou. The embrace of welcoming to community requires these four actions for a theology reflecting God's embracing love. Reconciliation, by making space in oneself for another, is enabled where identities adjust to meet the other's otherness. These are not words to be merely said, these are words that require deep understanding and an awareness and knowledge of what the otherness is. The embrace of welcoming others requires active participation by both sides: which is particularly poignant because each other defines the other's identity. The congregations unwilling or resistant to changing their identity, despite welcoming, are not embracing; if there is little embrace, there is a level of exclusion and self-embrace. A compromise is seen in Ammerman's case studies in the willingness of one congregation to build bridges across socio-economic divides that allow the *rich* reaching out to embrace the *poor* on the other side, without either changing identity.<sup>10</sup> This is also seen where on either side of a divide identities are both enriched and flourish in the synergy of a relationship.<sup>11</sup>

Prejudice weakens the possibility of Volf's embrace. Prejudice, as a preconceived opinion or position, may exist in individuals in Christian community as exclusion. Volf argues there are no rules that can define a person as good (right) or evil (wrong).<sup>12</sup> The theologian, N.T. Wright, in discussing Paul's theology, sees the mission to the Gentiles as only possible if the Gentiles were *not* objectified as evil: "they [Gentiles] are human, called to reflect God's image, loved by their creator."<sup>13</sup> This interpretation allows not only Gentiles, or pagans, to be relieved of an evil construct, but conversely Jews are not considered the opposite - of being constructed as automatically good (moral superiority). Jesus' great commission to the disciples to "go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15) and Paul's mission testifying "to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24) are both proclamations to the whole world and to all peoples without prejudice (Ephesians 3:6).

However, prejudice does exist and may be seen as "right." Volf considers that there is a tendency for people to echo the reigning opinions of their culture and mimic its practices without

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<sup>10</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 202.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>12</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), Book I, Part II, 371.

critiquing or distancing from that culture.<sup>14</sup> Each culture or community therefore may unavoidably have its own atypical set of prejudices considered “right” by that community. Prejudices build exclusion and these prejudices, however subtle, need addressing if embrace is to be fulfilling.

In more practical ways, embracing requires embracing others that are not loved, others that may be too different or too dirty, others that are not considered innocent, others that are not like us, and embracing others with contrary biblical interpretations. Ammerman’s congregations that provide embrace for the gay community decided to change, making space in themselves for their new members so that the new identity was able to form a united and cohesive whole. The others became no longer others, through the mutual embrace of I and Thou. Some that could not embrace the newcomers left their congregation: they seemed unable to make space in themselves for the others not like them. Making space in oneself for the other requires the acceptance of difference. It does not mean becoming the other, as each identity is retained. The separation of those that leave and those that remain, if in a reconciling space, are both able to forgive and farewell each other. In this space, the narrative of embrace continues despite the separation, and thus avoidance of conflict and ongoing conflict are disempowered.

Volf places the mutual gift of forgiveness at the boundary between exclusion and embrace.<sup>15</sup> As discussed previously, the *gift* of transition is the healing possible of unresolved issues.<sup>16</sup> The forgiveness heals wounds that exclusion inflicts, leaving an empty space. This empty space delineates a place of departure. Either there is no going back (the hurt is too deep); or there is no more communion, with them and us remaining separated in a kind of peace; or there is restoration of communion as true peace. Both *forgiveness* and *repentance* have inner conflict built into them, a form of suffering and conversion that has to happen. The difference between forgiveness and repentance is that only humans repent, forgiveness is sourced from God. The Christian model for forgiveness is in the relationship with God established in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13). Forgiveness and repentance both mean change. Yet hurt may not be deliberate; it may be a response to what is communicated during restructuring.

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<sup>14</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>16</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 111.

In Volf's experience with ethnic cleansing, in comparison to the experience with congregations, there appears to be a vast difference in the level of forgiveness required. However, it is the ability to make space in oneself for the other that allows mutual forgiveness in the common will to embrace as subjects. In this forgiveness both are changed. Mutual forgiveness and mutual repentance in a reconciling space allow healing on both sides of struggle. Mutual forgiveness may not allow one to forget, but the memory of hurt is now powerless.

The knowledge and application of embracing brings into community the ability to be transformed and to continue being transformed. Reconciliation is an ongoing process of adaptation in an ever-changing community however subtle or silent that change may be. Reconciliation is made possible in an I-Thou relationship from positions of natural equality and justice, not from a dominance that objectifies. Reconciliation cannot be sought as a *final* place. This misses the point of an enabling reconciliation that is continuous. A "*final* reconciliation" as an absolute is described by Volf as "a seductive ideology of a false liberation."<sup>17</sup> God alone is the final reconciliation. Final reconciliation cannot be achieved between I and Thou as an end state. In life, reconciliation through relationship is continuous and is continuously proceeding from the *perichoresis* of the triune God. This Christian theology transcends, for instance, agreeing to differ, reaching an agreement where there is tolerance, or voting, which all maintain a level of division.

The term *perichoresis* describes the triune relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Volf's point is that "everything in the idea of perichoresis or 'mutual interiority' ... depends on success in resisting the slide into pure identity."<sup>18</sup> This is the essence of the *together but independent* nature of the Trinity. Volf's theology is that each divine person, to make space for the other, adopts the reciprocal relationship of the Trinity in the *perichoresis* of eternal equal embrace. Volf extends his interpretation to the mystery of the Eucharist, when people receive the divine person and participate in *perichoresis*.<sup>19</sup> Making space in ourselves for diverse others, allows embracing by God of those in an I-Thou relationship, and thus through this openness to being included into the One of *perichoresis*, with the inner conflict of forgiveness enacting in each and every human person. Therefore, in this theology, at the point of reconciling, conflict is dissolved.

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<sup>17</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 110. [Italics added]

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 129.

In amalgamating churches or closing a church, this interpretation of *perichoresis* transcends the practical issues (such as memorials, gifted windows, and buildings, particularly where these may have become symbols). Everything proceeds from the Trinity and belongs to the Trinity in *perichoresis* with the people of God in Christian community. With this view, the people of God may let go into God's embrace. No human act can destroy or weaken God's embrace. The complexity of ever-changing selves is sourced from the fluidity of external ever-changing identities and ever-changing relationships in Christian community. Understanding and living with the strength of God's embrace coheres and stabilises the people of God for the restructuring process. The Builder, the triune God, remains the living active (*unchanging*) centre.<sup>20</sup>

### **Changing Selves - Transition**

In a theology for restructuring, there is planned change with attendant transitioning of the people of God. Rites of passage are constructed rituals and they usefully define the passage of time and point to the changes in meaning. "Endings" themselves do not deny the ability for relationship; but what ends will not be returned to. The relationships between members of a congregation may be forced to change, as in church closure, even though people may move as a group to another church. Certainly in church closure the separation from the community in place forces a change in identity. It is in this separation and possible breaking of relationships that feelings of rejection, displacement, and pain may be found, and where choices open up for the people of God. One such choice is for the people to leave and not journey to the new beginning. Another choice is to grasp the change and open up to new possibilities.

The "beginnings" are not possible without the endings. Volf explains this in relation to the story of Abram and Sarai, emphasising that "departure is part and parcel of Christian identity."<sup>21</sup> Their removing themselves from their ancestral relations enacted the beginning of the history of the Jewish people. Such an important biblical event is outside a congregation's direct experience. However, it is valid to say, by drawing from this story that beginnings are important and that beginnings may well transcend what has ended. In the transcendence there is the possibility of transformation. First, Abram and Sarai had to willingly obey God's will and choose to enter a transition stage.

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<sup>20</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 40.

## Being in Exile

For a church congregation facing restructuring, the transition stage is the psychological space that may last years, and the congregation whose church is being closed will be particularly affected. Transition, for congregations whose church is being closed or who are displaced in a functional change, may be understood from its foundation in theology as *being in exile*. Being in exile may result from the distancing caused by the process of restructuring, or the distancing between the *transitioning* culture (the congregation moved) and that of the *non-transitioning* culture (the congregation that continues in place). In a stage of being between cultures (or identities) there opens up an inability to resist exile in a powerless place. As the ending has taken place – the congregation has already been broken up or a ministry programme has ceased – there is nowhere to return to. *Exile* is a place of transition with its confusion, its identity issues, and its loss of power.

At least three actions are evident for a congregation in exile. First, with a group of various cultural/congregational exiles, there is the likelihood of grouping with others in exile, who likewise are disconnected from their land/church/ministry whether Pākehā, Jew, or Māori. Another position is through the need to maintain cultural uniqueness as diaspora and thus maintain separation. There is also another form of exile possible where a powerless exclusion dominates. Being in exile in this sense may define for instance those unable to reach positions of decision-making within a congregational hierarchy, or those whose church has been closed.

N.T. Wright's hypothesis is that first century Jews considered they were *in exile*.<sup>22</sup> The Jews inhabited their land, but their status as a dominated culture left them powerless under Roman occupation. This *exile* was enforced exclusion dislocated along the fault lines formed by race and power. Cultural exiles may in fact form their own separate community as their way of building identity so that they create their own embrace, rather than feel exclusion.<sup>23</sup> This forming of a separate community allows their *other* voice to be heard, and provides a place to return to of their own making where they are no longer *other*. These *others* are not necessarily marginalised minorities.

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 207.

<sup>23</sup> Jione Havea, "Unu'unu ki he Loloto, Shuffle Over to the Deep, into Island Spaced Reading" in *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after Voices at the Margins*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

Being in exile may be the experience in transition. However, the need for conversion also sits in the transition space. The meaning of a conversion experience opens the transition process of restructuring to be part of biblical experience enabling beginnings to be the focus of conversion. A conversion experience in Christian theology usually refers to conversion to the Christian faith. The presence of conflict is one sign of any conversion process. The conversion of transition is the letting go of the past, and acceptance of a new beginning. This *conversion* is a human action during the transition stage, in contrast to *transformation*, which is from God and exists in the future.

### Gathering In

What is the answer to the feelings of being in exile? In responding to this question I turn to Isaiah 56:8 “Thus says the Lord God, who *gathers* the outcasts of Israel, I will *gather* others to them besides those already *gathered*.”<sup>24</sup> Ending exile is more than just the process of conversion. Beginnings become a time of gathering in those who feel displaced. It is the coming home to Jerusalem, to the new sense of place, which pushes back the feelings of exile. For some this homecoming will be immediate. For some it will take longer as they shake off the mantle of being outcast. For some God will gather in. Some will have been previously excluded. And, some will have left.

The task of ministry becomes “gathering in,” of embrace, and of welcoming home albeit to a new place, with new people. Gathering in begins out in the place of exile to the outcast, and to those who are feeling displaced. Exiles include the excluded (“foreigners and eunuchs” from Isaiah 56:3) and the “included.” Therefore belonging without qualification models Christian community by equal recognition of each individual with dignity and respect. This passage from Isaiah 56:3 is a radical reinterpretation of earlier Torah. Going forth and gathering in is the mission of the church particularly during restructuring. To return from exile requires this gathering in, bringing home and welcome, so that relationships may be restored through all the steps in *embrace*.<sup>25</sup> The process of re-forming identity then begins.

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<sup>24</sup> Italics added.

<sup>25</sup> For further reading, see Walter Brueggemann, “A Welcome for the Others” in *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 49-71.

## Broken Relationships

Christian community is bound together through the beliefs and relationships of the people of God. In Chapter Two the possibility of breaking relationships was a factor in those congregations avoiding change and conflict. Understanding why breaking or dividing relationships may be considered sinful, with a counterstory of guilt, becomes important when discussing narratives that include schisms, those leaving during the transition process, or those forced to leave due to closing a church. These are the conflicts where congregation members either choose to leave, “leave” but do not leave (possibly fighting back), or are forced to leave (as in a church closure). In broken relationships, both sides are hurt in the disconnection of relationship with both sides suffering the pain of separation. Both sides together require a healing process to disempower sin and guilt.

Sin and guilt form within Christian community from biblical narratives. The ancient Mediterranean identity was inherently relational in the interdependence of family and community.<sup>26</sup> Kinship relationships, where each was reliant on the other, also related to land or place. For Māori this spiritual, physical, and corporate relationship to land or place is expressed in their understanding of the word *tūrangawaewae*.<sup>27</sup> Such “high-context” cultural relationships are implicit in the Bible and for Māori without requiring further explanation.<sup>28</sup> In today’s reality of congregational memory, deliberately breaking kinship or family bonds, and breaking with place, is reinforced through Bible stories as sin: for instance, the prodigal son twice acknowledged that he had sinned and therefore felt he was guilty (Luke 15:11-32).

With such an understanding of sin, leaving a congregational family through a perceived division may become a painful burden for both those leaving and those remaining; a burden that is deeply felt due to the twin dimensions of the social and the spiritual. The spiritual is apposite both in the

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<sup>26</sup> Chris Marshall, “I have Sinned Against Heaven and Against You’: Sin as Relational Rupture in the Teaching of Jesus” in *A Thinker’s Guide to Sin: Talking About Wrongdoing Today*, ed. Neil Darragh (Auckland NZ: Accent, 2010), 65-73.

<sup>27</sup> “In the Māori worldview, land gives birth to all things, including humankind, and provides the physical and spiritual basis for life. Papatūānuku, the land, is a powerful mother earth figure who gives many blessings to her children ... In the Māori worldview, much of life is about finding one’s *tūrangawaewae*, one’s foundation and place in the world. This is traditionally expressed through a people’s relationship with particular places, such as a mountain, a river and other important sites ... *Tūrangawaewae* are places where [Māori] feel especially empowered and connected.” Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, “Papatūānuku - the Land,” *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 19 October 2015, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/papatuanuku-the-land/page-1>. Also see Bill Bennett, *God of the Whenua: Rural Ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ: Philip Garside, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Mark Allan Powell, ed. *Methods for Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 168.



church environment and for Māori. The community bonds remain, despite separation, and require reconciliation and healing on both sides of division, whether this healing eventuates in reconciliation and return or not. Being able to hold both true and false together as equally valid positions, despite contradiction, opens a way to healing. The narrative is “true” for both sides, and the narratives may be read together. Therefore, in essence, “the task is to inhabit the narrative’s tension and refuse to dissolve it.”<sup>29</sup>

### ***Self Protection***

The normative behaviours that form as part of congregational life may become exclusionary in the form of resistance or *self* protection.<sup>30</sup> This was first raised as an issue in the discussion of “endings” in Chapter Three. The self protection of resistance to change avoids a change of identity and excludes possibilities for the future and may reinforce decline. As in broken relationships, self protection is important due to the twin dimensions of the social and spiritual. Self protection is self-embracing and affirms the existing identity. There is no judgment intended in describing this position. However, self-embracing an existing identity may inadvertently produce a barrier to outsiders reinforcing exclusion exposed in a them/us dichotomy. Conversely self protection may affirm the identity of a niche congregation. A congregation may welcome others, expecting the others to become like them, rather than adjusting themselves to make space. Fear enforces self protection and disables the need to be vulnerable and risk change, which is what is required to seed transformation and growth.

Volf distinguishes between the use of the terms *boundaries* and *barriers*; both can be a form of self protection. It is important to distinguish between the definitions of these often-transposed expressions. Boundaries protect. Barriers form division along fault lines. Both may appear exclusionary. However, boundaries enable formation of discrete identities and these identities are able to form relationships across the boundaries. In terms of Volf’s theology, boundaries are not exclusionary. By contrast, barriers may prevent meeting, and a relationship across the barrier is then impossible. These distinctions are important since Volf’s understanding of *exclusion* “does not express a preference; it names an objective evil.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Goodhew, *Towards a Theology of Church Growth*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> The definition of *self* protection in this thesis relates to identity protection. It does not encompass physical protection.

<sup>31</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 68.

The underlying motive for bringing about non-exclusionary outcomes through conflict requires further explanation. The negotiating process of identity is formative through trial and error to reach the centre of the self. This re-centering is a constant process via crucifixion or, using Volf's description, *de-centering*. Volf equates *de-centered* with death and *re-centered* with resurrection. In other words, equating to *endings* and *beginnings*. Endings are therefore aligned with the process of death, and *beginnings* with resurrection and hope for the future. Death as "a celebration of the life of ..." may be appropriate contextualizing of an ending as a creative time that honours the past. However, context determines the appropriateness of any theology. Endings in this analogy are necessary for hope to exist and enable movement into the future so that re-centering is not only in, say, its re-formed cultural context, it is also moving forward to a new time and place. This is the process of continual adaptation, enabling the energy of conflict to be harnessed for transformation.

By definition, boundaries may be necessary and possibly a tentative exclusion. Boundaries are to aid embrace and any exclusionary tendency may be resolved, for instance through teaching. Thus embrace aids the mutual transformation of both I and Thou while retaining discrete identities. The building of a barrier that creates harm through a moral, or any other wall, may exclude acceptance of others. In so doing the barrier immediately excludes all attributes of the others, without distinction. Buber's I-Thou relationship is immediately lost and the potential of meeting with the eternal Thou.

## **Generational Transfer**

Generational transfer, which was discussed earlier particularly in Charles Taylor's philosophy, may also suffer from moral walls built to *self* protect the *old* from the *new* where the old may be entrenched for instance on committees, worship teams, or in ministry leadership.<sup>32</sup> This wall may be found in people or procedures; power in both cases likely rests with the old. In discussion with Charles Taylor in the previous chapter, the old social hierarchies were imbued with an honour system that is now considered out-of-date as a way of recognising others.<sup>33</sup> In the US case studies, an honour system seems well entrenched in some congregations, where key families dominate church membership, decision-making, and exercise influence through

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<sup>32</sup> The word *old* in this context refers to ideas and ways that are no longer appropriate given a *new* narrative. It does not refer to chronological age. *Old* retains its honour; i.e. there is no derogatory implication.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, 26-27.

generous bequests and offerings. The old may likely decide normative behaviour - what is considered right or wrong. In Volf's theology, this is the argument regarding who may be innocent or guilty.

Volf's explanation of *contrived innocence* contributes to an understanding regarding the healing of two sides of an innocent/guilty division. Volf comes from the perspective of "everybody is innocent in their own eyes."<sup>34</sup> To question whether someone is guilty, questions in whose eyes or from what point of view they are considered guilty. The opposite is to ask whether someone is innocent, and this questions in whose eyes are they innocent. Therefore perpetrators may generate an innocence that is self-serving. Volf explains the double strategy of perpetrators. In generating *contrived innocence*, first they deny wrongdoing, and secondly they build up the positive moral significance of their own actions. In a church environment, certainly "God" may be used to justify human action, legitimately or not.

There are also the onlookers, congregational members outside of the discussion, who Volf calls the "third party." These members cannot claim innocence because of their non-collusion, indifference, or tolerance. It is the onlookers through their own biases who may determine innocence (right) and guilt (wrong) and thus collude in and add power to contrived innocence.

## **Fighting Back**

Perpetrators building positive moral significance have the ability to open up with a long history of wrongdoing done to them and see themselves as past victims; thus moving from perpetrator to victim back to perpetrator in a continuing cycle. These are Bridges' opening up of past hurts, discussed earlier, which are the *gift* of the time in transition.<sup>35</sup> The transition time offers healing for victims/perpetrators, and may break this cycle, provided the past hurts are brought into the open and do not sit in the silence of denial or disengagement.<sup>36</sup> The repercussion, if there is no healing, is that the person may continue to cycle from victim to perpetrator, as described. Healing becomes an imperative otherwise conflict during transitions is likely to exacerbate, as in

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<sup>34</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 110-111.

<sup>36</sup> I define *engagement* in a Christian setting as a description of a person who is committed and motivated to experience the real depths of their faith; *disengagement* is the opposite.

fact has happened in the two examples given earlier from Australia,<sup>37</sup> and the US.<sup>38</sup> Conflict generated the energy for the writing and publication of books and the subsequent collaborations among those affected to resist closure. In both examples, I suggest *spiritual rupture* is evident due to the significant level of pain suffered in response to how the church hierarchy managed restructuring. I also suggest that there is a relationship between length of time in a particular congregation and the level of rupture for individuals. In the US example given above, the protestors are still active at one church eleven years later.<sup>39</sup>

Leaving a congregation, or being marginalised within a congregation (leaving but not leaving), may evidence something resulting from power structures. In either case, *leaving* truncates any movement toward the possibility of transformation – conflict may commence, but conflict is ultimately avoided. Leaving may signal both avoidance of a conflict situation and creation of resistance. Thus, resistance is one sign of conflict-avoidance that may exacerbate differentiation of identity possibly to the point of anarchy.

Those who consider themselves victims, such as a congregation whose church has been closed, ironically may be classified as *perpetrators* if they fight back. There is the potential for escalation in such a situation where conflict begets conflict in the division. Healing releases pain held from mis-recognition, blame, judgments of others, and projected attitudes toward them as *other*. In an environment of I-Thou the unavoidable conflict of healing releases the energy for transformation, and thus the power of remembered pain may be stripped from the historical narrative. The importance of remembered pain is covered in the following chapter.

## **Being as One**

A place where there is no conflict or division may be interpreted for the people of God as being One with the triune God.<sup>40</sup> In real-life, conflict is sourced in the tensions at the fault lines of diversity but I argue there is a place where conflict does not or cannot exist. Being One with Christ is held in a paradox or place where no conflict may exist. It is important in restructuring that such a place is available for those in Christian community.

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<sup>37</sup> Lane, *Saving St Brigid's*.

<sup>38</sup> Seitz, *No Closure*.

<sup>39</sup> Marcelo, "Judge Orders Protesters to End 11-Year Vigil Inside Closed Church".

<sup>40</sup> I have used the word *One* to signify a divine place.

Living with diversity was key to Paul's development of theology. Living together as family meant unavoidable diversity, and Paul's strategy is summarised in Galatians 3:28 (NIV):

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In this place, God embraces I and Thou in the Oneness, when identity is recognised, and when identity is accepted to the extent of Volf's "making space in oneself for the other."<sup>41</sup> Paul's theology of unity in the One makes all differences irrelevant bringing all into equality through faith. Unity in the One does not erase the differentiation required of identity formation. This unity allows and requires diversity – the greater the diversity, the greater the potential, and the strength of coming together in the unifying force as One. The existence of difference affirms and strengthens Christianity, and may enable relationships among religions. In an I-Thou relationship, the eternal Thou enables us to receive the distinctness of the other. To extend this idea, if a church is defined as "I," then each church has the potential to be in an I-Thou relationship with other Christian churches, and with other religions. Such a worldview allows the holding together of all contradictions and all others, each in their unique identity.

In *Anecdote to Evidence*, the main causes of conflict and divisions were in worship styles, leadership, gay priests/bishops, and members' behaviour.<sup>42</sup> There is now freedom from the Law, yet people continue to generate their own laws. For Paul to suggest that slaves and masters sit together in table fellowship was shockingly egalitarian.<sup>43</sup> Yet, it was the only way to occupy the spiritual place as one people, with table fellowship the starting point. The Galatians 3:28 passage was deeply subversive to what was religious authority at the time. It is considered subversive today by some. The linking together of the conversional experience of baptism, of death and rising to new life, and the language of belonging for all however marginalised, brought together the fictive kinship group in a distinct bonding in communion. The baptised could be "all One in Christ Jesus," and any human status, by birth or political construct, was irrelevant.

The narrative of Galatians 3:28 images the major divisions in society at the time of Paul – race, class, and gender – three extreme examples of potential conflict. If these three divisions could be

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<sup>41</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 49.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book I, Part II, 359.

considered as one, then the inherent conflict is dissolved. Being One with Christ Jesus was possible only if they could be one with each other without conflict. Paul uses his definition of diversity in the extreme and this allows a community to incorporate all possible diversity. Where worship style is the most frequently reported reason for conflict,<sup>44</sup> this may be a sign of diversity, and as some US case studies show there are adaptations available using music in a way that ameliorates and dissolves conflict while retaining diversity.

Volf interprets Galatians 3:28 as a real life experience with the strict opposites enhancing the narrative style in the text.<sup>45</sup> I will continue with Volf's assumption, that selves are situated, thus having distinctions of gender, race, and class, in awareness the wider differences of Mannix and Neale include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and physical abilities.<sup>46</sup> Paul marked out *race* in the words "neither Jew nor Gentile," *class* through "neither slave nor free," and *gender* by "nor is there male and female." Ammerman's congregations also reflect other differences, "neither young nor old," "neither newcomer nor long-time attender," "neither the dominant nor the silent," "neither insider nor outsider," "neither gay nor straight," and other fault lines.

To look further at the narrative construction of the Galatians text, the words "neither/nor" provide a space, where those who believe join God in a mutual embrace, where no one is excluded. In Paul's theology, belief has to exist first in order to see and understand both Oneness and the space where Oneness exists. The use of "neither/nor" dissolves all tensions and all attached cultural norms, yet does not disregard identity. Neither/nor does not produce the midpoint of two absolutes or either of two absolutes.<sup>47</sup> There is no compromise. Therefore, identity continues to be open to change and to making space for the other in oneself. It is in the letting go of tension and entering surrender where vulnerability may be sensed and where vulnerability must be allowed to exist for transformation to be possible. It is a choice to *be* One with God (or Christ Jesus, or the eternal Thou) in what is a deeply religious place and not a place available in a corporate business model. *Being* allows the transformation in Oneness since there is mutual recognition of the other. Theology is suspended as the search for God is found. No interpretation is then required.

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<sup>44</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 49.

<sup>45</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Table 12.3 Categories and Types of Diversity. Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 413.

<sup>47</sup> Neither/Nor is a logical operator, and is a binary operation on two propositions where neither is true.

Paul's words *for you are all One in Christ Jesus* are the operative elements in the verse, with the narrative construction of opposites as examples of human differences which are considered no longer relevant. Nonetheless, the church has an historical narrative that makes distinctions, sometimes through biblical interpretation and sometimes in other ways of *adiaphora*.<sup>48</sup> The God-given call of Jesus to love one another, which supersedes all other claims, has been heeded but sometimes not.

N.T. Wright develops his understanding of Paul's theology with the "Messiah-and-spirit-driven emphasis on the one God and on the unity of the people of this one God."<sup>49</sup> Wright uses the particular word *unity* in discussing Paul's theology specifically when Paul's intention was to explain that everyone is equally welcome at God's table in community. Belonging at the same table was confirmed in the Antioch incident of Galatians 2.11-14 in which Peter concedes that, in effect, Paul is correct – there is no separation among people who follow Jesus and no distinction in what food may be eaten. Wright asserts that the predominant single identity was to be "Messiah-people."<sup>50</sup> In race, class, or gender, cultural norms are attached to these diverse bodies. These bodies exist today with their various human attributes and Paul's theology is not describing anything new such as a "third race" but removes as irrelevant identity attributes of norms of culture and attributes of race, class, or gender.<sup>51</sup> With no identity attributes that may divide, there can be no conflict in differentiation.

From Paul's proclamation of everyone being equally welcome at God's table, it can be assumed this meant without conflict. To deepen this interpretation, silence enables awareness, imagination, and vision thus providing the ability to be One. This is also a place of active surrender, subsumed into *kairos* time; a place of surrender of pre-formed prejudices, opinions, and theological positions. Being One is always possible where there are I-Thou relationships. God's embracing is in the paradox where any contradictions are held as they are, without conflict, and this is where Oneness is possible to exist. Divisive conflict will not solve practical issues. Therefore, the existence and experience of life without conflict may be seen as a way to

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 402. *Adiaphora* (Gk) means "indifferent things" – they are peripheral or non-essential matters neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God.

<sup>49</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book I, Part I, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Book I, Part II, 397. "Messiah-people" is the earliest description of those who would later call themselves "Christians."

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Book II, Part IV, 1443-1449.

learn and live without division. In practice, paradoxes, contradictions, or different points of view, may not be ignored, tolerated, or met with indifference, since the possibility of I and Thou as subject is then lost. Reconciliation is necessary for Oneness embracing I and Thou to express genuine peace.

Being One avoids the necessity to access and analyse another culture. Being One allows difference, without conflict arising from analysis and classification. The effects of *lost in translation* reside both in interpreting Galatians 3:28 and in interpreting, for instance, other cultures. The dichotomy of sacred and profane is perhaps the more difficult to reconcile where morality differs between cultures so that offence may be caused, which is not the experience of the other. *Agreeing to differ* is the practical terminology allowing a place where co-existence is possible. Becoming One in silence will allow experience of the lack of conflict in the mutual relationship.

Once diversity is allowed, all may still be One in Christ. Diversity provides the strongest place provided there is unity. Although some may leave this should not be seen as dis-unity. The unity of the church as a whole continues. Practically, conflicting power claims existing within difference need reconciling dialogue and the words “Let us pray ...” potentially leading to Oneness.

In the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the three Tikanga are One and they each retain their unique identities. There are no others. All differences and conflict are set aside in entering into communion. Oneness also transcends denominational differences in its application to all those who believe in the Christian faith. Oneness is the place where sacred stories may be found. For leaders in their context, identifying the existence of exclusion or embrace opens up creative mitigation strategies to ease the transition process and support the *new* narrative while honouring the *old* contributing to a well-managed process with positive outcomes. Much of the discussion may seem negative, yet these risks require action. Restructuring may be unavoidable but it ideally should be painless. Being One with Christ in prayer is the sanctuary where refuge and time for healing is available.



## Chapter Five: Moving Forward

The final step of the Pastoral Cycle is to plan the actions in a local context that have been decided from earlier research and theological reflection.<sup>1</sup> To fully let go of the past will allow the full experience of God's embrace, the possibility of transformation, and will add to the ability of a congregation to flourish. Memories may influence the future trajectory of a congregation. In this chapter, I will discuss the following:

First, in analysing congregational narratives, I will explore how a congregation may let go of the past and move toward a transformational future. Memories form these narratives. Miroslav Volf's fourth co-requisite for Christ's embrace is healing of memories.<sup>2</sup> The need to heal is also William Bridges' gift of transition.<sup>3</sup> Reconciliation takes place by carefully opening up past memories and releasing the attached feelings so that the historical narrative loses its power over the future. In reconciling, the emotion attached to the memory is erased with its latent potential for divisive conflict. A counter-narrative of sin and guilt may also lie among these memories. However, ideally there will be cases where a congregation's narrative is one full of excitement and growth, continuous transformation, and a past narrative demonstrating the life-giving foundation that it is.

Secondly, a brief exploration of situations where congregational members may leave is necessary to expose and mitigate pain's imposition on the narrative. The risk of someone leaving is of course the opposite of what is intended. However, it may be necessary for some people to leave as conflict leaves with them and this is part of the congregation's transformation. For some congregational members there is the risk of (extreme) social and spiritual rupture.

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<sup>1</sup> Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 136-151.

<sup>2</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 110-111.

I will continue to use the word *old*, not in terms of chronological age, but as it refers to ideas and ways that are no longer appropriate given a *new* narrative. *Old* retains its honour, and there is no suggestion of a derogatory stance.

## **1. Congregations' Narratives**

I argue that it is necessary to understand a congregation's narrative before planning change. One of the themes arising from research findings in Chapter Two was "The Use of Narrative" where it was found that narratives appear key to unifying a congregation, and setting perspective for the journey ahead.

Five aspects of the word *narrative* will be explored:

- a) the emotional, social, and spiritual narrative of the congregation's past as told today by the congregation's members
- b) a constructed narrative that guides a congregation's trajectory
- c) a narrative for a congregation's transition process
- d) the biblical story that a congregation uses to identify their own religious story
- e) a script that in a few words carries a congregation's vision for their future as Christian community

### **a) Past Narrative**

The narrative of a congregation is the historical, spiritual, and emotional memory of the people and their faith journey of what they have seen and experienced. This interpretation of *narrative* brings a congregation's theology into view. This theology helps understand the construct of the congregation's past and possible future identity. This narrative is not a history of those appointed to vestry nor is it found interpreted through business models.

To better understand *narrative*, I now turn briefly to the link between memory and narrative. An individual's or a group's narrative is formed from memory (which is likely fallible). Memory depends on what a person remembers and how they remember. Memory also as sacred story

reveals a congregation's theology and their identity.<sup>4</sup> In Volf's theology, memories are a form of knowing and are found expressed in how things are acted on.<sup>5</sup> The emotion attached to a memory provides an innate energy. What is remembered often deeply affects what is done.<sup>6</sup> For a congregation, memories may well be happy and reflected in positive outward actions toward others. For a memory tinged with pain, remembering becomes an object that may be actively pursued and continued. This pain may be found in situations of avoidance, withdrawal, silence, or adjusting position. Seeing such situations should not necessarily be read as obedience. What is done may also mean continuing revenge, gaining political advantage, exercising moral superiority, control, and exploitation. Acting on memories by an individual or group, is a sign that the memories are first acting on them.<sup>7</sup>

Volf discusses painful memories in terms of his experience with ethnic cleansing; yet, the insights he derives may be applied judiciously to congregations. For instance, distorting or repressing memories does not allow healing; signs of anger, unconcern or perhaps callous indifference reflect a lack of healing.<sup>8</sup> Naming an event gives recognition and in a reconciling community restoration becomes possible. This restoration may be biblically experienced as a living death of the old memory, replaced by a new way of looking, bringing hope. God's promises are able to give hope for the future.

For practical experience of the existence of memory affecting future decisions, at least two examples are available in the US research where past actions are repeated – I describe this as a “default narrative.” East Lynn's church has a past narrative of relocating successfully and this is what they remember. They were planning to relocate again to avoid decline: their past narrative for change has become their future narrative, by default. Hinton Memorial has had two recorded schisms – possibly a learned memory from the past where schism resolves conflict.

There will be good memories that can be re-invoked to warm and blanket the bad. Good memories may reinforce nostalgia for the past, and yet may give impetus into the future and

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<sup>4</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 61.

<sup>5</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006). (In this book, Volf expands in depth on ‘memory’ discussed in his earlier work *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996)).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-75.

resilience to change. However, as discussed earlier, the emotion tied up in painful memories past and present requires healing during a congregation's time of transition. Unhealed memories have power and this power needs to be disconnected through healing. Volf states "[bad memories] hold us back so that we cannot project ourselves into the future and embark on new paths. They chain our identity to the injuries we have suffered and shape the way we react to others."<sup>9</sup> Therefore "keeping the past in the past" when there is an unhealed memory is an insufficient response during transition. A congregation that is reflecting a pain-imbued narrative, whether implicit or explicit, needs healing of that memory.

For some congregations, the most painful memory may be that of a schism, an outright disagreement with a pastor/warden/vestry member, perceived financial mismanagement, or perhaps the closure of a church. In these cases, relationships likely have been broken. The practical issues may be dealt with through discussion. However, the emotional issues that affect relationships, at the worst, may be bitter and produce divisive conflict and lasting separation. The ability to continue embracing those in pain through a healing process allows the congregation to embrace a pain-free future narrative.

A word relevant for New Zealand is Volf's terminology in the past *colonising* the future.<sup>10</sup> Racial and religious colonisation is a past that many would say still requires some healing with Pākehā and Māori. This old memory from the past continues to affect New Zealand's future as a nation, disallowing the full potential of both nationhood and indigenous religious beliefs to be realised. Although this restraint is ameliorating as disputes are settled, the memory embedded in emotions continues to invade the narrative of future generations. Both sides seek reconciliation and healing. Healing is able to continue its restorative work through mutual relationships and not through taking sides in a division.

The sentimental longing for something in the past comes from memory and the emotional and spiritual elements contained in memory may be specific to an individual's or a congregation's experience. Particularly, Christian beliefs contribute to religious memory. It may not be possible to remove this nostalgic memory because of its attachment to holiness, nor, I contend, should it be removed by invalidating an experience of God. Holiness attached to memory in this sense

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 82.

attaches to place and to the land. The roots of tradition are particularly important for a denominational church as a whole but individuals, who do not adapt to changing interpretations, possibly without realising, will be locked in the tradition's past. Thus, resistance to change may be seen in those protecting *their* God, *their* experience, and *their* tradition. Australian theologian, Terry Veling, describes tradition in a way that honours the past and supports its interpretation in a future context:

Tradition calls out to us from the deep memory of the past, not to celebrate nostalgia or comforting doctrines, not to enshrine some truth in a timeless vault. It is no quaint or comforting reminiscence; rather it is the memory of a passionate people with deeply spiritual longings and burning hearts.<sup>11</sup>

Nostalgia is a springboard to the future with the Bible's wisdom informing and confirming the trajectory, with honour for the past retained. The Old Testament is the springboard for the New Testament. Nostalgia is most faithfully expressed when used to support the future. Honouring the past may enable nostalgia to be left behind.

#### **b) Future Narrative**

I argue a congregation should deliberately identify its trajectory by making its future story concrete through a narrative. Such a narrative encompasses what is seen and heard in community (rituals, symbols, music, images, online presence, metaphors, building architecture, local images, etc.). This narrative is not a mission statement. It is about the people of God and how they will form their community in the new environment and what the tenets and theology of their new community life will be.

A religious narrative is an I-Thou story; it engages with the other and with God. This engagement allows fluid boundaries between a congregation and its wider community so that one is the other; where belief systems nourish and enrich for the common good. Hence, engagement treats all people as subject, without secular adversity. The narrative is not to hold God or the congregation in a narrative bondage, but to provide narrative as seed for the future allowing the possibility of growth for the people of God, where all are recognised equally as unique individuals.

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<sup>11</sup> Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as it is in Heaven"* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 36-37.

Words create opinions through their interpretation and the words chosen are signs revealing a congregation's identity, perspective, and their level of relationship with the wider community. Cohering a congregation's reality in context to the future narrative is necessary. A forward-looking narrative supports the break with the past, or could simply re-direct the journey if that is more relevant. The narrative, to be in any way transformational, needs to be spoken, heard, and acted on to ensure the congregation moves forward and inhabits their new narrative to the extent it becomes loadbearing.

A new narrative provides a distinct trajectory for a congregation to follow and to inform the wider community. Such a narrative has potential to unify, cohere, and build the new identity. It also acts as a foundation for the reality of new memories. The future narrative may be an extension of the past narrative, but its real potential is in the possibility of changing the future of a congregation, and also opening the congregation's boundaries, and bridging its barriers. Ammerman's case studies include examples of words that the congregations are using either implicitly or explicitly. These words have intrinsic and obvious meaning and express an intentional language of community. The two new church plants were free to set their narrative trajectory. The trajectory of those congregations described as persistent in the face of change remains in a static comfortable past. Their past narrative, is their future narrative, by default.

The importance of leadership in leading construction of a congregation's new narrative is particularly evident in the US congregations who are adapting. As only one example of how a pastor is able to lead a congregation's narrative, I quote here from St Matthew's case study:

The pastor himself has set the tone for a strong and healthy parish, both by his insistence on openness and inclusion and by his hands-off style of management. His stance of no-questions-asked acceptance [of people] diffuses criticism of the presence of [for example] gays and lesbians in the parish ... [reflecting] the Church's basic love and acceptance of all persons who seek to live a Christian life under its care.<sup>12</sup>

### **c) Narratives for Transition**

Choosing a biblically-based narrative requires a deep understanding of the theology being projected and the possible variety of interpretations during the transition stage. The narrative is

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<sup>12</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 168 and 169.

very much context-dependent. Leaders should consider the question of criteria for choosing this narrative. As an example, I discovered various authors and particularly Bridges using the Exodus story as the narrative for transitions. While a congregation may understand the exodus out of Egypt as God's story of liberation and fulfilment for the Hebrew people, some may take a more literal interpretation from the text. There are various reasons why this story may not guide a modern-day congregation through a transition:

- it has negative racial overtones, with the Hebrews ejected from Egypt, and the Hebrews killing the Canaanites to take over the Promised Land
- hierarchical patriarchal power continues throughout
- the Hebrew exodus included an army as well as civilians
- the journey took forty years
- the old had to die off first
- Moses died before the beginning

The Exodus story reflects exclusion by race, gender, and power. Paul's theology moves forward from these Old Testament constructs to where in Galatians 3:28 race, gender, and power are irrelevant.

Without a narrative for transition, people may find disparate stories to bring their own meaning to change and transition. In choosing a biblical narrative to act as a metaphor for a congregation's transition, first it needs to be viewed in the context of the congregation and the particularities of their transition. The ability to embrace fault lines without exclusion confirms a narrative's acceptance, use for the transition and as a foundation with the potential for growth. Ideally, the narrative will express the construct of synergy in the transition process, and into the future of the congregation as a whole. The narrative should drive the congregation together (unity) and forward, be biblically rooted, easily incorporated into sermons, and be relevant to church members and to the wider community.

The stages of transition may require different verses for each stage. As an example, Ecclesiastes 3:1ff, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven ...,"<sup>13</sup> may be adapted to each stage of transition as seasons that move forward, without doubt or hesitation, and

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<sup>13</sup> These verses are amenable to use of alternative words; for instance, the translation of *kill* may be better reworded as *to let go*.

do not look back. There is nothing to preclude the use of additional guiding narratives to reinforce specific requirements in context, unless they confuse the trajectory.

#### **d) Narratives of Religious Stance**

Examples from Ammerman's case studies include both implicit and explicit narratives of religious stance. It is not clear how developed these particular narratives are in practice. The implicit biblical narratives are part of a congregation's life but are not necessarily spoken or written but are theology nonetheless. As an implicit narrative, Grace Baptist incorporates bible study into church life so that "scripture become[s] the stuff of everyday conversation."<sup>14</sup> Epworth United Methodist's implicit narrative is that the long time members "remain a powerful presence" - an inference to God's power.<sup>15</sup>

The explicit congregational narratives drive forwards and outwards, embracing the wider community and themselves. Good Shepherd Lutheran's explicit saying is "Embracing the diversity of God's creation and celebrating our oneness in Christ."<sup>16</sup> Brighton Evangelical's pastor leads their cohering narrative "Everyone in the church is special ... each one has received an invitation from God to God's table."<sup>17</sup> This narrative is particularly meaningful as Brighton's congregation feeds the community's marginal and outcast, and is an example of a biblical stance that reaches into the arena of the congregation's mission.

The US research makes no mention of how the biblical narratives arose yet they are birthed from the congregations' experience. However, the explicit narratives described are embracing, particularly relevant to the context of the congregation, and appear equally relevant to the wider community. However, I suggest that it is the implicit narratives that tell the deeper story.

#### **e) Scripts**

There is no single universal verse, *slogan*, or *mimēma* for all time. They are necessarily temporary. Each will be specific and relevant to a congregation's time and place, and may be

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<sup>14</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 246.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 207.



changed depending on circumstances. Such a script may interlocate with “Let us pray ....” Paul’s *mimēma* is “for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28b). Any meme is consistent with the future narrative of a congregation. The aim is to focus and bond a congregation. A living meme, such as Paul’s, is a self-describing intentional language of a community.

## **2. Leaving**

There is an ambiguity when people leave a loving family and this action requires analysis. In restructuring of a congregation, the risk of people leaving will be between endings and beginnings. In the US research studies, those people that physically left congregations undergoing change were in an extreme position, and where no one should be considered right or wrong. There is not only the pain felt, but also the tension in the choice (change, leave, or stay without changing). Members’ leaving is identified in the English research.<sup>18</sup> There is also a “leaving” that is relatively unobtrusive and unrecorded (disengagement).

In the event of a church closure, leaving is at the point of the ending when the community relationships are broken in that place. Choices open up for congregational members. One choice is whether they will continue as part of the new identity or leave. For some it will be a time of conflict and grief, yet their leaving enables the remaining congregation to transform; those who leave will miss or avoid the potential to transform with their congregation. Those leaving will leave behind their part in the congregation’s past narrative, and possibly the potential to reconcile that past.

This discussion covers areas of schisms, disengagement, closure of a church, generational transfer, and letting go of the past.

### **a) Schisms**

Not wishing to adapt to changing circumstances appears to be the reason for division and it is this reason that is important, not who was right or wrong in any given situation. Choosing to

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<sup>18</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 49.

blame, for instance the appointment of a “lady preacher” or a preacher’s style, is not an option.<sup>19</sup> The final choice is whether to leave or stay: to adapt or not. Physically leaving a congregation is entirely self-imposed. However, while not all situations are as clear-cut or as painful as a schism, the principle remains. Those who leave avoid the pain of the transition and, by avoiding the control exerted by the church hierarchy or others, retain power over their life choices. Those who leave retain their identity by not adapting.

## **b) Disengagement**

It is possible to leave a congregation, but continue to attend. This position is a psychological departure or “disengagement.” It effectively relieves those disengaged from participation. For instance, those *in exile* may continue to exile themselves through disengagement if they do not perceive a welcome or embrace on the other side of conflict.

Volf discusses a similar facet and that is the power of normalisation.<sup>20</sup> This is not leaving in any obvious way. The effects of the power of normalisation within a congregation are almost the opposite of freedom since the effects produce a type of imprisonment *in situ*. Exclusion is not only about such things as building barriers, creating rules, and generally denying access, but also exclusion can be normalised by hiding behind the perceived normality of what Michel Foucault calls “carceral mechanisms.”<sup>21</sup> These imprisoning mechanisms trap people within rules that define normal knowledge, values, and practices, and what is therefore abnormal.<sup>22</sup> There is evidence of this in congregations where powerlessness is recorded, in the silence of acquiescence, and it could exist within the procedures of democratic systems. On one hand, normalisation has the ability to trap people in the past, and in an unwillingness to change. On the other hand, it could ensure a stable, consistent environment following the tenets of community life. However, in either case, normalisation could be harnessed as a strategy to move a congregation forward by changing the “rules.”

Disengagement may sit in silence, refusal, and resistance, passive or not. These people have “left” in every practical sense, disenfranchising themselves from active relationship.

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<sup>19</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 219-220.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 308. Referenced in Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 308. Referenced in Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 62.

Disengagement may also exist in those who attend only occasionally, or only when on rosters. The guilt felt from the possibility of actually leaving may be enough to retain these people. The physical act of leaving for them may be too difficult. Yet, those disengaged will likely show resistance to further change, such as the suggestions of enthusiastic newcomers.

The cause of disengagement may be found in each individual's narrative. A new future narrative for the congregation may be able to counteract these old narratives by undermining or usurping the cause, thus leaving the past behind. This subversion may result in conversion.<sup>23</sup> Conversion is seeded from the need to resolve inner conflict. Conversion comprises letting go of an old narrative (death), and accepting and engaging with the new narrative (resurrection). The old narrative has not *failed*. It is to be honoured, and the new narrative, in Walter Brueggemann's gentle words "invites, seduces, teases, [and] requires the abandonment of an old script [that is deathly]." <sup>24</sup>

By contrast, the disengagement of outsiders, rather than insiders, is described in the research report of St Matthews who welcomed the gay community:

Many gay and lesbian members talk about the sense of alienation they felt in their years away from the Church, feeling lost and alone, unsure of God's love. But they were drawn back to church and then reassured that God did indeed love them.<sup>25</sup>

In the example in the UK research, the women/gay priests and bishops may neither be fully engaged by the hierarchy nor by the congregations they wish to serve. This becomes an imposed disengagement by the dissenters in not allowing the potential diversity of appointed clergy to be recognised.

### c) Closure

A committee generally decides the closure of a church but closure may be imposed, perhaps due to the costs of earthquake strengthening. However, a congregation, of their own volition, may decide to close and this situation appears to be more successful. As one example, St Andrews

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<sup>23</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Some Theses on the Bible in the Church" in *Mandate to Difference: An Invitation to the Contemporary Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 191.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>25</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 171.

Kirkfield, a small congregation in Ontario, Canada, decided, “it wasn’t good stewardship to keep going as [we] were ... right from the beginning, people were open and willing to change.”<sup>26</sup> There was a *unanimous* vote to merge with another congregation. It is worthwhile to note that this decision was made when there was “money in the bank.”<sup>27</sup>

The congregation that willingly decides to change, retains and enhances its feelings of power in being allowed to re-interpret their own world. As noted in Chapter Three, this feeling of power generates the energy for change and positive outcomes thus reducing the likelihood of further decline.<sup>28</sup> The decision by a congregation to close removes the extreme pain of an imposed closure and the need for healing of memories. If any members do leave it is likely to be by agreement. The congregation’s narrative will not reflect pain and the future narrative is positive; I-Thou relationships are retained, as is honour.

MacLachlan, on the closure of St Andrews Kirkfield states -

Their decision to bless their community with their building [sold for \$1] and to bless their pastoral charge [the congregation they merged with] with their resources is a powerful testimony, not just to *ending with grace*, but to truly live out what the Bible says.<sup>29</sup>

Closure of a church is an initiated or imposed division. By comparison, the act of leaving an existing congregation is a self-chosen pathway. A lack of engagement is also a chosen pathway, dysfunctional but not necessarily divisive. Generational transfer is an internal division that requires the congregation to honour and support those in its own community. Those leaving, those disengaged, and those moving on within the congregational community, may continue to be embraced. However, closure without amalgamation indicates exclusion. The whole process of transition, or of being in exile, is also to a lesser extent exclusionary and initiated by the Church. Yet, with amalgamation and the mission of gathering in and welcoming, the impact of exclusion, may be mitigated.

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<sup>26</sup> Amy MacLachlan, "Good News Stories: Congregations in Transition," *The Presbyterian Record* 134, no. 10 (2010): 35-40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 266.

<sup>29</sup> MacLachlan, "Good News Stories," 36. [Italics added]

In a congregational environment, *beginnings* are not an immediate psychological step but a process of forming a new identity. As discussed in Chapter Three beginnings may be met with antipathy as congregational members adjust to a re-forming environment. The actual deconsecrating of a closed church may be delayed as the people adjust and pastoral workers take care of individuals who are suffering. As the UK research shows, experience with closures has led to further decline and there is a recommendation to forestall closures.<sup>30</sup> The new beginning would seem to be the better focus, so that a church closure potentially loses its power to entrap people in their past memories.

The importance of closure comes not from the practical change (folding the deckchairs), but from the spiritual and psychological effects on the community (the people have become the fabric of the deckchairs). Spiritual formation of a congregation is much more than nostalgia for the past. A religious community is built on its belief system and on shared experiences of belonging, and the joy of the special moments and events that make up the seasonal life of a congregation. Pain and grief are shared experiences, such as when a member reaches their last days of life, moves to another town, or leaves for residential care, and when the pastor's tenure ends. Closure will rupture the spiritual relationships to place, and will likely affect everyone in the congregation at the same time.

In the experience of closure, congregations may feel displaced or landless, and thus powerless. Such feelings of dis-placement have important roots and meaning in Māoritanga and in the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> A narrative focussing on the new beginning may alleviate a possible narrative of dis-placement.<sup>32</sup>

#### **d) Generational Transfer**

As discussed earlier, generational transfer issues occur when two generations are vying for power, cited in both the UK and US research studies. Long-term members, coming from a time when honour was found through inequalities, have reached their *retirement* age - the point when the old narrative is to be replaced by a new narrative for a future driven by younger members or

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<sup>30</sup> Goodhew, Kautzer, and Moffatt, "Amalgamations, Team Ministries and the Growth of the Church". 135.

<sup>31</sup> Māoritanga is part of the New Zealand identity.

<sup>32</sup> For further reading on the importance of place from the perspective of the Christian faith, see John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

newcomers. In the New Zealand Anglican Church, there is a time limit on how long someone may be a warden or on vestry. However, other levels of generational transfer are possible that provide a broader definition. These, found in Ammerman's case studies, may include such things as old assumptions, conservatism, tradition, symbols, music, liturgy, and worship style. Such elements anchor a congregation in a place dominated by the past. The effect on a congregation's future may be positive, as some will recognise that the past may offer stability, experience, and a foundation for the future. This is a place of diversity where the gifts of all contribute to the future (co-creation). Unfortunately, in some arenas the fault line between generations is becoming a barrier (past ways versus new ways), rather than a boundary through which relationships may be established.

The gap between generations is becoming wider, particularly through relationships with technology.<sup>33</sup> The driver of the future will be the technology the children are brought up on. The elderly have experience, qualifications, and their expertise is valued. The younger people know technology, music, and are usually physically active. The elderly likely have grandchildren, and congregations enjoy the vertical generational links. The elderly will retain their honour if their church supports them, and likewise the young or the newcomers will be encouraged and thereby honoured by the elderly. These are the age fault lines where synergy will exist in the conflict of diversity. The elderly may let go in the confidence that the young need a training ground, while the elderly are available for consultation, not dominance. In effect, the elderly are being asked to step back but not to disengage.

Ammerman's case studies include numerous examples of generational transfer issues, and often these are exacerbated by tight-knit congregations following a narrative of past successes, predominantly in those congregations persisting in the face of change. However, in contrast, one congregation sees the issues of gay rights as a current societal issue that needs to be addressed. In another congregation, committee structures have been formed that allow different generations to participate in strictly designated ways. In some, cultural differences have been incorporated through a variety of music styles; and in others by ensuring newer members have a part to play.

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<sup>33</sup> For further reading see Rob Salkowitz, *Generation Blend: Managing Across the Technology Age Gap* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2008).

Good Shepherd Lutheran names itself a *resurrection* congregation. It was the determination of the thirty-five members who voted in 1984 to keep the church open that made the transition possible, breaking from the old identity and forming the new. The Founders' Cross is the symbol of the church's past and old identity, continuing to honour "the determination of those who stayed and midwifed [the new identity] into being."<sup>34</sup> The congregation's narrative is "Embracing the diversity of God's creation and celebrating our oneness in Christ."<sup>35</sup> This narrative has the ability to quell any lingering doubts as it is able to interplay with their reality. The change and growth in this congregation has not been without tension, particularly between old and new. The pastor's leadership is acknowledged as a key to their successful transition.

The distinction between young and old may of course not be a clear dichotomy. *Young* can be *old* in their thinking, just as *old* can be *young*. However, the dichotomy helps to analyse differences between generations. Essentially the older generation are a "vertical" generation, whose values are based on hierarchy, honour, and possibly moral superiority. The younger generation are a "horizontal" generation who may disable power structures inherent in hierarchies and inequalities through using social media. Both generations may follow what they are already interested in or believe in, building in an implicit bias against anything that is different, particularly when there is an internet search involved. Search engine algorithms feed our known consumption patterns and through this exclusionary concept the result means that alternative points of view are not provided.<sup>36</sup> The fundamental problem is that search engines innocuously feed and reinforce people's exposure to their own biases. Such reinforced biases may not aid cross-generational knowledge and comparisons, unless specifically requested. If one extends this argument, one might say that the algorithm keeps both sides of the argument segregated to a point where each other is perceived as "very wrong," a perception gained by not seeking alternative opinions.<sup>37</sup> The algorithm potentially becomes one of the divisive omniscient narrators in our lives.

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<sup>34</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 273.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Epstein and Ronald E Robertson, "The Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME) and its Possible Impact on the Outcomes of Elections," *National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 112 (33) (2015), accessed 11 October 2015, [www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1419828112](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1419828112).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

### e) **Letting Go of the Past**

For a Christian community to embrace without a bias that produces insiders and outsiders allows a place for people to stand with a sense of belonging for all. Society continues to change and new biases will arise both in society and within the church. One aim of restructuring must be that of seeding the potential for growth and transformation. I argue that letting go of the past, and moving forward to a new beginning, is a *conversion* experience with its implicit conflict. Conversion in this sense is not a conversion to faith, but a conversion experience from one state to another state, or in other words, a change of heart. It is almost secular in this definition. Conversion is part of the moving forward of the transition process and precedes transformation.

If a process of conversion is activated during transition, then the conversion relates to the letting go and the change of heart required for the new beginning. In Ammerman's case studies, St Matthew's Catholic Parish is an example of conversion to welcoming the gay community. Hope Baptist has been led in its conversion by a new pastor. Epworth United Methodist's congregation has converted gradually through the appointment of successive pastors who have led a future narrative. The narrative embraces the Christian community and the wider community, engaging all in the excitement of the change. Thus, transformation has the potential to spill out of Christian community nourishing the wider community in mutual relationship.

Conversion is an experience for each person involved in a transition. Conversion to the new beginning is insufficient on its own for a "successful" amalgamation and re-formation. This brings to the fore my earlier question, "Is willingness enough?" The two pillars of the bridge of conversion are letting go the old state, and the new state. The new state must be understood through a new narrative. The act of conversion will bridge from the old state to the new state, from the past to the future, and from the letting go to the new beginning. Conversion is part of transition with its inherent conflict, chaos, meaning, and change. On the other side of conversion is acceptance, faith, meaning, and maybe enthusiastic support, but this is just the start of the re-formation of a new congregation in an amalgamation. In a closure without an amalgamation there is only the letting go. The process of letting go is one side of conversion but there will be an unknown or maybe constructed other side.



The perceived resolution of conflict often brings psychological closure and the pain that may have adversely fuelled old narratives is spent. Yet, narrative is dynamic, and never static. For reconciliation and healing to be operating the narrative should, I contend, continuously accommodate to current issues as a congregation moves forward, and where current issues become the congregation's past narrative. Transformation or division, may hide the details of the narrative of conflict, and possibly give the impression that none existed. The transition of Incarnation Episcopal is described as "... non-problematic. Black members say they were surprised at the openness and warmth of the white parishioners; they assumed that the white members *who stayed* were committed to the church regardless of the race of its occupants."<sup>38</sup> The words *who stayed* hide the issue of conflict that caused white members to leave. No further detail is given in the research report. In the silent story of those who left, the future of this congregation travels forward apparently unhindered by the past.

Returning from exile may enable letting go of old memory as the new narrative overtakes the old narrative. The return also enables a re-engagement through the transformative purpose of a gathered community joining as One in Eucharist. The narrative is transforming as the congregation is changing and forming into its new identity through necessary conflict that is "part of the mutual struggle toward shared community."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 146. [Italics added]

<sup>39</sup> Victorin-Vangerud, *The Raging Hearth*, 141.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis will play out in the context of a congregation, informing and guiding the process of restructuring. The approach has been one of theological reflection based on real-life experience from research to inform decisions in what is the highly complex environment of restructuring. This thesis rests on the hypothesis that the restructuring of Anglican communities must be a well-managed process that potentially supports the seeding of growth in congregations, or decline will be exacerbated.

### Managing Restructuring Well

Churches have been accustomed to sustainable congregations in the past. Now the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand is facing an increasing decline in affiliation. The answer is likely amalgamation of congregations with this action potentially exacerbating decline. A well-managed restructuring will not guarantee success but it actively engages and manages the inherent risk and *conflict* as congregations move forward from their *old* narrative to the *new*. Letting go of old assumptions is as important for those leading restructuring as it will be for the congregations being restructured. Assumptions from the days of success and stability cannot be reignited. The NWND churches have strategically placed themselves and are free to continuously adapt having started their lifecycle as new church plants.

The words *change* and *conflict* are unavoidable allies. To change is *conversion* with conflict implicit in this change process causing uncertainty and confusion as identity is threatened. With change comes resistance. Resistance is essentially identity protection. Both identity (or *self*) protection and prejudices may become embedded in the culture as “right” thinking increasing the difficulty of conversion to a new narrative.

Conflict is sourced in identity differentiation and relationships. Charles Taylor's theology on the politics of recognition and Martin Buber's concept of recognition in an I-Thou relationship set the benchmark for Christian community, and thus identify how conflict may be sourced. Where change is a fact of everyday congregational life, the people incorporate diversity and resolve or mitigate conflict, bringing religious engagement into the centre of the congregation's community life. These congregations evidence the ability to keep moving forward and changing identity, with pastors accepting conflict as a way of life and leading strongly into the future narrative. As quoted in *Anecdote to Evidence* "knowing how much a church can change is no small skill."<sup>1</sup> A restructuring environment requires the ability to lead transition and conversion from an *old* narrative to the *new*. The new narrative may well require a new style of leadership. A well-managed restructuring will gather the people in to community and will manage those who decide to leave.

Well-managed conflict will contribute to survival and life-giving growth, rather than to division and decline. The congregations that continuously adapt have embraced conflict to their advantage. This is the everyday mutual struggle of being in shared Christian community. A reconciling community, following the four co-requisites given by Volf, understands how to provide the full extent of God's embrace. A reconciling community is resilient to change and makes room for the other.

Avoiding a change of identity is not necessarily a predictor of decline. This identity may be strongly held and not amenable to change. These are the congregations considered least likely to amalgamate successfully. However, the niche congregations successfully embrace their unique cultural identities. Striving for consensus may contribute both to a congregation's inability to change, as well as their peaceful existence. Avoiding conflict for the sake of harmonious relationships may leave a church persisting in the face of change, remembering a successful past. Decline in itself is not a reason to consider closing a congregation, unless either the congregation decides this for themselves, or the congregation loses financial viability. In New Zealand, meeting earthquake standards may make church closure unavoidable. A church running into debt cannot be supported financially or theologically.

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<sup>1</sup> Voas and Watt, "Numerical Change in Church Attendance: National, Local and Individual Factors". 50.

Managing a declining congregation well will allow the continuing inclusion of their extended family – friends, neighbours, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, local businesses, local residents, previous church members and clergy, Facebook friends, and so on. All those who have some affiliation however loose will be affected by a closure. Allowing a church to die naturally maintains the congregation's sense of honour of a successful past and those who have participated in that past. Actions during restructuring build into the narrative on both sides of struggle and the emotions may continue to reside in the narrative being formed. Managing decline well produces good outcomes in terms of the subsequent narrative. To die well and creatively is the mandate. One way of honouring a dying congregation is to allow them to decide for themselves, how they want their end to be managed.

The implications of spiritual rupture from the detachment to a place where God has been encountered need to be considered. A place to stand that is attached to holiness and a lifetime in one church is how the people have become the fabric of the church. As church closure exacerbates decline, if the congregation chooses to die naturally, then the Church has a perceived obligation as servants of the people to honour that wish, if that is possible. If not possible, then good pastoral practices become imperative.

Instances of seemingly successful changing congregations were found in (a) the Canadian example of St Andrews, Kirkfield, where the congregation instigated their own closure deciding this on the basis of good stewardship,<sup>2</sup> and (b) where churches are maintaining two congregations, the *old* and the *new*, with the new likely to take over in time.<sup>3</sup> Research on re-forming congregations would identify the key factors for “successful” amalgamations.

Hindrances to change were explored. The potential to revert to the *old* ways is likely stronger in those not fully committed to change. Feelings of powerlessness will contribute to decline. Silence should be interpreted so that underlying issues are able to surface. A congregational member being acquiescent to change may not be a good sign. The declining congregations may not, or are unable to, express the extent of God's embrace, and are unfulfilled as there are no differences feeding their environment and therefore synergy unlikely. Willingness to change as a starting point will not be enough for these congregations.

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<sup>2</sup> MacLachlan, "Good News Stories."

<sup>3</sup> Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 72, 76, 278. Appendix III Congregations 1, 2 and 21.

Planning is the most important component of the transition process. The planning stage forms the platform for growth. A non-traditional future is the focus for planning, particularly for those congregations that cannot attract children. Local context will determine this future. A congregation enters their *exile* as soon as the word *restructuring* is mentioned. At this point, mitigation strategies should already be in place to avoid potentially difficult situations. In any event, the place of being One in Christ becomes the sanctuary where division is negated, and where those in a difficult or divisive place can come and pray together. Being One may not resolve practical issues but it is a spiritual place where being together without conflict is usefully learned and experienced.

A well-planned and managed transition will produce a congregation more likely to grow but an unplanned transition may write a narrative that has the potential to subvert the aims of the transition. A constructed future narrative may be used as the agent of change as it is able to set the trajectory, and with willingness to change, conversion, and a feeling of power, there is the possibility of a strong move into a transformative future.

It is important that healing of memories removes any latent pain in the *old* narrative that may affect the future. The narratives that congregations tell of themselves may inform the restructuring process of what needs to be healed, and inform where a strong foundation for the future exists. Pain may be held in memory and restructuring may add to this existing pain. Volf's four-fold co-requisites for *embrace* enable a Christian community to learn to reconcile and live with difference.

Living with difference is not moving to homogeneity. Buber, Taylor and Volf do not support a homogenous community of like individuals. Difference, or diversity, is life giving and feeds a community. This enables each culture to retain its identity, and relationship exists between each culture and between each individual. This is a natural unity through relationship. Boundaries will exist between cultures (or between any other fault lines), so that relationships are possible. If there is a barrier, no relationship is able to exist. It befits Christian communities to allow this natural differentiation to exist so that the various cultures give life to community. Majority and minority groups are able to exist side by side without either having priority over the other. Separate language services were identified in the US case studies, yet a lack of relationship between cultures was acknowledged. Voting requirements may not support justice where there

are majority and minority groups: one person, one vote, will not provide justice in an imbalanced voting pool. Consensus is the ideal between each group to avoid division.

It is important to identify the guises of power in a congregational environment. Power with the congregation drives the energy for growth, but powerlessness has the opposite effect and contributes to decline. Therefore, counteracting any feelings of powerlessness in a congregation, and with the congregation having equal rights to contribute (co-creation), may trigger synergy. Equal recognition of each unique individual counteracts an honour system implicit in a hierarchical structure. Honour systems from inequalities are less accepted generally in society with the advent of social media and therefore traditional denominations may need to adjust to a more horizontal environment by considering where and how power should reside and when. Restructuring is potentially an opportunity for addressing power imbalances built up over time.

From the US research, hierarchies with overarching administrative structures or committees are potentially an issue and produce a feeling of powerlessness in situations where decisions may be overruled or where decisions are imposed on individuals or a congregation. However, a denomination in leading change may utilise the power of (denominational) normalisation to aid a changing narrative, with consensus also ideal.

## **Risks**

Along with planning the potential future to be achieved through restructuring, the risks need to be identified in context and mitigation strategies put in place. The main risks being faced in restructuring are the issues that may diminish the restructuring process. Risks include to varying degrees:

- change and its attendant conflict
- division and its attendant energy (separating into them and us)
- congregational members leaving, with a painful separation
- spiritual rupture where members are forced to leave their place of memories and their place of strength

- decline itself
- fighting back
- members acquiescing to leadership and possibly disengaging
- disengagement in the new place
- loss of energy for positive outcomes
- sabotage
- silence
- a world presented to leadership by others
- assumptions
- feelings of powerlessness

Each risk, the probability of its occurrence and the possible consequences, need to be mitigated. The analysis of risk in context is an ongoing process as congregational life moves forward.

### **Seeding Growth**

It is possible to manage restructuring to support seeding growth, but restructuring may also seed further decline. Here I will summarise the main elements that are more likely to seed growth through their use together to create synergy: the place where two or more elements can achieve more than any one can on its own. This focus will open up greater possibilities for survival and growth.

The aim of restructuring in context is to realign a congregation with potential for the future and to seed the potential of growth into and through individuals, congregations, and the wider community. For instance, where a congregation is working from the feeling of a powerful position, consensus and power together provide synergy for the congregation to move forward and not lapse into decline.

The most likely strategies for seeding growth, used together to create synergy, may include:

- willingness to change, and choosing to risk and experience transition
- embracing conflict, aware that in the struggle is the possibility of transformation
- growth itself
- a well-managed restructuring process (including risk analysis)
- a well-planned transition process (including risk analysis)
- excitement for the future (a positive response)
- the holding of positive (healed) memories
- enabling the feelings of power to be with all in the congregation
- the right for everyone to contribute and be heard – co-creation
- fluid boundaries between the inside and the outside
- allowing growth for each unique person
- equality and justice (including in the voting environment)
- consensus, achieving more than a majority vote
- a dedicated pastor for each congregation (*Anecdote to Evidence*)
- a feeling of “ownership” by everyone
- a narrative for the transition process
- a constructed future narrative with appropriate theology
- fully letting go of nostalgia and the ways of the past (the *old*)
- conversion to the new narrative, or way of being (the *new*)
- moving from *old* to *new*
- generational transfer
- understanding Taylor’s concept of recognition in context
- understanding Volf’s “right” and “wrong” in context
- understanding that all people are to be treated as subjects with dignity and respect
- diversity and difference feeding community
- knowing the place without conflict, where there is prayer, and a way of being One in Christ Jesus



- providing Christ's embrace, explained by Volf's four co-requisites of repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for another, and healing of memory; this is a continuous way of being<sup>4</sup>
- *gathering in those in exile* - the role of ministry<sup>5</sup>
- the ability to make the other, no longer the other
- where God is the unchanging Builder; the living, active centre of community life.

## Christian Community

The ability to live in Christian community in harmony is a learned experience. I question whether attending church will automatically provide this learning. Volf looks to this through his theology of exclusion and embrace asking, "*what kind of selves we need to be* in order to live in harmony with others?"<sup>6</sup> With single people overtaking married people in terms of numbers, and the 213 ethnicities in New Zealand, being taught how to be a Christian family may well be necessary.

Restructuring attracts *conflict*. Conflict may be simply a struggle for agreement, or serious conflict could end up dividing the church. The perceived threat and fear of changing identity and experiencing something as an undefined "new" identity requires leadership through conversion. Enabling people to let go and thereby to open up their forward movement together will allow the common language of the new community to become the loadbearing narrative. Change and conflict cannot be separated and should not be avoided in restructuring. Any congregation being led into growth is exciting, if not somewhat daunting.

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<sup>4</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 100.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, "A Welcome for the Others" in *Mandate to Difference*, 49-71.

<sup>6</sup> Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 21. [Italics in original].

### **Further Research for the New Zealand Context**

Research is required to extend this thesis into the area of amalgamation and re-formation of congregations, and closure of congregations and their place of worship.

Research is required on the rapidly adapting NWND churches, their numbers, their influence, and their strategies in the marketplace.

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## Appendix I: Religious Affiliations NZ Census 2013

Religious Affiliation	2006 Census	2013 Census	Numerical Change	% of Total People 2013
Anglican	554,925	459,771	-95,154	10.8%
Baptist	56,913	54,345	-2,568	1.3%
Catholic	508,437	492,105	-16,332	11.6%
Christian nfd	186,234	216,177	29,943	5.1%
Latter-day Saints	43,536	40,725	-2,811	1.0%
Methodist	121,806	102,879	-18,927	2.4%
Pentecostal	79,155	74,256	-4,899	1.8%
Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed	400,839	330,516	-70,323	7.8%
Other Christian Religions	108,924	107,799	-1,125	2.5%
<b>Total people, Christian religions</b>	<b>2,027,418</b>	<b>1,858,980</b>	<b>-168,438</b>	<b>43.8%</b>
Ratana	50,565	40,353	-10,212	1.0%
Ringatū	16,419	13,275	-3,144	0.3%
Other Māori Christian Religions	579	555	-24	0.0%
<b>Total people, Māori Christian religions</b>	<b>65,550</b>	<b>52,950</b>	<b>-12,600</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Buddhist	52,362	58,404	6,042	1.4%
Hindu	64,392	89,919	25,527	2.1%
Islam/Muslim	36,072	46,146	10,074	1.1%
Judaism/Jewish	6,858	6,867	9	0.2%
Spiritualism and New Age Religions	19,797	18,288	-1,509	0.4%
Sikh	9,507	19,191	9,684	0.5%
Other Religions	14,943	15,054	111	0.4%
<b>Total people, with at least one religious affiliation</b>	<b>2,271,924</b>	<b>2,146,167</b>	<b>-125,757</b>	<b>50.6%</b>
No Religion	1,297,104	1,635,348	338,244	38.6%
Object to Answering	242,610	173,034	-69,576	4.1%
Total people stated	3,743,652	3,901,167	157,515	92.0%
Not Elsewhere Included	292,974	347,301	54,327	8.2%
<b>Total people, New Zealand</b>	<b>4,027,947</b>	<b>4,242,048</b>	<b>214,101</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Appendix II: Religious Professions NZ Census 1966

Religious Profession	Number of Adherents		% of Popn	
	1961	1966	1961	1966
Church of England (Anglican)	835,434	901,701	34.6%	33.7%
Presbyterian	539,223	582,976	22.3%	21.8%
Roman Catholic (incl Catholic undefined)	363,964	425,280	15.1%	15.9%
Methodist	174,026	186,260	7.2%	7.0%
Baptist	40,974	46,748	1.7%	1.7%
Protestant (undefined)	45,100	46,090	1.9%	1.7%
Ratana	23,126	27,570	1.0%	1.0%
Latter Day Saints	17,978	25,564	0.8%	1.0%
Brethren	25,810	23,139	1.1%	0.9%
Christian (undefined)	12,104	21,548	0.5%	0.8%
Salvation Army	15,479	17,737	0.6%	0.7%
Congregational	9,381	12,101	0.4%	0.4%
Church of Christ	10,504	10,301	0.4%	0.4%
Seventh Day Adventist	8,220	9,551	0.3%	0.4%
Jehovah's Witness	5,944	7,455	0.2%	0.3%
Lutheran	4,817	5,730	0.2%	0.2%
Ringatu	5,377	5,605	0.2%	0.2%
Atheist	3,359	5,474	0.1%	0.2%
Agnostic	2,288	4,960	0.1%	0.2%
Hebrew	4,006	4,104	0.2%	0.2%
Eastern Orthodox	3,328	3,605	0.1%	0.1%
Hindu	2,074	3,599	0.1%	0.1%
Undenominational	1,514	3,069	0.1%	0.1%
Assemblies of God	1,060	2,028	0.0%	0.1%
Undenominational Christian	2,170	1,968	0.1%	0.1%
Apostolic Church	1,399	1,841	0.1%	0.1%
Rationalist	1,030	1,696	0.0%	0.1%
Christadelphian	1,641	1,628	0.1%	0.1%
Christian Scientist	3,811	1,161	0.2%	0.0%
No Religion (so returned)	17,486	32,780	0.7%	1.2%
All other religious professions	14,412	23,499	0.6%	0.9%
Object to state	203,747	210,851	8.4%	7.9%
Not specified	14,198	19,300	0.6%	0.7%
<b>Total people, New Zealand</b>	<b>2,414,984</b>	<b>2,676,919</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## **Appendix III: *Congregation and Community*: Case Studies by Response**

### **Persistence in the Face of Change**

- 1 St Catherine's Catholic
- 2 Brighton Avenue Baptist
- 3 Gray Friends Meeting
- 4 Carmel Wesleyan
- 5 Berean Seventh-day Adventist

### **Relocating - Moving**

- 6 East Lynn Christian Church
- 7 First Baptist
- 8 South Meridian Church of God

### **Relocating - Niche**

- 9 Holman United Methodist
- 10 Episcopal Church of the Incarnation

### **Adaptation: Integrating Gay and Straight**

- 11 St Matthew's Catholic
- 12 First Congregational
- 13 First Existentialist

### **Adaptation: Integrating across Cultures**

- 14 Brighton Evangelical Congregational
- 15 City Baptist
- 16 Hinton Memorial United Methodist

### **Adaptation: Creating New Internal Structures**

- 17 Hope Baptist
- 18 Grace Baptist
- 19 Carmel United Methodist

### **Innovation: Birth and Rebirth**

- 20 Good Shepherd Lutheran
- 21 Epworth United Methodist
- 22 St Lawrence Catholic
- 23 Northview Christian Life

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