

EDITORIAL

Editorial Volume 4 Issue 2

Steve Taylor

Welcome to another issue of *Ecclesial Futures* and another fine set of original research contributions on development and transformation in and through Christian communities. I begin with thanks to the thirteen authors and six book reviewers published in this issue, along with the fourteen anonymous peer reviewers who have provided constructive, thoughtful and engaged feedback.

Thanks also to my colleagues Nigel Rooms (co-editor), Patrick Todjeras (editor of book reviews), Chris Pipe (copy-editor) and the team at Radboud University Press and Open Journals for their skill and care.

Original research

This issue of *Ecclesial Futures* offers seven original research articles and six book reviews. The articles range over four continents, including contexts in Oceania, Africa, United States and Europe. The focus of ecclesiological research includes local congregations, dioceses as a denominational structure and theological colleges. The research articles include empirical studies of placemaking, denominational renewal, reverse mission and migrant hospitality, along with methodological reflections on researching in theological partnership, church mobilization and missiological research.

In a **first** article, Rosemary Dewerse, Roxanne Haines, and Stu McGregor offer a case study of the application of Regenerative Development in a local church community in a rapidly changing inner-city suburb of Aotearoa New Zealand. The article describes the application of participatory, place-based, whole-of-systems approaches in a congregation with a long history and a growing commitment to decolonising their thinking through relationships with land and indigenous peoples. Historically, Regenerative Development has been applied to urban design and development projects and community development. Dewerse, Haines and McGregor describe how frameworks that value nature and indigeneity were applied to a local congregation. In an initial phase, five storylines were explored at Cityside members. These included *tangata whenua* (indigenous) stories; geological, ecological and water stories; neigh-

bourhood stories; church history; and Cityside stories. In a second phase, a set of processes sought to articulate an essence of place and establish “Why Cityside, here?” A third phase offered trajectories for long-term development. Alongside descriptive work, the article evaluates the potential of place and narrative in church health and renewal. Rather than locate renewal as the responsibility of church leaders, Regenerative Development values working with the ecology, geology, sociology and anthropology of a place. Mission shifts from saving to serving, from doing something to the community, to working with the vocation that arises from place-sourced potential. Theoretically, the article addresses an absence of place and narrative in the church growth and missional literature. Practically, the descriptive nature of the article resources practitioners working with congregations and organisations. Finally, a local church gained a transformed understanding of their future viability.

Ecclesial Futures welcomes original research not only of local churches but also of denominational structures and in a **second** article from Aotearoa New Zealand, the focus shifts from a local congregation to a diocese. Catherine Rivera conducts an ethnography of a diocese, participating in the intentional communities they offer to young adults and experiencing what she describes as a “broad theological table”. She finds that intentional communities provide important spaces of belonging and faith formation. In a rapidly changing world, the structured set of spiritual practices offered in these Intentional communities enhance well-being. Economically, the intentional communities offer financial stability and free up community members to spend more time in social activism. Rivera finds that a second factor that attracted young adults was the practical outworking of a “broad table” approach to diversity. For a generation attuned to practices that exclude others, ecclesiologies willing to maintain unity amid doctrinal or theological differences nurture the faith formation of young adults. The ethnographic data is brought into conversation first, with Romand Coles’ theory of receptive generosity and second, through framing the Western church as marginal. On a local and daily level, a broad table encouraged partnerships and gave missiological shape to being a good neighbour. A recognition of the increasing marginality of the denomination shaped the willingness of the diocese to incorporate emergent and neo-monastic groups as intentional communities. The result was renewal, for individuals and the diocese. Rivera’s research shows the importance of denominational structures making spaces of belonging and identifying with marginality.

The value of partnerships is also a feature of a **third** article. The article by Dustin Benac, Hannah Coe, Juli Kalbaugh, Tatum Miller and Erin Moniz outlines a new research methodology. Rather than accept the current silos between congregations, theological schools and nonprofits, the article describes how scholarship and religious practice can cultivate belonging and connection. The article provides a

theological fieldnote based on a year of the Program for the Future Church. Participants were invited to be collaborative in exploring solutions to the pressing challenges facing the Church today, and in a programme structured around convening points. These included connecting in Celebration, discerning in Collaboratory, and deepening through Contextual Research Hubs. The article helpfully describes the processes that animated these convening points and the interweaving that was refracted over time. A number of foundational assumptions are present. A first is that organizations are living realities in which belonging can be cultivated. A second is the value of active engagement of participants from different academic disciplines, sectors, denominations and organizations. A third is the importance of place and the richness that results when gatherings are held in different locations. A fourth is the worth of participants as co-authors and the ways that experiential narration is deployed to ground the new research methodology in embodied reflection. What results is a life-giving contribution to discussions around theological imagination and a description of how theological work can be located not in libraries and classrooms but in context and with communities.

The nature of cross-cultural dynamics in partnerships is provided in a **fourth** article. Adebisi Adenekan-Koevoets explores the possibilities and limits as African churches attempt cross-cultural mission in the West. Adenekan-Koevoets uses qualitative methods to illuminate the dynamics as Nigerian-initiated churches in London reposition themselves from “migrant enclaves” into communities engaging with wider British society. The article begins with an analysis of ecumenism and documents which demonstrate how African Pentecostal churches experience ecumenism as dominated by a European perspective of religion. Concerns that bring African Christians together include the supernatural, holistic theologies and responding to poverty and violence. These concerns are in contrast to European ecumenical concerns, which historically have focused on sacramental life. The recent development of receptive ecumenism, which values an “exchange of gifts” are seen as helpful. The article then reflects on ecumenism in cross-cultural mission by drawing on ethnographic research of three African Pentecostal churches in London. Churches that are larger in size and have a greater proportion of young university-educated members are better positioned to engage ecumenically and in community care. The intercultural capacity of key leaders is a significant factor, as are initiatives that begin with a commitment to personal relationships and friendships. There is also value in shared interdenominational events, particular when occasions are designed which encourage participants to learn from each other. The article helpfully documents the diverse ways in which African Pentecostal churches already participate ecumenically, through community care initiatives. Finally, the article outlines differences between first and second-generation-led Nigerian churches. An emerging generation of African Europeans are committed to the contextualization of Pentecostal

beliefs and practices, both in terms of outward-facing evangelism and the future shape of ecumenical engagement. This emerging generation offers new possibilities for the ecclesial future of the Church in the West.

In a **fifth** article, Pieter Labuschagne offers a missiological research model for his context in South Africa. The article works with an understanding of missiology as an independent field of theology and research as a practice that should result in the sharing of Good News. Given these stated aims, Labuschagne interrogates an approach to practical theology developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry in the 1990s. This approach is summarized in an acronym of LIM:

- L = Life-situation identified
- I = Interpretation of the life-situation
- M = Model preferred scenario

This practical theology approach is affirmed by Labuschagne for the ways in which it locates theology in dialogue with lived experience. However, the LIM approach needs to be examined in light of missiology. First, ways to integrate themes of *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality into every step of the practical theology model are presented. Second, mission action is introduced as an outcome. The result is a missiology schema, presented in diagrams that are clear and compelling and in an acronym of LIMM:

- L = Life-situation
- I = Interpret the life-situation
- M = Model preferred scenario
- M = Missional action

The article asks important questions about the place of missiology in research and in relationship to other academic disciplines. The diagrams and acronym offer clarity. Labuschagne provides a practical resource shaped by a depth of theological reflection that deserves to be tested in other locations.

Moving from South Africa to United States, in a **sixth** article, Mark Harden researches how congregations might be invited to assign practical theological meaning in assessing their readiness for church mobilization. Given a shortage of empirical research on church mobilization, Harden constructed a framework of ministry practices to analyse mission readiness for church mobilization. A literature review resulted in the development of six constructs: relational bonds, role of church leaders, dedicated support staff, belief in the plan, commitment to action and available essential capabilities. Harden drew on these six constructs to develop a self-assessment tool, called Church Performance Readiness Inventory. Given the importance of practical theology, Harden constructed an analytical framework to be utilized alongside the

self-assessment tool, as a way of integrating praxis and ecclesial theory in conversational modes accessible to lay participants in local congregations. The article includes the results of a pilot study, in which the self-assessment tool was tested in a local congregation with a vision of becoming a multicultural church. Participants completed the Church Performance Readiness Inventory self-assessment and the results were workshopped with participants. Practical actions were brainstormed and theological concepts that could helpfully shape the future were identified. The article notes the need for further research to understand how the self-assessment tool and the analytical framework might continue to inform this local church in their mission. What is helpful from the article is, first, insight into how a self-assessment tool can be used in a congregational change and, second, how lived theologies can be discerned around a self-assessment tool.

In a **seventh** article, Sue Holdsworth researches ministry among migrant communities. Holdsworth begins with auto-ethnography and her experience of the impact of different agendas as Christians sought to offer hospitality to migrants. She undertook ethnographic research, participating over two years in four different church-based intercultural initiatives in Melbourne, Australia. Holdsworth's article brings current understandings of pastoral care and mission into conversation with empirical data. The ethnographic data revealed ways in which pastoral care can be hindered by poorly constructed theologies of mission. The lived witness of these church-based intercultural initiatives was diminished when volunteers neglected spiritual practices including prayer and collegiality. Witness was enlivened when Christian teachers sought to cultivate a strong sense of God's presence. The article works with a pastoral theology in which the pastoral carer progresses from sympathy, through empathy, to interpathy. However, movement is not automatic. Learning is required. Holdsworth observed empathy and potential. All initiatives held the possibility of long lasting, mutual friendships. Yet across the four church-based intercultural initiatives, Holdsworth observed a lack of sustained attention to formation, prayer and reflective practice. Seeking to integrate current literature on pastoral care and mission with empirical data, Holdsworth argues that mission is better framed as pastoral care. The article returns to where it began. Church-based intercultural initiatives can express love of God and neighbour through intentional cultivation of pastoral practices of empathy and compassion, hospitality, and spirituality. Cultivation includes training in interpathy and team gatherings for prayer and reflection. In the mutuality in relationships, conversations about faith can naturally emerge.

In grateful thanks

As a journal, we honour the memory and rich contribution to missiology of Professor Therese D'Orsa, who died suddenly on 7 May 2023. Dr Therese D'Orsa was a

passionate advocate for Catholic education, professional learning and new voices in the theological landscape. In that capacity, Therese offered significant gifts as a member of the Editorial Board of *Ecclesial Futures*. Her responses to correspondence was always prompt and her reviews showed particular skills in nurturing scholarship among women.

Therese served with the Sisters of St Joseph in communities in Australia, India, the Philippines and Vanuatu. In 1997, she became the Director of Catholic Education and Director of Religious Education in the Diocese of Sale. Then in 2007, she became the inaugural Professor of Mission and Culture at BBI-TAITE – The Australian Institute of Theological Education.

Ecclesial Futures gives thanks for the life of Therese D’Orsa and offer our prayers to Jim, her spouse of many years.

With warm welcome

As a journal, we welcome Dr Fides del Castillo to the Editorial Board. Fides is currently Associate Dean, School of Innovation and Sustainability, De la Salle University, Philippines. Dr Fides del Castillo brings research expertise in Basic Ecclesial Communities, Christianities in the Philippines and Kenotic Christology. Fides has a rich range of networks including as President, Network of Professional Researchers and Educators, International Association of Mission Studies and as a recipient of Lamin Sanneh Research Grant with Overseas Ministry Study Center, USA.

Partnerships

As a journal, we continue to be delighted with the unfolding partnership with Radboud University Press and Open Journals. Through Diamond Open Access, original research is available free to authors and reader. All our issues including archives are stored at <https://ecclesialfutures.org/>, thanks to the generosity of Wipf and Stock Publishers, Radboud University Press and Open Journals. Finally, we are grateful for our partnership with you. To receive updates via the newsletter, sign up at <https://ecclesialfutures.org/>.

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