Ecclesial FUTURES

edited by
Nigel Rooms
and Steve Taylor

Ecclesial Futures

Editorial Structure

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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/.

About the author

Steve Taylor is Director AngelWings Ltd and Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. Contact: steve.taylor@flinders.edu.au

ARTICLE

Regenerative Development as a Pathway for Church Renewal

Rosemary Dewerse, Roxanne Haines, Stu McGregor

Abstract

This article details and discusses Regenerative Development, a concept developed by the Regenesis Group, as a means for enabling church health and renewal. Across 2020–23 Cityside Baptist in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, worked with Regenerative Development Practitioners through three phases of application. The process and what emerged challenges usual perspectives on church growth and revitalization priorities around vision, outcomes and the community and context in view.

Keywords: Regenerative Development, Renewal, Cityside

In 2019 the leadership of Cityside Baptist Church in Auckland, New Zealand, found themselves wrestling with the question, "Why Cityside, here?" We had decisions to make that would impact our life together in the present and the future. Amongst our members were four people passionate about Regenerative Development and, seeing resonant potential with the nature of our community, the decision was made in 2020 to accept their recommendation to apply this methodology to address our question. What emerged challenges usual perspectives on church growth and revitalization priorities around vision, outcomes, and the community and context that is in view. This article begins by backgrounding our story leading up to this work, introduces Regenerative Development and details the process as applied to Cityside and emerging discoveries, before discussing the implications for understandings of church health and renewal.

1   The Cityside backstory

In 2019 the Council of Cityside Baptist found ourselves wondering what we were being called to be for another generation of our life together. This iteration of faith community at 8 Mount Eden Road in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, had been

alive and active since 1993 and formally instituted as a church of the Baptist Union in October 1995. It had emerged out of a period of social justice ministry on the site (the Auckland Baptist City Mission) in recognition that such ministry "needed to be based in a worshipping congregation" (Cityside Baptist, n.d.). Essentially at the time a fresh expression of church community in the inner city made up of young to middle-aged adults, Cityside, initially led by Mark Pierson, became known for being a safe space for those struggling with traditional theological assumptions and performance-based paradigms of church, and for its innovation in artistic expression and participatory "ancient-future worship" (Pierson, n.d.). Study of the community's approach was published in the mid-2000s (Taylor 2004; Guest and Taylor 2006). By 2019, with the worshipping community having outlasted the work of the City Mission on the site, we were feeling the need to revitalize our sense of identity for discerning our future as a church and ongoing missional purpose. A group of members had undertaken research into the future potential of our buildings and offered design possibilities, and we were wondering how best to approach not only our children and youth spaces but a range of needs in our diverse community.

One of the wider local contextual realities for us was that construction was beginning on both a redesigned public transport hub and high-density housing planned to accommodate 20,000 inhabitants, promising to significantly alter the physical and socio-cultural landscape (Auckland City Council, n.d.). Closer to home, due to an initiative called 8Space, our building during the week is a vibrant hub hosting artists, musicians, poets and community events across twenty art studios and rehearsal and meeting spaces. Their evolution and aspirations need to be taken into account. Meanwhile there has been a growing commitment amongst Citysiders, inspired by Māori brothers and sisters, to try to truly live the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of our nation. This is a long but important journey of decolonizing our thinking, relationships and living in this land.[1] Key challenges for us in the face of these contextual realities are that: few of our members live locally; there is not often cross over between Sunday and weekday inhabitants; and Te Tiriti requires paradigm shifts in language and power. As we look to the future, what is God's invitation to us? Who are we to be?

It was important to employ a process that would resonate with us. The innovator of 8Space, Damaris Kingdon, and two others of our congregation, Roxanne Haines and Justine Skilling, are Regenerative Development Practitioners; a fourth, Joy

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1   A roopu (group) of the Minister, three Māori members and the Chair of Council was established during 2020.

Davidson, was deeply interested in this methodology. They felt regenerative principles of wholistic, participatory, nested-systems, essence-of-place regenerative development aligned with our community and so early in 2020 they approached Council. After some months of discussion and planning, the Council agreed to begin this process in November 2020. Mark Haines, a Council member and from August 2021 its co-Chair, volunteered to coordinate the logistics and gave many hours to this work. Coming strongly recommended, Rhyll Stafford, a member of the 8Space community and experienced Regenerative Development Practitioner, was employed as an invested outsider to facilitate the identified phases. The process itself, planned to be substantively progressed in 2021, was slowed by the COVID pandemic. The phases were completed at the beginning of 2023.

2   Regenerative Development

Regenerative Development first emerged as a concept in North America in 1995, coined by the Regenesis Group. It describes a means of enabling living beings to co-evolve a whole-of-systems approach to harnessing potential so that a project might contribute to the regeneration of the unique place in which it is located. As a methodology, Regenerative Development seeks the stories of that place as contained in environmental, historical and community records and data (quantitative and qualitative) to uncover recurring patterns shaping geology, biology and culture over time. By doing so, the essence of that place is revealed and thereby core guiding principles for future initiatives can be discerned. In taking such a place-sourced approach what becomes possible is not a short-term strategy, but a fifty- or even five-hundred-year trajectory for development.

Typically, development and renewal projects are the work of a (siloed) few, seeking to address problems that have arisen, with an eye on the immediate issues, working to time and money constraints, and rarely taking into account wider considerations and interdependencies, let alone listening to the unique stories of place. A city, for example, may be facing urban growth that puts pressure on essential services and housing requiring the reconfiguration of neighbourhoods and risking social and ecological disruption. Locally, a community suffering from the consequences of disaffected youth might look to further means for curtailing their behaviour, missing opportunities to harness their energy, while (church) leaders may decide to establish as a missional initiative a community garden to address rising costs of living but find themselves quickly facing issues of sustainability.

Regenerative Development does not focus on a problem in an attempt to fix, contain or manage it, but proactively engages in deep listening and "imaging" to identify

purposeful potential – the inherent, long-term directional possibilities emerging from context. "Imaging is different from imagination. It is a focused effort to see some-thing accurately and from the inside, as it really is" (Regenesis Institute 2023a: 3). In order to do this, the whole story of a setting needs to be taken into account in order to discover its inherent potential sourced in its essence. Then it is a process of "seeing how that essence can be uniquely value-adding within its con-text" (Mang and Haggard 2016: 123). For Regenerative Development, this requires the collaborative involvement not only of would-be decision-makers, but all those who will be affected from the past, present and future. The Law of Three facilitates what could present as a complexity of disparate ideas. It understands that truly creative thinking is enabled by activating forces inspiring new ideas, restraining forces that identify those things that could constrain and thus need integrated consideration (often articulated by the receiver), and reconciling forces that bring the first two together and enable "a shift in level or insight" (Regenesis Institute 2023b: 2). In such a process place and its unique qualities is crucial, for Regenerative Development believes we must allow nature and indigeneity to shape us if we are to thrive as nested eco-systems. A given project may be place-based – an imposition of an idea on a living community; the aim is to be place-sourced – inspired by what we encounter. Deep listening is therefore a matter of paying attention not only to current need but, in the case of a community's development, the interweaving of realities sourced in historical human knowledges of and behaviour in that place, ecological and, deeper still, geological truth.

The focus on place recognizes that eco-systems are unique expressions of interde-pendent communities – animated in ways particular to each location, "touchstones for shared meaning and caring" (Mang and Haggard 2023: xxxii). Who and what we are and can become is inevitably shaped by place. As Rebecca Solnit has observed, "Places matter. Their rules, their scale, their design include or exclude civil society, pedestrianism, equality, diversity…They map our lives" (Solnit 2007: 9). In a real way vocation emerges from this mapping, essentially of soul. For a true thriving there will be congruence of the past, present and future, across land, water, rocks, vegetation, human and other life forms. Indigenous peoples have been profoundly aware of this for millennia: those of us who have inherited Western enlightenment thinking need to recover this understanding.

Such thinking recognizes the complex reality that we exist within interrelated (or nested) systems that not only have an impact upon us, but which we also impact. Regenerative Development is built upon systems thinking, including the work of John Bennett in the 1960s (Bennett 1992). In his work, four sources underpin activity toward realizing potential: the ground and the goal (motivations revealing the why,

that take into account need and aspiration); and the directive force and instruments (means of engaging). In Regenerative Development they become:
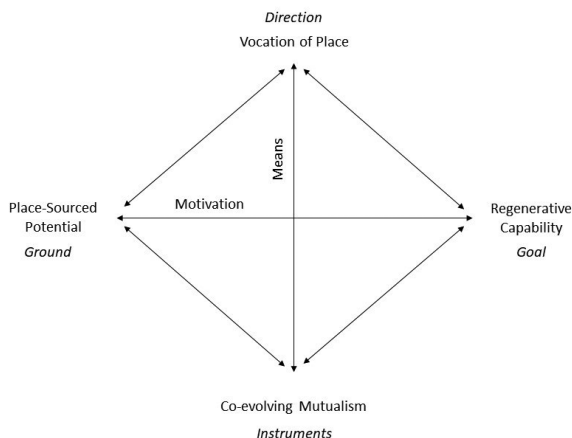
Direction
Vocation of Place

Means

Motivation

Place-Sourced Potential
Ground

Regenerative Capability
Goal

Co-evolving Mutualism
Instruments

The starting point for seeking motivation is the question 'What is the unique and inherent potential of this place?' for that will help in identifying the regenerative capability of the work. Discernment of the vocation of that place (its essence that will inspire guiding principles for long-term decision-making), deployed in an approach committed to co-evolving mutualism of all natural and human parts, constitute the means. This is not a process therefore of the visioning so popular with many leaders with its sense of casting an idea forward, but of identifying purpose – a profoundly grounded exercise exemplifying the Māori proverb, "Ka mua, ka muri," we walk into the future facing the past.

Two other approaches to change are also woven into Regenerative Development. Permaculture, "originated by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s … discerns patterns in natural and human systems in order to weave them together as dynamic wholes" and Developmental Change Processes commit communities to working together to co-evolve "the potential of place, rather than struggling over the limits presented by existing conditions" (Mang and Haggard 2016: xv). The overall result is that design (and planning) is linked to process rather than end product and is held with an open hand while being grounded.

It is important to note that whenever and wherever this work is done, systems thinking requires of us an awareness that whatever our "whole" might be – the geographical or conceptual project we are focused on – it is nested within, and offers nesting to,

other wholes. The concept is of interdependent holarchies as opposed to discrete hierarchies – nested and interweaving ecosystems. A building project, or a project centred on a building, for example, should not consider the building individually but be mindful of its role as both a host of wholes and belonging to larger wholes, or systems. Truly regenerative work, embarked upon in a way that gathers the voices, understandings and creativity of all invested parties, human and of nature, should thus enable thriving beyond the immediate sphere. In the thinking of organizational architects James Clark and Charles Krone, writing in the 1970s, humans have the potential to awaken "the capability embodied in all living systems for creating increasing levels of vitality, viability, and the capacity to evolve" if we would only think in these new (yet, for indigenous peoples, old) ways (Plaut and Amedée 2018: 5). As noted earlier, deep listening is required to discern what is essential and wherein lies potential; self-awareness to set aside ego in order to align and image with others the possibilities of the nested whole is a continuing (regenerative) necessity. Spirit in and through all is key; deep calling to deep.

3   The process and our discoveries

Most commonly Regenerative Development has been applied to urban design and development projects, as well as community development. We agreed to apply it to our life as a gathered and dispersed community of faith (gathering on Sundays to worship at 8 Mt Eden Road but living and working during the week across the city of Auckland) to address two fundamental questions: What is the Spirit saying to Cityside at this time?; and Who/What is Cityside being called to be in this place?
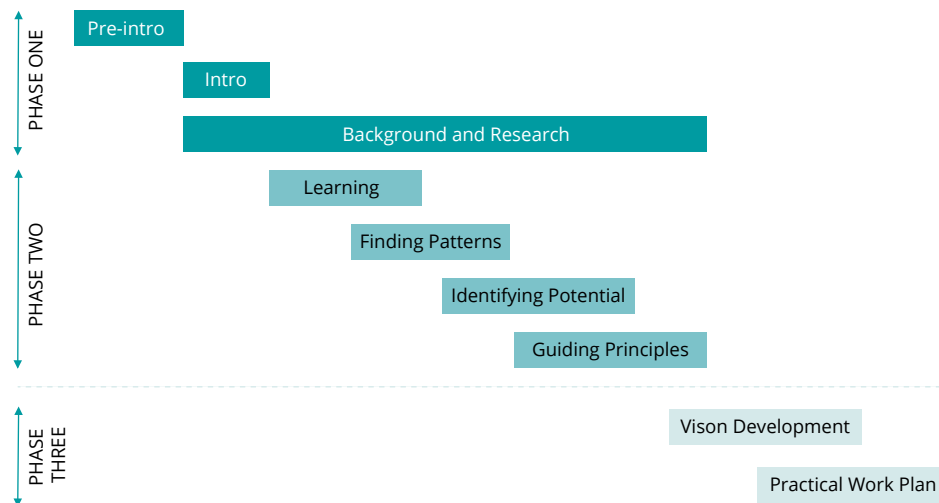
Figure 2   Cityside's Tetrad (Haines 2022)

Three phases were shaped up to enable us to discern the essence of Cityside and this place, what we could look like, feel and do in a regenerative state, and what our guiding principles and commitments might be. Together they help us discover and enable in this iteration three of the four elements of the Regenerative tetrad noted earlier: place-sourced potential, co-evolving mutualism and vocation of place. The fourth – regenerative capability – being the goal.
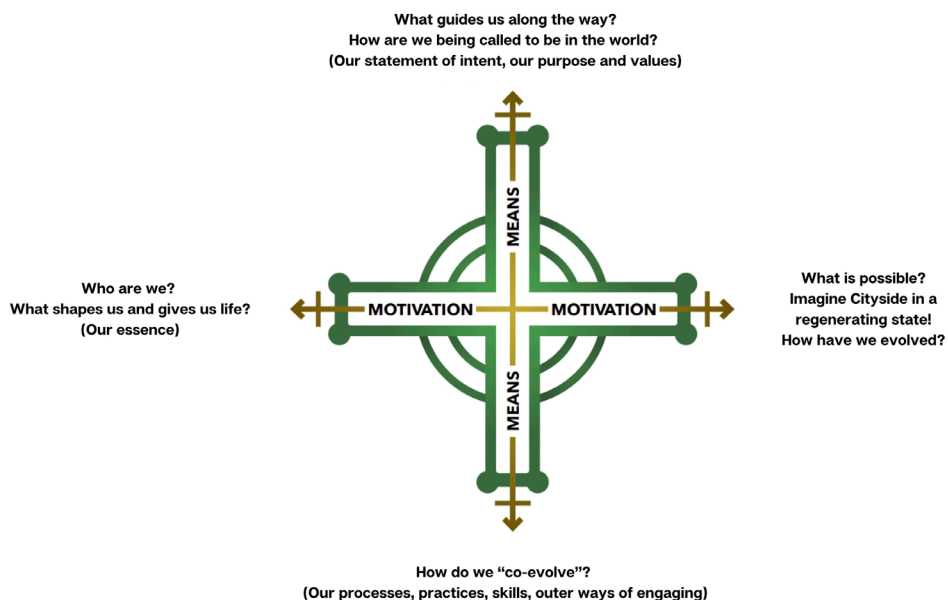
Figure 3   Three Phases (Haines 2020: Slide 2)

Several months were devoted to the first phase and particularly to researching our "Stories of Place". Five storylines were explored by Cityside members: tangata whenua (indigenous) stories; geological, ecological and water stories; neighbourhood stories; church history; and Cityside stories.

3.1   Phase One: Stories of Place
3.1.1   Tangata whenua
Cityside is located under the shadow of Maungawhau, "The Mountain of the Whau tree" (also known as Mt Eden), a volcano of some significance for local iwi (Māori tribes) in Tāmaki Makaurau, or the Auckland region (Geonet, n.d.). An elder, Matua Paora Puru of Waiohua, a confederation of tribes, took members of Cityside up the mountain on a hikoi named Te Aro Oho – A Journey of Awakening. As part of that journey, we learned that until about ad 1700 thousands of Māori had lived there

in an enormous pā, a terraced citadel. You can still see the evidence of this carved into the maunga, along with indentations of house sites and food storage pits. The crater itself is known as "Te Kapua kai a Mataaho – 'the food bowl of Mataaho', the deity responsible for volcanic activity" (Tūpuna Maunga Authority , n.d). The whau, after which the maunga is named, is a native tree with large leaves whose wood is half again lighter than cork. The wood was used for rafts and outriggers on small waka (canoes) and as floats on fishing nets, the leaves as paper, and the sap and jelly beneath the bark for medicinal purposes (Te Mara Reo, n.d.). Meanwhile, in the valley between Maungawhau and the ridge on which Cityside is located is a puna or spring named Te Ipu Pakore, which was the main water source of the pā. The maunga for Māori therefore, we discovered, had been a home to many, a key source of shelter and sustenance, hospitality and healing, a refuge and place to both venture out from and return to. Interestingly today it also hosts a series of large rocks sourced from another key local volcano, Te Tātua a Riukiuta, the only surviving scoria cone of three in the wake of quarrying. This is to maintain the memory and the mana (spiritual power and authority) of these lost ancestors.

3.1.2 Geology, hydrology, ecology

Investigation into our geological history reveals that while we are located on tuff – rock made of volcanic ash ejected during an eruption – it does not come from Maungawhau, our closest mountain, but from Pukekawa, the volcano now at the heart of Auckland's central business district. The lava of Maungawhau meets the tuff of Pukekawa at the ridge on which Cityside sits. Hydrologically "the porous volcanic soil [across the area] causes rainfall to quickly soak away, and the large fractures and even caverns in the rock allow large amounts of water to be stored and move underground" creating an aquifer below ground – the ongoing source for puna (springs) nearby – and a stream above ground flowing eastward to the sea (Dewerse, Dewerse and Skilling 2022: 2). Alongside this significant water resource, the volcanic soil itself is extremely fertile, rich in magnesium and potassium, creating an abundant ecological oasis. A lush forest grew alongside a wetland, both full of native trees and plants good for food and medicine as well as native birds, lizards, fish and eels. Māori, arriving from Polynesia, added kumera, taro and uwhi (yams), cultivating significant gardens and using warm rocks from Maungawhau to enable these tropical plants to grow. Living with the land they came to see themselves as its descendants and kaitiaki (guardians and caretakers). Europeans and Chinese from the 1840s altered the landscape, building houses and roads along main arterials following ridgelines such as ours, as well as market gardens. "In a short space of time, the fertile soil, the stream, the spring, the forest and wetlands disappeared beneath concrete and asphalt" (Dewerse, Dewerse and Skilling 2022: 3).

3.1.3 The neighbourhood

Reflection on the neighbourhood noted our neighbours as not only being the volcanoes, our abundant water sources and fertile soils, but also the thirteen iwi (Māori tribes) who have lived, moved through and interacted in this area over time. There is an invitation and challenge to deep relationship in the mihi, or salutation, given to Cityside by Matua Paora Puru, our guide on Maungawhau: "Ka pa he taura waka e motu, he hono tangata e kore e motu." Unlike a canoe rope, a human bond and connection can never be severed. (Kingdon, 2022: 6). Today, as in pre-European times, we are located on the edge of a tuff that is both a point of convergence and a thoroughfare "on the way to elsewhere" (Kingdon 2022: 7). Down the road is a train station that has been key to the Auckland rail network since the 1880s. Not far away is the Mt Eden Corrections Facility, a fortress-like prison built in 1882, today a reception centre for male remand prisoners in the Auckland region. While the area overall has gone from housing to industrialization and back, postcodes for our neighbourhood have been changing in recent times as apartments have been appearing and the population has been densifying. If you examine our neighbourhood over time it evidences cycling patterns of showing promise or lapsing into dubiousness, of housing people or becoming industrial, of land being fertile and abundant or contaminated, of being vibrant and artsy or soullessly functional. Today it has been dubbed "Uptown". Maungawhau has been redesignated sacred and is a place for walkers to pause and remember. A new housing development is under way with accommodation for business and light industry. Not-for-profit organisation For the Love of Bees has established an exemplary no-till regenerative organic market garden in what was an empty contaminated lot and 8Space gathers together a vibrant arts community. There is renewed intent and possibility.

3.1.4 Church history

The land our church building sits upon was part of the Waitemata block "gifted" by a local Māori chief to the British around 1840.[2] Baptist activity first began in a house a few streets away with the founding of a Sunday School in 1864 by Theophilus B. Heath to give children local to Mt Eden something divinely-shaped to do on their weekends (Kingdon 2022: 6). Rapidly-growing, a dedicated building catering for up to 200 children was erected in 1865 at the junction of three main arterials. Then in 1885, Heath's home church planted Mt Eden Baptist further down the main road on the

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2   "Gifted" is enclosed in speech marks because while the British understood it therefore as ownership, and able to be bought and sold for Māori "tuku whenua" is land gifted for a purpose to be used responsibly and without alienation of the land, in the context of ongoing mutual relationship. In the perspective of Māori, this gifting has been abused (Healy 2009: 111–34).

current site. Adult membership multiplied ten-fold within two years, partly because of political commitment to the temperance movement. Over time, from being a church plant the community at Mt Eden became church planters. Twelve other Auckland Baptist churches existing today had Mt Eden Baptist members involved in their founding, a fact which meant our church waxed and waned in number as people engaged beyond. From such significant evolutions, by the 1950s industrialization was overtaking housing in the area, reducing attendance. In 1960 the congregation decided to close and offer the building for the use of the Baptist City Mission. It became a key centre of resourcing and refuge, particularly for those who were homeless. An article in the *Central Leader* newspaper in 1971 called it "an oasis of relief in Auckland's concrete jungle" (Prince 1971: 5). Thirty-five years later, in the wake of one hundred years of very Christological cycles of dying and rising, a new ministry emerged with the constitution of the faith community of Cityside in 1995.

3.1.5 Cityside
This storyline, being the most recent, coalesced through conversation and contribution. It was actually the first piece of research undertaken and included interviews with our two previous pastors, two former children's programme leaders, and five long-standing members; five reflective Zoom sessions open to all current attendees which more than thirty-five people attended; and the opportunity for the community to construct an online Map of Time and Heart exploring when Citysiders first came to the community and why, and why they have stayed. The data from more than fifty people on the Map pretty much sums up the original intent and realised potential to date. The majority came because they no longer felt at home in Church, wanted a faith community in which they could be fully themselves, and/or because of relational connections. They stay because honest wondering is truly welcome as per our tagline "Thinking aloud allowed," for the authenticity and challenge to the status quo, the emphasis on participation, silence and creativity, the inclusivity and aliveness of spirit, the commitment in our lives and work to the good of our wider world, and the deep friendships that have been forged. For many, Cityside is an edgy oasis to come to and go out from.

3.2 Phase Two: Discerning deeper
We spent time learning and presenting the storylines to our community because it was important for us all to hear, understand and process these if together we were to uncover the essence of place so important for discerning our unique vocation, and thus responding to "Why Cityside, here?" Our children too engaged in experiential reflection by walking in our neighbourhood and the Maungawhau rock forest and exploring the nooks and crannies of our building. As the storylines were celebrated – woven into our worship services – key observations were noted on tall

three-dimensional blackboards standing as pillars amongst us. We colour-coded and drew connecting lines as we formally and informally reflected together on what was emerging. We asked five questions: What is unique to this place?; What has influenced and is influencing Cityside's role?; What resonates for us personally?; What do we hear amongst us as we share responses?; and What does this mean for Cityside's role and potential? Children and adults alike journalled and conversed. The "Regen Boards" we populated together provided the data against which all subsequent parts of our Regenerative Process were cross-referenced by our facilitator Rhyll and a small team of key Cityside Regenerative Practitioners and leaders supporting her.

In the wake of the storyline sessions one of that team, Karen Haines, wrote the following responsive prayer. It usefully summarised our storylines, expressed our desire, and began the distillation process.

> *Cityside is built on ancient tuff*
> *at a meeting of the ways, travelled by pathfinders.*
> **We seek wisdom in our journeying.**
>
> *Cityside is near a spring,*
> *nourishing life, an oasis to splash in.*
> **We seek wisdom as we, too, thirst.**
>
> *Cityside wants to honour Tiriti partnership*
> *making space to listen, to understand, to kōrero together.*
> **We seek wisdom in our learning.**
>
> *Cityside has met the needs of community:*
> *children learning, church planting, provision for lost adults, space for meeting.*
> **We seek wisdom to be good neighbours.**
>
> *Cityside has nurtured imagination,*
> *drawn in artists, musicians, way-finders, free-thinkers.*
> **We seek wisdom as we create and recreate.**
>
> *Cityside is on a hill, visible from a distance*
> *edgy, being out front.*
> **We seek wisdom as we influence others.**

The next step saw us, across three workshops with small groups of people, focused on defining, refining and finalizing an articulation of Cityside's essence of place arising from the data gathered. As Rhyll noted in her report:

Much like our personal essence that endures and transforms through our lifespan, the essence of place is also unique and enduring. Collective action can be empowered when the unique essence of a communities[sic] place is uncovered and expressed. Asking if we are being true to essence, keeps our collective direction alive and free of personal agendas. Providing much more than plans or activities that tell or ask people what they think, we have instead an invitation to learn and respond collectively to what is emerging. We can move forward with essence as both a reflection and a guide. (Stafford 2023: 17)

Cityside's Essence:
A nourishing wellspring
where journeys converge,
a waypoint at the edge,
providing sanctuary
as we creatively explore and question,
respond to and engage in our world. (Stafford 2023: 16)

Once confirmed, past and present Cityside council members sought to distil core principles. We drew not only on our Regenerative work to date, but also a set of Community Priorities and a Statement of Intent drawn up by then leaders in 2014 that proved encouragingly, consistently resonant.

We seek to be a transforming community following in the Way of Jesus the Christ, through practices of prayer, hospitality and engagement in our world – local and global.
We hope to nurture depth, beauty and vitality in ourselves and in the world around us. We aim to sustain and resource Christian practice, and work towards the restoration of all life. (Stafford 2023: 32)

Our principles we consequently named as: Relational, Restorative, Creative. The expectation is that into the future all decisions in any part of our community life be cast and reviewed through their lens to ensure we honour our discerned essence.

3.3 Phase Three: Ka mua, ka muri

In Regenerative Development, as noted earlier, awareness of nested systems and interdependency is important because "in a truly healthy state, each system adds

value to the other" (Stafford 2023: 19). The activity in our building across every day of the week reminds us that Cityside is only one whole within *its* whole as other groups also find home here. Not only that, Jesus' command to love our neighbours (Mk 12.31), cast through the Regenerative frame, requires that we consider our human and natural neighbours beyond our building, local and global. While we know this, the Regenerative process nonetheless invites us in our next season to intentional accountability that is true to our essence conducted in ways that are always relational, restorative and creative. Having said this, it is important to note that for our indigenous members such reminders are unnecessary. Early in the Regenerative process they noted that its commitments and insights are intrinsic to their worldview. This makes it even more urgent that we honour the call to deep relationship woven into Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

What therefore could Cityside look like in a regenerating state? Further workshops sought to respond to this question, imagining practically what this might mean. We identified three ways we would recognize we are regenerating, set the following goals for the next three years within those, and identified an accountability structure including timeframes and people responsible to see them carried out.

> *Cityside as a Church [will be] sustaining an authentic and responsive Christian centre – reading the 'signs of our time' as a dispersed community.*
> 1. *Weaving Cityside spiritual practices, encouraging those on the margins and multiple voices.*
> 2. *Understanding and developing co-governance. Equipping Pākehā.[3]*
> 3. *Creating a cultural shift: Relational spirituality/Being intergenerational.*
> *Cityside … [will be] providing a meaningful contribution to our neighbourhoods: local, theological and ideological.*
> 1. *Developing Cityside as a community hub…(establishing a 'Community Weaver' role).*
> 2. *Initiatives in the Building (including Social Enterprises).*
> *Cityside building and surrounds [will be] creating a place of solace and restoration, in connection with our local environment, providing contemplation for Citysiders and others.*
> 1. *Building renovation. [Note: during the Regenerative Process the City Council hired our hall and kitchen to provide people in the area with "quiet space" when the rede-*

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3   Pākehā initially referred to those of British descent. It can also refer to all non-indigenous New Zealanders.

velopment of the local train station got too much for them, affirming our essence as sanctuary.]

2. *Residential Intergenerational Community – An offsite option.*

One Sunday, when practical ideas to realize the goals were presented, there was significant energy generated with a surprising number of people offering their creativity, skills and time. This was a first affirmation for us that when development is sourced in the essence of place, imagination can be sparked and vitality enabled. As Rhyll noted, however, moving into a regenerating state is a commitment taking years, not months. "Building the required capacity and capability for a regenerative direction can be a creative challenge, needing action as well as plenty of room to experiment, reflect, adapt and learn" (Stafford 2023: 31). This is the space Cityside now find ourselves in.

4   What can Regenerative Development offer to church renewal?

There may in fact be much in our story and this approach to renewal that seems unsurprising. Missional church leaders know the importance of surveying one's neighbourhood to ensure initiatives undertaken are congruent with need. History is something congregations often like to recall and assess the present in the light of. But in our context, where the possibility of numerical growth by which health is so often judged is becoming elusive for many church congregations, Regenerative Development offers a wider perspective and frame.

The concept of renewal has been significantly influenced since 1961 by the work of Donald McGavran, who inspired the Church Growth Movement (CGM) (McGavran and Wagner 1990). McGavran promoted evangelism conducted via a genuine understanding of local culture though in the hands of others CGM developed into a focus on quantitative measurement and over-simplified formulas for church growth (Stetzer 2012). In the 1990s one such formula given significant profile was Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* offering five strategies. This focused on "purpose" via internal people-building to create health bringing growth (Warren 1995). More recently the concern has been to understand church life cycles because "Learning life cycle status often provides a sense of urgency for church leaders as they plan for new cycles of growth and development to avoid the life cycle of decline" (General Baptist Ministries 2016, n.p.). The key perceived problem, to be avoided if at all possible, is decline and death. "Redemptive potential" is the antidote – a quantitative analysis of income, membership and activities to realise a comfort zone that enables transition into a larger church size (General Bapist Ministries, n.p.) Embedded in all of this is

the assumption that the responsibility for renewal lies on the shoulders of "church leaders", or the church leader, who must cast a vision for others to follow.

Related to these approaches but deviating a little, other initiatives have pressed again into sociological understanding for empowering renewal. "Place" is acknowledged as important and "ecology" is even spoken of, but typically these terms refer to the church building as per the model for growth for leaders profiled in *Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Message*, or to human community evidenced in local demographics of changing cultural and socio-economic reality (DeMott, Shapiro and Bill 2007). Alice Mann in her chapter entitled "Place-Based Narratives" took a step further and investigated the historical story to reveal the "soul of place," but stopped there (Mann 2010: 63). Bids for renewal, even when sourced in attempts at appreciative enquiry, fundamentally remain problem-centred and anthropocentric.

Regenerative Development affirms uniqueness of place and, rather than being focused on the problem, seeks to discern vocation arising from place-sourced potential through wide collaboration. Regenerative Development recognises that an organizational entity is not an entity unto itself operating independently and on its own terms in the world around it. Beginning with the boundary of the greater whole, which could be, say, the city limits, we look at the systems nested within that boundary. We explore how ecology, geology as well as sociology and anthropology affect a place historically to the present and then, based on this information, into the future. The outcome of this is that the entity doesn't "do to" the world around it, but "works with". At first this sounds like classic missional thinking, but the major difference is that it is not anthropocentric in the first instance. After deep listening to the nested systems it finds itself in, the church discovers its vocation, which determines shape and service. We should not underestimate the seismic shift in thinking here. Rather than "mission to" the emphasis is on "participating in". A church then is integrated already, particularly if it has a building.

In this frame, evangelism and church "growth" is dramatically expanded from a fundamentally quantitative exercise into a qualitative journey, and into a service model rather than a saving model. It is no longer an "us and them" but simply an "us". We become participants in the systems we are nested within rather than set up against them. Furthermore, the attitude the church has towards itself is more humble and accepting of ebbs and flows in the church life. For example, the children's ministry that once thrived is allowed not to now. It is not a crisis if an ebb takes place. Trying to avoid decline and death at all costs is arguably not consistent with the acknowledgement at the heart of the gospel and affirmed by Paul in the

Epistle to the Romans, that it is dying that makes rising possible. Part of the crisis in Western churches, we would suggest, is that we see existence needing to be a continual progression in growth. Worldviews that are cyclical in orientation accept waxing and waning as a part of life; "unforming" is as vital as forming and re-forming in the process of renewal (Lee 2022: 7). From another angle, as Steve Taylor noted, we need to be very cautious about assigning value to permanency (Taylor 2019). Cityside's own Stories of Place affirm the beauty of reimagination and rebirth, as well as our need for repentance. As in permaculture, instead of growth being territorial and imposing, health incorporates death and decay to give way to more life.

If the focus on place that Regenerative Development requires seems to fly in the face of the old adage that a "church is not the building but the people", the wisdom of indigenous peoples reminds us that landscapes are living beings and we are integrally connected to them. As David Titterington has noted, landscapes are "actors … 'agentic' … shape[ing] our beliefs, our bodies, and our minds" (Titterington 2017: n.p). Reminiscent of the Law of Three, "they also enable, inspire, and constrain much of our activities … Societies and stories *take place*" (Titterington 2017: n.p). The biblical record itself evidences the importance of place for shaping identity and grounding potential. "The place where we live tells us who we are – how we relate to other people, to the larger world around us, even to God" (Lane 2007: 22). For Cityside, a dispersed community where the majority of members do not live in the suburb of Mount Eden during the week, a lingering question was how can a process focused on the place of our building be relevant to our everyday lives? The understanding of nested and interdependent holarchies affirms, however, the resonance of discerned patterns in one place (for us restoring, relating and creating) for influencing life in others. In Spirit the essence of place goes with us.

5   Conclusion

When it comes to how we might effect church renewal, a warning from the leaders of Regenesis Institute is useful: "On the face of it, the promulgation of good ideas around the world seems sensible. Yet it has the insidious effect of transforming living communities into commodities. It flattens reality, ironing out the differentiation and diversity that makes all the places of the world rich, resilient, and interesting" (Regenesis Institute 2023c: 13). At Cityside, as a result of the Regenerative process we have undertaken to date, we have caught a glimpse of how hopeful and vital our life can be, within a transformed understanding of viability.

About the authors
Rosemary Dewerse is currently Academic Dean at the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide, Australia, part of the University of Divinity. In 2020–21 she was Chair of the Council of Cityside Baptist and supported the initiation and, beyond that, the application of Regenerative Development. Contact: rdewerse@unitingcollege.edu.au

Roxanne Haines works as a Placemaker in strategic development in an urban design context for Eke Panuku, Auckland Council's urban regeneration agency in Aotearoa New Zealand. A trained Regenerative Practitioner she was a key initiator of, leader in, and contributor to the Cityside Regenerative Process.

Stu McGregor has been the Minister of Cityside Baptist Church since 2015 and completed the Regenerative Practitioner Course in 2022–23 in the wake of the events described here. He has a postgraduate diploma in Theology from Tyndale Carey Graduate School.

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ARTICLE

"They Made Space for Me": Enhancing Receptive Generosity in an Anglican Diocese in Aotearoa New Zealand

Catherine Rivera

Abstract

Drawing on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork with young Anglican social justice activists in Aotearoa New Zealand, this article engages with Romand Coles's theory of receptive generosity, and the theme of the Western church as marginal, to explore why a particular Anglican diocese was attracting new, millennial-aged members, most of whom did not grow up Anglican. I consider how spaces of generous reciprocity were formed and enabled through living in intentional communities (ICs) and being able to engage with pluralistic "broad table" spaces of discussion and dissent. These factors were part of what drew the research participants to this diocese and to Anglicanism in general, as well as enhancing their social justice activism. My research shows the importance of intentionally making spaces of belonging for millennials and Gen Z aged people in a faith community, rather than hoping the status quo of the past will suffice.

Keywords: Anglicans, Intentional communities, Marginality, Social justice, Young adults

1   Introduction

In 2017 I began my PhD in Social Anthropology with the goal of trying to find out why a certain Anglican diocese (referred to as "Diocese J") in Aotearoa New Zealand had many young people ('millennials') who were involved in social justice activism.[1] I wanted to find out what Anglicanism was contributing to their spiritual and activist formation. As an anthropologist and non-Anglican, theological concerns were not

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1   A very short definition of social justice activism is activities which attempt to bring to public attention issues that impede people or groups having fair and equal opportunities to engage in the society they live in, or which hinder human, and increasingly non-human, rights (Plant 2001).

part of my research question; the main theoretical lenses were civil society, participatory democracy and phenomenological becoming. However, out of my fieldwork emerged themes and observations that should interest church practitioners and those at the coal face of Christian formation and discipleship.

One of the main observations why my participants were present in Diocese J was the opening of welcoming spaces for them and their interests. In the case of Diocese J, these spaces were initiated by the Bishop and the Deputy Bishop. These spaces were physical (in the form of intentional communities (ICs) where many participants lived) and institutional (through the creation of bridging mechanisms and paid roles which allowed for ecclesial innovation). Additionally, the Anglican praxis and theology of maintaining a "broad theological table" was found to be attractive to the research participants. I will analyse these spaces through the conceptual themes of receptive generosity and being marginal to argue that a cultural change is required by many Western churches to enable flourishing, life-giving and generous spaces of belonging for both their younger members and those who are outside their walls.

1.1   Methods

For this research project I used standard anthropological data gathering methods of interviewing (eight people), spending time with my participants through "hanging out" and going to events (church services, festivals, conferences, protest marches, meetings, workshops, training events), and examining written texts and materials. Participant selection focused on Anglican Christians in a particular diocese in Aotearoa New Zealand who were involved in either activist[2] or teaching activities which engaged with social justice issues (see the definition in footnote 1 above) and were aged between 22 and 35 years old, although there were some participants who ended up outside of this age range. Permission was needed from the diocesan bishops to proceed with the project, once this was obtained, I was able to start contacting potential participants and setting up fieldwork opportunities. Most of the fieldwork took place in a large city in New Zealand (not named due to ethics permission agreement with Diocese J).

One of my main goals for my fieldwork was to experience my participants' world as much as possible, which led me to using a methodological framework called sensory ethnography. This method encourages researchers to move from detached observation to using their body and its senses as a way of understanding the multiple

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2   Examples of activism activities undertaken by participants included public protests, blockading, gathering public submissions on government policy, awareness-raising events and sit-ins.

and varied "lifeworlds" (Jackson 2016) that their participants inhabit. Practically, this is done by co-creating and forming things together with one's participants (Pink 2015). For example, instead of observing a teaching session, the researcher teaches in that session; instead of watching others pray, the researcher writes a prayer and prays it together with their participants. For myself, this method involved joining in some of the spiritual formation practices of my participants, such as morning and evening prayer, observing Lent and Advent, using the Anglican New Zealand Prayer Book (Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia 1989) for home devotions, and giving teaching sessions at some of my participants' events.

2   Making space for Millennial Christians

The research questions I have engaged with throughout my graduate study come from trying to understand the contemporary issues that are important to, and formational in, the lives of young people who are Christians. The participants in my both my Masters and PhD research were usually millennials, that is, the generation born between the early to mid-1980s up to the end of the 1990s (Strauss and Howe 2000), although in my PhD project I also ended up with some Gen Z participants. Millennials grew up in an era where the Cold War had ended, and the world was becoming increasingly connected in cyberspace through digital technologies (Gregg 2017). Millennials in the West are one of the least Christian generations ever if adherence is measured by attending a church (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Ward 2013). While generally not interested in institutional Christianity, both millennials and Gen Zers are often interested in spirituality, mindfulness, meditation and yoga practices (Halafoff et al. 2020; Jian Lee 2018). Considering the characteristics of millennials discussed in the literature, it could be assumed that they would not be attracted to or want to be part of an old religious institution like Anglicanism. Yet Diocese J had a growing cohort of them, and this was a prominent reason why I chose to do my research there.

My research found that one of the reasons for the growth of millennial Anglicans in Diocese J was that space was made for new groups to be incorporated into the diocese at a pace and in a way that let them "try out" being Anglican. Most of these groups were based in emergent or neo-monastic Christianity. The Emerging Church Movement (ECM) has been called "one of the most important reframings of religion within Western Christianity in the last two decades" (Marti and Ganiel 2014: Abstract). The ECM has roots in evangelical Christianity and is primarily made up of "recovering evangelicals" (Bielo 2011; Cox Hall 2017). Most academics frame it as a rejection of evangelical right-wing fundamentalism and/or consumeristic "megachurch" Christianity (Bielo 2011; Marti and Ganiel 2014). The EMC began amongst

young evangelicals in the early 1990s in the US and other Anglophone countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (Guest 2017). New Zealand had some of the earliest Emerging Churches, such as Cityside in Auckland (Taylor 2019). Marti and Ganiel's (2014) definitions of the ECM note an anti-institutional stance, the importance of ecumenicalism/pluralism, and a tendency towards experimentation and creativity. Gibbs and Bolger (2005) include being highly communal, and the importance of practising hospitality and egalitarian participation. Dissent and questioning are valued (Packard and Sanders 2013). Most participants in the ECM are millennials or younger Gen Xers (Cox Hall 2018; Moody and Reed 2017). These millennial-aged Christians "crave commitments that matter" (Spellers et al. 2010: 145) and "value authenticity in relationships and connection with culture" (Taylor 2019: 150).

Neo-monastics are a sub-group of the ECM (Carter 2012). They often live in intentional communities (ICs) and have a shared communitarian "rhythm of life" that structures each day and can include such activities as morning and evening prayer, practical work within the houses and out in local communities, and shared meals (Bielo 2011). Spiritual practices such as lighting candles, burning incense, contemplation, meditation, centring and liturgical prayer, silent retreats and observing the traditional church calendar are common in most neo-monastic communities (I. Adams and Mobsby 2010; Cox Hall 2018). Ethnographic studies have found that many previously independent neo-monastic communities and Emerging Churches, what Steve Taylor (2019) calls "first expressions" groups, have aligned themselves with mainline[3] churches such as the Anglicans and Methodists. This was the case in my research also. Since "first expression" groups are already using contemplative practices and are attracted to the "old and ancient" (Bialecki and Bielo 2016), they find mainline churches a good theological fit (Snider 2011). In Anglicanism this process has been helped by the instigation of the Fresh Expressions initiative by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and based in the Church of England (Moynagh 2012; Taylor 2019). Many ECM/first expression leaders become Anglican clergy; Taylor goes so far as to call ECM/ first expression groups "vicar factories" (2019: 90).

2.1 Formational Spaces of Intentional Community

Intentional communities consist of groups of people who are not biologically related living together in a shared physical space such as a house/s or on communal land (Meijering et al. 2007; Miller 2010). At the time of my fieldwork (2018–mid 2019), there

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3   Mainline – the traditional and established denominations of Christianity. Protestant mainline denominations include Anglican/Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Baptist. Some definitions include the Catholic Church, Quakers and the Reformed Church.

were four main ICs across the diocese consisting of 200+ individuals, with focuses on teenagers/youth, university students, marginalized people and members of a specific, youth-focused, church. Each IC usually consisted of a group of houses that formed one community. There were slightly different arrangements of space for each IC, and each had different demographics, consisting of combinations of single people, couples and families with children.

The context to this space creation in Diocese J was that its Bishop, John,[4] was not a "cradle Anglican". He had spent many years as the leader of a non-Anglican, ecumenical missional community movement. John eventually became Anglican and was ordained, and the intentional community movement he and his wife had founded became an Anglican order. When John became Bishop of Diocese J the practice of intentional community living, which already had a presence within the diocese, was resourced and encouraged even more, becoming an important part of its formational discipleship. Many of the leaders and members of who were part of the IC founded by John took on pivotal roles in the diocese. This in turn attracted other non-Anglican missional and emergent churches/movements and individuals to connect with Diocese J. Bishop John offered to formalize the relationship with some of these groups through the designation of being a "pioneer mission unit", which is essentially a trial period for the group to "try out" being Anglican. Eventually several of these groups became official Anglican churches.

Many of my participants lived in one of the ICs and described how this way of living created a space to belong through "grounding and rooting" in a physical locality. Relationships and their formation and maintenance are one of the core values of neo-monastic living (Jones 2008). People joining these communities understand that they may not always get along with other members, and there will be tough times (Kamau 2002). However, they covenant to work out their differences because the community is envisioned as a family. Belonging was something that many who joined the Youth IC were looking for, according to its leaders Dan and Adele.

We were created to be in relationship, to belong, and society tells you … the only thing you need to belong to is yourself. Community is the reflection of the spiritual truth that we are created to be relationship. One of our girls, she said "when I came here, I didn't really have friends and now I have family, and I have a safe place where I can come home every day and know I'm supported. I'm not alone and I'm not lonely".

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4   All names of research participants are pseudonyms.

Another IC leader, Pete, noted that the speed of change in contemporary society gave young people in their community anxiety about belonging and that lack of belonging amongst millennials had led to high rates of mental distress.

There seems to be a sense of constant conflict in the world at the moment and a lot to care about ... Choice anxiety is huge. Too many choices. What will I belong to? What will I give my energy to? ... we have an epidemic in mental health, my guess is that most of our people have some form of anxiety [and there are] a lot of mental health disorders that are manifesting in young adulthood.

The fast paced and chaotic temporality of the modern world was alleviated to some extent for my participants by the ICs that they lived in having a structured "rhythm of life" that was patterned on monastic life, albeit a life that included work and study outside of the community. Adele explained what a typical day would look like in their IC house.

We eat together, and we have a rhythm of prayer. We do prayers at [name] church twice a day, at 8.15 am and 5.15 pm. Everyone is expected to be there providing you don't have work or university lectures. We share our resources, and we serve in the local parishes. We think that is a core part of doing life together.

I noticed during my fieldwork that the times spent in ICs where prayer rhythms were used daily gave structure to everyday life. The combination of repetitive, ritualized spiritual practices with a structured and set daily routine was calming. It took some of the anxiety out of everyday life because there were fewer choices to have to make. In a chaotic world, stability can be a greater need than continual and unpredictable change. Anthropologist Roy Rappaport (1999) argued that structured communal rhythms are a form of "communitas" that binds groups together and repetitive everyday repetitions and tempos, such as the daily rhythms of life in the ICs, impacts and forms the self as well as the community. Anthropologist Amy Cox Hall (2018: 689) agrees, pointing to the daily patterned rhythms of life in neo-monastic communities which "fashioned selves and altered worlds". These rhythms can also create what Heidegger referred to as "clearings" (Jackson 2013), spaces in everyday life which bring forth incremental changes of the self which can encourage transformation and a sense of belonging.

On a practical level living in an IC relieved some of the financial pressure that was common to millennials living in urban centres. This included not having to worry about rental precarity and being able to share resources such as food through communal meals. For families with children, living in an IC provided extra hands to

share childcare duties (Sargisson and Sargent 2017). All these aspects mentioned above freed up community members to spend more time on social activism and volunteer work. As Davina said,

> It's not just living together but sort of finding your people, the ones you share values with. Particularly in your work having a community is grounding and I think that is necessary for activism ... that community is vital in keeping me going. Whether that is people that are going to be cheerleaders or people who say "yes I want to do this with you", and people who are going to call me out and say "maybe you should rethink that".

Thus, one of the main findings of my research was that providing structured spaces of belonging through the opportunity to live in an intentional community was an attractive option, and one of the factors why the research participants come to work in and be part of Diocese J.

2.2 The Pluralistic space of the Broad Table

Another factor that was appealing to my millennial participants was the pluralistic and "broad table" theological characteristics of Anglicanism. For political philosopher William Connolly pluralism is something that is created and maintained by the cultivation of specific attitudes and values; it requires living with tension in the in-between of multiple ideas, beliefs and ways of being; "it requires a tolerance of ambiguity" (Connolly 2005: 4). Anglicanism has historically had a "broad table" approach (Rayner 2003) to maintaining unity amid doctrinal or theological differences by allowing for a variety of opinions to be voiced and listened to in Anglican decision-making spaces (for example, the General Synod). At the broad table, allowances are made for "competing ideas and incompatible ontologies" (Adams 2018: 189), with all who lay claim to being Anglican allowed a "seat at the table". Rayner (2003: 59) points out that being able to balance and hold competing tensions for the sake of a wider unity is a feature of broad-church Anglicanism; "Anglicanism has traditionally been reluctant to excommunicate its radicals".

This openness extends to ecumenical and interfaith learning, with strong Anglican involvement in these types of networks (Randerson 2015). Anglican broadness affirms a wide range of people, practices and theologies, including types of social justice activism that some other Christian denominations reject. Anglicans in New Zealand have had significant participation in various interfaith groups (Haggar 2017; Pratt 2016) and protest movements, such as the "Peace Squadron" in the 1970s led by vicar George Armstrong which attempted to stop an American nuclear submarine from entering Auckland harbour. These interfaith links have become espe-

cially important in New Zealand since the Christchurch Mosque attacks in 2019. This historical background of cultivating ecumenical and interfaith religious pluralism was evident in Diocese J.

It was noticeable during interviews that the acceptance proffered by the "broad table" nature of Anglicanism was something that had attracted many of my participants to the denomination. Pete said, "the Anglican Church has a broad table that beautiful and big, and you can be part of that … a broad table which actually looks like the church [should]". Stephen said, "there is a broad spectrum of practices, they allow for … including activism in social justice. The dogma isn't entrenched, there are opportunities to challenge, question, and think bigger … they made space for me."

Neo noted that the IC he had been part of was able to join the Anglicans because "it wasn't questioned that we would be acceptable. Anglicans accept anyone, so of course, they accepted us". For theologian Derek, Anglican broadness was important since it allowed for his background of training in a Lutheran seminary to be used and valued in an Anglican context: "I can say 'this is how I do my theology' … and there is a place for me at the table. Really the goal of the table isn't to bring everyone together to the centre but rather to honour everyone in the seats as they are."

Another reason the broad table concept most likely appealed to my participants was due to being millennials. Research on millennials has shown them to be more accepting of pluralism and diversity than Baby Boomers or Gen X (Brunell 2013; Reysen and Katzarska-Miller 2013). Millennials are particularly prone to reject institutions who are not pluralistic and promote only one way of being: "some are resentful or afraid of a body [the Church] they perceive as unwilling to enter into dialogue and are still interested in stridently asserting its own version of the facts about the universe and the true interpretation of these facts" (Dormor et al. 2003: 2).

While many of my participants were just discovering the delights of Anglican pluralism, they had been disconcerted to discover fellow Anglicans who were trying to block access to the table. Some Anglican churches who oppose LGBTQ+ rights and/or the ordination of women in the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have split off from their geographic dioceses and come under the authority of conservative bishops from places like Uganda and Rwanda (Hasset 2007). However, within Diocese J, the broad table is still in use and attracting those who are leaving Christian groups which have become fearful of pluralism and "outsiders".

3   Discussion Theme One – Receptive Generosity

I want to suggest that the ability to sustain a local politics ... requires an orientation ... that grounds humility – the humility necessary to engage in the slow and painful work of sustaining a community capable of resisting the allure of significance that is the breeding ground of violence. (Coles and Hauerwas 2008: 24)

In considering how space was made in Diocese J to incorporate non-Anglican millennials, I have engaged with the work of political philosopher Romand Coles and his work on receptive generosity. According to Coles (1997), receptive generosity is a stance or orientation that is open to both giving and receiving from others, especially those that may have a different view. It involves encountering, listening, and vulnerability. Coles frames this through the term "Caritas", which refers to the love of God for humans, and vice versa. Caritas is giving that is reciprocal. A generosity that only wants to give, but not receive, can lead to the establishment of unequal power structures and is not true generosity. Coles gives the example of Spanish conquistadors who, like some of the British colonizers who came to New Zealand, tried to "gift" Christianity to the indigenous people of the New World but did not see anything in indigenous religions that was worthy for them to learn from: "when generosity becomes separated from receptivity it tends toward imperialism and theft" (Coles 1997: vii).

For Coles, Christians can have problems with receptive generosity, especially receiving wisdom or input from groups who are "outside the Christian story" (Coles 1997: 3). However, he argues that there is a theological argument for extending receptive generosity to "the other" because that is what Jesus did: "since Jesus [was] a stranger, this must mean sitting receptively and generously at the tables of those of other traditions when invited" (Coles and Hauerwas 2008: 227). Coles notes that theology which claims God cannot receive anything worthwhile from humans, especially non-Christians, is problematic for creating authentic open spaces, especially if those outside Christianity are perceived as having nothing beneficial which can be given to God or his church: "the church construes itself as the foot-washer, but not in need of being foot-washed by non-Christians ... as server but not in need of being served by others" (Coles and Hauerwas 2008: 228).

It can be argued that the ICs and broad table theology created spaces that enabled Diocese J to be a receptively generous ecclesia, and this factor increased the amount of young people joining it and the incidents of activism taking place. The historical openness to "the other" brought into being spaces of transformation and "new things", such as the uptick in social justice activism I observed. Romand Coles's writing, and his conversations with Stanley Hauerwas, on the concept of receptive

generosity is a framework to work with as to how creating broad tables can (in)form ecclesial weavings and spiritual formation in a climate shocked, uncertain, twenty-first century world.

The table can be seen as a space of receptive generosity that encouraged listening and the giving and receiving of gifts from each other, rather than "non-relational charity". This stance in Diocese J had subsequently increased the alliances and relationships with non-Anglicans on social justice issues of mutual interest, and attracted young Christians who are interested in fighting inequality and poverty. On a local and daily level, receptive generosity was practised and enacted in the intentional communities. Here receptive generosity intersected with several theological ideas, including immanence and incarnation – God with us. To be receptively generous was to intentionally embody and incarnate God's vision of human flourishing by being a good neighbour through acts of service and being in relationship with those who lived close, to "wash feet" as Coles says. Being receptively generous in Diocese J was to envision the local as a sacred space where God dwelled.

4   Discussion Theme Two - Marginality and Liminality

During my research, I observed concerted efforts by my participants to construct spaces and tables at which to listen to each other, and those outside of their community. I contend that one of the aspects which encouraged listening in Diocese J was the decline in numbers and societal influence experienced by Anglicans in New Zealand and across the western world. The decline of people identifying as Christian in New Zealand has been particularly notable amongst mainline denominations such as the Anglicans, especially since the end of the 1960s, but applies to Christianity in general (Ward 2013). Census figures from 2018 indicate that more New Zealanders now identify as being "of no religion" than Christian (Losing Our Religion 2019). More and more Christians in Western nation-states view themselves as being marginalized and pushed to the edges of secular society (Rivera et al. 2023). Pentecostal Christians in particular feel that their beliefs and views on such issues as LGBTQ+ rights and abortion are not considered valid by those in power and society in general (Noble 2014).

Most Anglican literature refers to numerical decline as the major concern for the twenty first century (Dormor et al. 2003; Towle 2007). Paradoxically, Anglicanism is still the largest Christian denomination according to New Zealand's census data; however, identifying as Anglican in the census generally does not segue into church attendance. Anglicans are also demographically older than Pentecostal leaning

Christian denominations, as research participant Erin said: "Anglicans are aging and shrinking in numbers and resources ... the average age is in the 70s and 80s."

Marginality encompassed several meanings for my participants. When describing why they wanted to live in an intentional community (IC), one of reasons was that to live in an IC was to "live on the edge" (Kamau 2002) as an alternative to 'the empire'. Cox Hall (2017: 695) says religious ICs "are experiments in living through liminality". "Empire" refers to the societal structures which favour the powerful who oppress the poor and leave the downtrodden to fend for themselves (Claiborne 2006; Wilson-Hartgrove 2008), and are often specifically linked to neo-liberal capitalism. To live in an IC was seen to undermine this unjust empire. My participant, Stephen, viewed "empire" as something to be opposed: "the church is not meant to cooperate with the empire, we are called to subvert it".

Some of the ICs were in suburbs that were impoverished, marginalized and some-what chaotic. IC members were interested in building relationships with people in their local area who were from marginalized groups. To be marginal was also to be countercultural. Pete mused in his interview that living in an IC made one's faith deeper and the call to challenge empire stronger: "there is something about being on the edge that makes prophetic voices sharper". Neo had a similar observation: "iden-tifying with the margins is being precarious, it can draw you a lot closer to Jesus". Being marginal was also applied to the activist groups and causes the participants were part of. Stephen was frequently involved in protest marches and blockading events, he said "Jesus was very much outside of the camp. He was on the edges. I found myself leaning more towards people who were on the fringes."

Being marginal seemed to be a conflicted subject for Anglicans in Diocese J. My mainly millennial participants Dan, Adele, Pete, Davina and Neo all thought that it was a challenge to stay marginal and "on the edge" whilst being part of an institu-tional entity such as the Anglican Church, which they said tended to draw one away from the edges of society and into the "centre". Dan said, "to be honest this is prob-ably the most 'centre' thing we have ever done", while Davina reflected that "it can be a real challenge to try to get somewhere now that we are at the centre". However, they also pointed out that Anglicanism was now marginal in New Zealand society overall.

In contrast, the sense I got from many of the older Anglicans I encountered was that they thought the Anglican Church in New Zealand still had considerable political and civic leverage and influence. Neo reflected that "the Anglican voice presumes [it] ought to be shaping societal arrangements". Despite this stance, in general there is

a growing awareness of becoming marginal in New Zealand society which, I would argue, has opened spaces for change and transformation in some dioceses that would not have been entertained when Anglicanism was at its height of influence. Coles and Hauerwas (2008) point out that part of learning to listen requires being vulnerable and many Anglicans I met were certainly feeling vulnerable as they stared down a tunnel of future oblivion for many of their churches. Becoming vulnerable seems to have facilitated more efforts at listening to outside groups, which resulted in these groups eventually joining Diocese J and bringing with them listening skills gained from being marginal neo-monastic/emerging Christians.

5   Final reflection

The presence of the ICs and the Anglican concept of the broad table in Diocese J suggest that the incorporation of Emergent and neo-monastic groups has helped to enlarge and create spaces for encounter, messiness and taking risks which has attracted younger, previously non-Anglican people to the Diocese. These new Anglicans are aware that in the public square they are one voice among many and have brought with them an awareness of "Christianity as marginal" that older Anglicans hadn't quite caught onto. Becoming marginal seems to have made some in Diocese J receptive to these new groups who bring with them energetic young people who are curious about ancient Christianity and the historical "treasures" of Anglican tradition and spiritual practices.

My research participants had learnt the negotiation skills needed to continually keep open engagement with the "other", whether that is secular social justice colleagues or Anglicans who see themselves as the centre of society and not at the margins. The emphasis on marginality inherent in the ECM and neo-monastic groups, and now being experienced by Anglicans, can be linked to my participants' identification with living on the edge. It can be surmised that identifying with marginality has led Diocese J to a more overt emphasis on missionally "being with" rather than only "providing for" the poor and needy. Thus, becoming marginal has changed the way that this group of Anglicans listened to and engaged with others.

It should be acknowledged that in opening space for people like my millennial-aged, non-Anglican background participants, there were those who felt that their more traditional Anglicanism had been sidelined and starved of resources. Thus, when space is opened for the new, it is a delicate balance to include and incorporate what already occupies that space. This is the time then to consider Coles's ideas on being receptively generous to all who hold and value spaces in which they, and others, can come and flourish together. Then it can honestly be said, "they have made space for me".

About the author

Dr Catherine Rivera is a Social Anthropologist in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research focuses on contemporary Christianity in New Zealand, and religious understandings of civil society and democratic participation. Currently she works at Massey University as a Research Impact Advisor. Contact: C.Rivera@massey.ac.nz

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Bending the Light: A Methodological Structure for Collaborative Theological Inquiry

Dustin D. Benac, Hannah Coe, Juli Kalbaugh, Tatum Miller and Erin Moniz

Abstract

The shifting structure of religious life requires new research methodologies that can attend to the dynamic nature of faith and resource ongoing scholarship and religious practice. Rather than approaching research and resourcing as separate and iterative movements, a contextually-centred approach can engage and support religious scholarship and practice in dynamic religious climates. While existing methodologies have advanced research and practice in considerable ways, these developments now make possible an integrative approach that combines research, resourcing and collaborative inquiry into a dynamic movement. This paper advances an argument through theological fieldnotes from a year of collaborative research and resourcing completed by the Program for the Future Church (PFFC). Established in 2021, the PFFC is a research, resource and relational hub that pilots solutions for emerging and pressing challenges before the Church. The methodology, "Bending the Light," pursues collaborative action research by constituting three sites of inquiry: a Celebration, a Collaboratory and a Contextual Research Hub. Nine practices guide individual and collective investigation(s): 1) identifying present gifts; 2) creating connections; 3) identifying commonalities; 4) clarifying presenting crises; 5) developing shared language; 6) elevating individual and collective imagination; 7) complexifying anchoring concepts; 8) exploring shared practice; and 9) piloting research and resources. Combining reflections from conveners and participants, this methodological structure enhances attention to the lived theologies that ground the life of faith and the forms of practice that can resource future research and Christian practice.

Keywords: Action research, Collaborative inquiry, Future church, Methodology, Organizational innovation, Theological education

1   Introduction: Bending the Light[1]

Mid-morning light shaped the site of the first Contextual Research Hub gathering convened by the Program for the Future Church (PFFC)[2] as a means to collectively explore the crisis of social disconnection and the realities of what that looks like in each participant's own ministry and personal context. As we crossed the threshold and entered a chapel in Waco, Texas, the space was illuminated from multiple points through lofted windows, stained glass, and the exterior light that followed us in through the door. The group of thirteen was met with silence upon entering, but the movement of light in the room transformed any reservation into resonance, welcoming us and beckoning us forward together.

The space was at once familiar, a chapel with pews organized to orient an audience toward the stage. "I know how this space works," reflected one participant. But amidst the recognizable elements, it also felt foreign. The pulpit, typically center stage, was relocated well off to the left. In its place were the participants, sitting on the stage rather than in the pews. Some were reminded as they looked up at the white Jesus gazing down from above, "This is not my space." The chapel context and physical structure of the environment was already forming and bending our thoughts, feelings, and time together.

This gathering and broader methodology engages in a practice described as "bending the light," drawn from Robinson's reflections on the practice of leadership (2009: 59–78). Robinson shares the story of a German professor who carried a found piece of glass in his pocket and began using it as a mirror to reflect light into dark spaces. "It became a game for [the professor] to get light into the most inaccessible places [he] could find." What began as a game grew to become a rule of life: the professor realized other sources of light – truth, understanding and knowledge – will only shine in dark places "if I reflect it." In a similar way, the work of the PFFC as a research, resource, and relational hub that pilots solutions for emerging and pressing challenges before the Church, seeks to reflect and refract possibility through the practice of gathering and collective engagement around shared crises. The structure and praxis within the "Bending the Light" (BTL) methodology consider how the combination of the convening practices of the PFFC and contextual engagement in a particular location with attention to participants' specific ministry circumstances

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impacts thoughts and actions. Through these fieldnotes from a year of collaborative research and resourcing completed by the PFFC, we aim to give an account of new ways of life that can emerge out of crisis and collaboratively bend the light of our individual and collective imagination toward hope.

The methodology expressed and embedded in this scene of gathering combines research, resourcing, and relationships into a single movement of collaborative inquiry. Following this introduction that purposefully starts *media res* ("from the middle"), we introduce this process of individual and collective inquiry as a methodological structure. Part II proceeds to describe the BTL methodology, identifying nine practices of discovery that guide individual and collective investigation across three sites of collaborative and contextual inquiry. Part III includes reflections from participants and co-authors in their own voice, grounding the theoretical framework within the lived experience of individuals who engaged in this collective inquiry over the course of one year. Finally, we conclude by exploring the theological significance of this particular mode of collaborative research, noting the importance of belonging, place and worship.

2   A methodological structure

The complexities of communities of faith require integrating theories, methods, and disciplines in order to give an account of the realities and possibilities of life together. While theology and theological education emerge from reflection on and in service of people of faith, it is often criticized for being disconnected from real world application. When theology and theological education remain abstract and theoretical, the lack of application can leave individuals and communities with limited guidance on how to address contemporary social, ethical, and moral challenges. There is a need, as Smith (2023) argues, for new forms to guide theological education and theological inquiry.

Methodology alone, however, cannot yield the encounter and formation that many of these communities, and theological education more broadly, desire. Structure is also required. Amid calls for new forms, the turn to structure provides a way to identify the properties, practices, and processes that can orient the methods and integrate the methodology in and for particular communities. Centering structure, or the particular physical, social, emotional, and spiritual conditions that surround gatherings, provides a way to combine insights from local communities and empirical research with theological reflection. This fieldnote demonstrates how social environments support the conditions for new ideas to form, and how these environments are, in turn, nourished by the ideas and values that infuse them with meaning. Like light

and a prism, theory and practice are inseparable from the structures they embody and make possible. Reframing the importance of structure acknowledges the transformative capacity of the relationship between theory and action by inviting attention to the conditions that enable individual and collective transformation, including the conditions for thriving as well as those that diminish life. It describes how organizations – and especially those endowed with sacred stewardship – are "living realities," as Jennings (2020) observes, built on individuals' affections, joys and desires for belonging. In its simplest form, thinking in terms of structure is like picking up the pieces of our lives and communities and creating space where enlivened imagination, birthed out of a sense of belonging, can form new structures where communities and individuals can flourish.

The BTL methodology builds upon and incorporates various insights and contextually-centered sensibilities that emerge from previous attempts to provide a theological account of the crises and responses that confront individuals and communities (e.g., Browning 1991; Osmer 2008; Bass et al. 2016; Scharen, 2015; Swinton and Mowat 2016; Cameron et al. 2010). Even as it incorporates some of the rhythm and style of existing methods, it also has a distinct manner that cannot be reduced to the logic of inquiry that the current modes of theological inquiry provide. Further, through the sustained practice of convening, it reconstitutes the forms of connection and belonging that are required for ministerial and ecclesial imagination to form and flourish. Hence, "Bending the Light" offers a methodological structure, an integrated theological research method, that can support the forms of discernment and collective action that cross silos within an ecclesial ecology (Benac 2022). The methodology purposefully includes and engages participants who inhabit different types of ecclesial institutions (e.g., congregations, theological schools, nonprofits), and the outcomes return to the local level, rather than remaining sequestered in academic institutions or the research community. As a result, as individuals and communities across this ecology discern how best to respond to a shifting organization landscape, the process and practices that ground this methodological structure can enrich the living theological imagination that animates theological education, local congregations, Church-related ministries and ecclesial entrepreneurship.

3   Outline of the methodology

Practical theology as a discipline explores the relationship between the conceptual learning of theology and doctrine and the actual lived experience of Christians on the ground. It offers an opportunity for individuals and communities to "see in depth" (Dykstra 2008: 48), drawn forth by the reality and possibilities of God. Nevertheless, the contextually-rooted and collaborative nature of this process resists linear

progression. Practical theology "is not linear but iterative," Cahalan and Nieman note. "In its very methodology, practical theology must remain open to God's future (Cahalan and Nieman 2008: 84). Similarly, through an iterative and imaginative process, BTL invites individuals and communities to see and name reality, as well as envision new possibilities for the future, again and again.

In this way, the methodology is one that not only connects the three aspects of the theological enterprise – action research, theological investigation and collaborative inquiry – but it also creates a collective imagination that is able to embrace new possibilities that shape the future of the Church. It not only attends to method but seeks to draw out the necessary structural conditions that form an alternative social structure where research, resourcing, and relationships can combine within an integrated and contextually-rooted theological research hub.

This methodology proceeds much like a light wave and a prism, rather than a singular, straight path. The research process moves like a wave, and the reconstituted sites of collaborative inquiry function like prisms. When light travels in the form of a wave and encounters a different medium, the spectral properties are affected; each wavelength is bent by a slightly different amount as they pass through the prism. This bending effect separates the incoming white light into its individual colors, creating a spectrum. In the same way, the "Bending the Light" methodological structure passes the "light" of collaborative inquiry through several different "prisms" to understand the substance and properties of the crises we encounter.

BTL works to create a new structure that illuminates and transforms communities through three grounding Properties: belonging, place, and worship. The combination of these Properties animates every aspect of the theological structure and the sites of collaborative inquiry are purposefully structured to include these three elements. When removed, the practices and processes described below lose coherence.
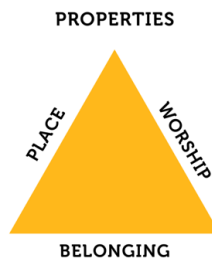
Figure 1   Properties of Bending the Light (commissioned by the Program for the Future Church)

Three sites organize the methodological structure: a Celebration, a Collaboratory and a Contextual Research Hub. These gatherings reflect an understanding of convening as a performative, practical theological inquiry (Benac, forthcoming a). As visualized below, the research process moves like an oscillating wave, elevating and anchoring the properties, practices, and people along the wavelength. Purposefully constituting new "situations" (Fulkerson 2007), these three sites of convening, grounded in the BTL Properties, act as a prism and become spaces that refract and redirect ideas, theory building, shared practices, and actions that follow. Just as the prism slows light waves and causes a refraction that illuminates the broad spectrum of colors, the prismatic gathering sites of the methodology are places where people slow down and consider their own contextually rooted gifts, challenges, and opportunities. This time of clarification and complexifying allows the different aspects, or colors, of the presenting issue to be reflected in a way that reveals new forms; theological imagination bends to open up new possibilities where hope emerges.

The methodological structure, grounded in the BTL Properties, is ordered by BTL Practices that guide the collective community. Across the three prismatic gathering points, nine practices guide the investigation: 1) naming present gifts; 2) creating connections; 3) identifying commonalities; 4) clarifying presenting crises; 5) developing shared language; 6) elevating individual and collective imagination; 7) complexifying anchoring concepts; 8) exploring shared practice; and 9) piloting research and resources. Together, this leads to a holistic exploration of theology and lived experiences.
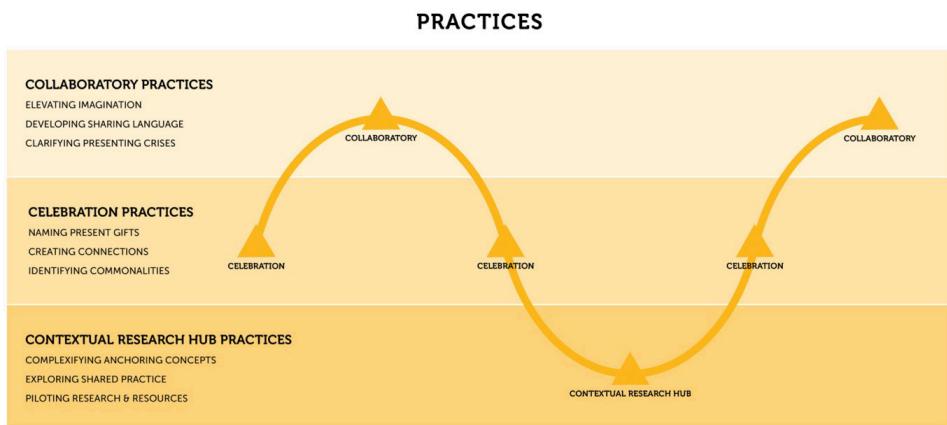
Figure 2   Practices for Bending the Light (commissioned by the Program for the Future Church)

From one prismatic gathering point, the process of inquiry continues along the wave, elevating or anchoring, until it meets another prismatic gathering site where it experiences another illumination, and so on. These new situations, which are at once theological and social, combine to create a method, a mode of convening, and a process for discovery that motivates and guides the work of transformation.

3.1   Celebration

The BTL methodology starts with celebration which orients individuals toward joy and toward God from the start. The anchoring practices of this prismatic point are naming present gifts, creating connections, and identifying commonalities to deepen the BTL Properties (belonging, place and worship). Celebration draws attention to the present and to the ways in which God has been and is at work by naming the gifts we have already received. At the same time, celebration is relational. Celebrations serve as vital moments of creating connection that affirm and build a sense of community. Just as the practice of marking seasons through the liturgical calendar orders movement through time, celebration marks these times in a way that illumines the holy-and-ordinary grounding for this work.

For example, this methodological work began with a Ministry Partner Gathering.[3] The purpose was to bring people together to make connections and share and celebrate the ways in which God was at work in our surrounding community. This intentional time together involved creative exercises, conversation prompts and time for reflection and sharing. Here, people were introduced to other organizations and existing resources that began to provide a framework for future collaborative work.

Even as joys and hopes that anchored our time together, individuals also found commonality in current challenges being faced. By engaging with the concrete experiences of those gathered, the collective community was able to listen to stories, empathize with struggles, and share in the joys and the pains. As a prismatic point of Celebration, this gathering space immersed the community in the lived realities of the people and surfaced the collaborative connections present in the available networks as well bring to light shared hopes and challenges. Figures 3 and 4 represent participants' responses.

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3   See "Program for the Future Church: Gathered," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiZBFv1kRfk.
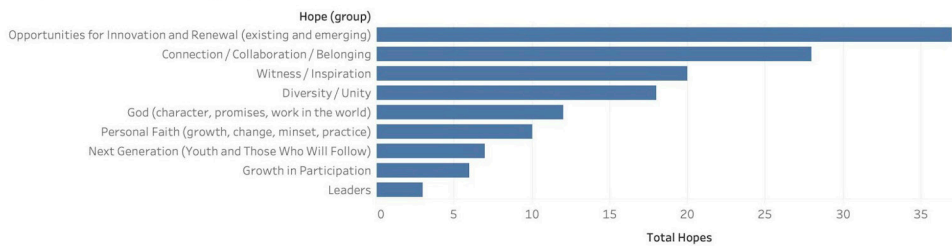
Figure 3   Ministry Partner Gathering "Hopes" (created by the Program for the Future Church)
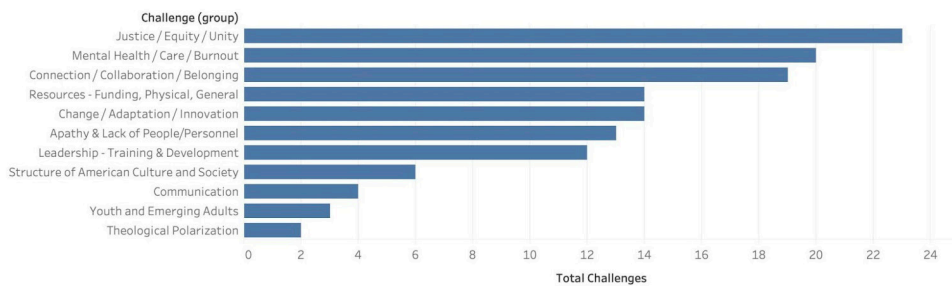
Figure 4   Ministry Partner Gathering "Challenges" (created by the Program for the Future Church)

Along with expanding networks, methodologically, this intentional gathering space invites opportunities to explore who resonates with your work. Starting with a collaborative convening of Celebration creates a shared story and allows people to connect not only with each other but also with the broader ethos of the community. By making connections and offering a vision for collective work, organizers aimed to create a hub of people who would be available to continue exploring together. This new collective energy, collaborative connections, and the information collected about current experiences is carried forward along the wave and directly informs the next gathering site: the Collaboratory.

3.2   Collaboratory
After identifying specific places of strength and encouragement, collaborative partners and communal challenges in our Celebration gathering, we brought these insights forward into the next convening point. The Collaboratory serves as a space for collective reflection, interdisciplinary and community connection, and the exchange of ideas around a particular challenge brought forth to investigate and illuminate. A Collaboratory can be thought of as a collaborative laboratory; a curated environment where church, community, and thought leaders are brought

together to work jointly on a particular presenting crisis or pressing challenge. Much as Osmer describes the work practical theology as starting, "where you are brought up short," (Osmer 2008: 21), this work centers the crisis/es that bring individuals and communities up short and demand an account. For example, the first Collaboratory centered the crisis of social isolation and need for belonging, and our second Collaboratory will center the crisis of leading alone. In a Collaboratory, participants share resources, knowledge, and expertise to address complex problems and find innovative solutions. It is a catalytic gathering meant to help clarify presenting crises, develop shared language, and elevate individual and collective imagination.[4]

Participatory and inclusive, a Collaboratory embraces active engagement with all participants from various disciplines, sectors, denominations and organizations. The diversity of voices and perspectives enriches the collaborative process. Nevertheless, the second practice, developing shared language, is essential for collaborative inquiry. In a Collaboratory, participants are not a spectator; each person is a meaningful participant and contributor. The work being done is happening in and through the people in the room. Participants' presence, ideas and experience have direct impact on the outcome. As collaboration unfolds, the participants develop shared language and concepts that facilitate clear communication and mutual understanding. Further, with the necessary research ethics approvals, the Collaboratory also doubles as a research site, providing a series of focus groups with participants.

And third, the Collaboratory elevates individual and collective imagination to envision innovative solutions and approaches that address the presenting crises. Accordingly, our work up to this point has purposefully curated environments where participants know at least two other people in the room, which allows them to have the relational support to imagine alternative futures. By facilitating collaborative partnerships and nurturing an environment of innovation and creativity, Collaboratories empower participants to drive meaningful and transformative change in their respective domains. The Collaboratory is an activator and generator, meant for dreaming and implementation, creation, and cultivation, designed to activate catalytic agents of change.

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4   The language of "Collaboratory" was inspired by Kenda Dean's work at Princeton Theological Seminary.

3.3 Contextual Research Hub

BTL proceeds to the Contextual Research Hub, which takes a deeper dive into the presenting issue and seeks to develop a more comprehensive and sustainable response. At this point, the three practices of discovery are complexifying anchoring concepts, exploring shared practices, and piloting research and resources.

In the Contextual Research Hub, participants delve into the anchoring concepts that underlie the presenting crisis. This involves exploring the root causes, underlying beliefs, and historical context that contribute to the challenges at hand. Second, the participants examine shared practices, traditions and community norms to better understand how they relate to the presenting crises. This exploration helps uncover potential leverage points for positive change. Third, the Contextual Research Hub pilots research initiatives, experiments, and interventions aimed at addressing the live issue. This includes testing potential solutions, evaluating their effectiveness, and refining strategies based on feedback. Guided by the insight of theological action research, this point of the methodology intends to stage and invite meaningful interventions in the communities the PFFC serves and the contexts participants inhabit.

Our Contextual Research Hub included faculty, students, local pastors, nonprofit leaders, and Baylor administrators, each of whom brought a unique perspective on the topic at hand. Being purposeful to think about the space, place, imagination and culture of belonging (Dykstra, 2008; Fulkerson, 2007; Benac, 2022), each week we met in a space that held meaning to one or more of the participants. The Contextual Research Hub gathered in four different places, each rooted in Waco, Texas: a community worshipping space, a 125-year-old chapel, a congregation turned nonprofit space, and a local startup accelerator. Participant feedback identified the formative function of these places. "We were able to move to different locations that allowed for us to refresh and concentrate on things we had not previously considered," one participant shared. Another reflected: "I enjoyed being in different spaces and thinking through how that impacts our conversations."

The interplay between shared texts and a shared context grounded our collective reflection. Three books guided our conversation during this Contextual Research Hub: Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* (1995), Cohen's *Belonging* (2022), and Birmingham and Simard's *Creating Cultures of Belonging* (2022) provided prompts for our conversation. Centered in places and gathering around shared texts, we began each meeting by asking: What does belonging look like and feel like in this space? Our work together over this period aimed to develop shared resources (e.g. open access reading guides, edited volumes, new language for preaching, published articles, and toolkits) and pilot ideas that address the challenge of belonging in our own contexts.

3.4 Back to Celebration

The progression from a Celebration to Collaboratory to Contextual Research Hub and then back through Celebration reflects an integrated and participatory approach. Within this methodological structure, celebration is both a condition and an outcome. As Figure 5 represents, this methodological structure provides a pathway for inter-active and ongoing individual and collective discovery.
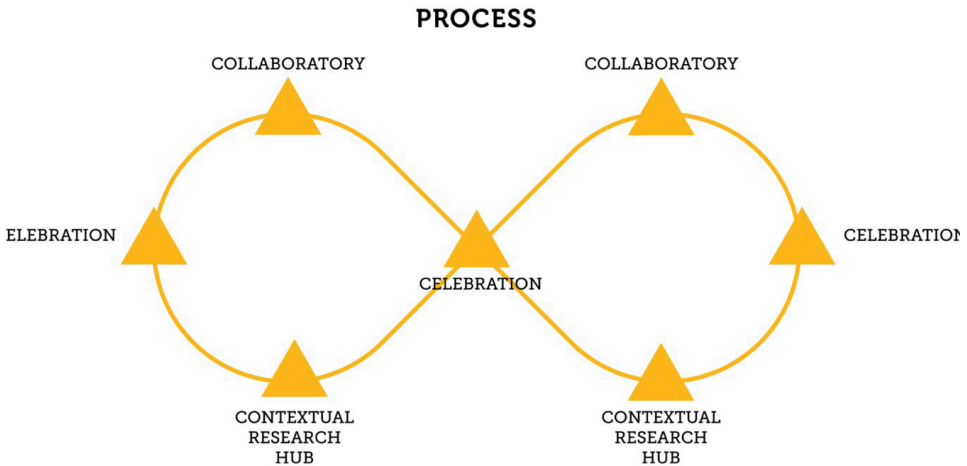
PROCESS

Figure 5   Bending the Light as process (commissioned by Program for the Future Church)

When pursued over time, BTL yields a dynamic and iterative feedback loop where each convening point symbiotically forms and transforms the individual and their organizations moving forward. Intentionally grounded in gatherings, this form of inquiry centers relationship and is rooted in the idea that gathering is a space of encounter, an act of resistance, and a place of creative possibility. When we come together, we encounter each other, and we encounter God. BTL reminds us that, after the ascension, the "locus of God's presence" is found in the people of God (Coloe, 2021: 518). God is to be found in each of us; the more we come together, the fuller picture of God we see. Gathering is also an act of resistance; in a time when our lives and communities are being set by algorithms and divided by polarization, it involves inviting others from the outside to come in, and to be in spaces with people we would not normally gather with. Proceeding from each site of gathering, participants carry what they have experienced and continue to move along the wave. Each arc builds on the previous movement, and the cycle builds from one year to the next.

4 Collective Discovery: Participant Reflections

Following this introduction and description of the "Bending the Light" methodological structure, three individuals who have participated in portions of the methodology share their experience in their own voice. Their personal narration relationally grounds the movement of theory and praxis and elevates the embodied and contextually rooted reflection that grounds this collaborative work. The inclusion of participants as co-authors who are invited to write in their own voice reflects the methodological commitments of action research and the performative outcomes this approach to collaborative theological inquiry pursues.

4.1 Hannah Coe, Pastor

One of the more striking points of reflection for me as a participant in the PFFC Collaboratory and Contextual Research Hub is how much of my daily life as a pastor is oriented around the crisis of isolation and the PFFC's chosen theme of belonging. Belonging is the common thread woven through most of my pastoral interactions. What started as a conversation that surfaced deeper questions and a desire to explore the realities of belonging progressed as the year continued. The concept of belonging, rather than becoming more clear, became increasingly complex in ways that felt deeply sacred and meaningful. I came to more deeply cherish celebrations of belonging. But, as the year progressed, I became attentive to the frequency of conversations in which people described painful experiences of broken belonging, and I became more attentive to my own experiences of broken belonging and how profoundly those experiences shaped me.

Recently, a member of my congregation and I worked together on an advocacy opportunity. She has experienced significant rejection and betrayal by the denomination of her youth because she is an advocate. As she reflected on the pain of rejection for doing what she felt was the right thing, I said, "I'm realizing that belonging is maybe more powerful than being right." We sat in silence, the weight of this truth landing in a deep place. Even decades after the hurt, even when we know we've done the just and faithful thing, the longing to belong is a persistent ache; the absence of belonging, a painful void.

The experience of broken belonging has a way of making people feel as if the fabric of their lives is unraveling. The last few years of pandemic and crisis have felt like the Great Unraveling. Over the course of our Contextual Research Hub, when I stepped into the pulpit to preach and looked at the faces looking back at me, I began to think, "I wish you all could see that your experiences of broken belonging are perhaps the most powerful common thread you share." I lamented my faith tradition's emphasis on measures of belonging, too thin and shallow for the living of these

days. I wondered how gathering together our common threads of brokenness might mend our belonging.

Inspired by the Contextual Research Hub reading and conversation, I arranged for a small group Bible study of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Galatians through the lens of belonging. We realized most of us were taught to read the epistles as systematic theology, not with the question, "How did early believers navigate questions of belonging?" We wondered how reading the Scriptures and interpreting our lives through the lens of belonging might be a source of healing and spiritual renewal.

Through my experience with the PFFC I had the opportunity to hear and learn about others' experiences of belonging and not belonging. This experience sprouted seeds of hopeful curiosity for me that common threads of belonging, especially the frayed and broken ones, are a source of healing and spiritual renewal for us all.

4.2   Tatum Miller, graduate student

The Contextual Research Hub centered on belonging allowed me to experience the nuances of different backgrounds and stories. To understand needs, I've learned that we must first understand people. How do we do that? Live life with one another. Carry each other's burdens. Then, we will learn what our communities truly need. Our methodology must start with people and not answers. Our communities are speaking but not many people are keeping their ear to the ground. When done right, relationships inform research, allowing for proper resourcing to occur. Research and resourcing must go hand in hand when working within the context of marginalized communities.

At the same time, it caused me to reflect on my own story of belonging. Even though our Contextual Research Hub was grounded in Waco, my belonging is largely wrapped up in my hometown. Louisville, Kentucky is one of the most segregated cities in America. The Eastside is populated mainly by white residents. Consequently, the West and Southside is made up of majority black residents. One in five black residents live in a place that is more than 75% black. Nearly half of the white residents live in a place that is at least 75% white. Drive through the West End and you will see soul food restaurants, entire families sitting on a neighbor's porch, and people smiling. You will hear the sound of 80s hip hop coming from the old timer's car and the occasional ambulance on its route. You will witness struggles, but also joys. Drive through the East End and you will find freshly cut grass, an abundance of electric vehicles, and Whole Foods. Louisville is also that place that I call home. These two communities are often at odds with each other due to distribution of resources. The East End has better policing, food access, infrastructure, and school systems.

The West End has failing schools, police brutality cases that make international news, and food deserts. A developed sense of home is required from belonging in the space between placement and displacement.

In the Contextual Research Hub, we explored different ways belonging can create spaces for opportunity. As a seminary student, my work in the Research Hub, organizing, writing and creating, directly impacted the way my education deepens my sense of belonging. Instead of looking inward, I turned outward to see that belonging can happen everywhere. When people feel like they can belong, communities begin to thrive. Resources and research are important but meaningless without the feeling of belonging. To those who feel rejected by the world around them, there will always be a gap that healthy grocery stores cannot fill. We need to start at the beginning, creating a space for everyone to find their place in this world of ours. The Contextual Research Hub helped me recognize that belonging starts in the grass roots. It's not the big moves, but the small moments that foster a feeling of belonging within our communities. From Waco to Louisville, displacement exists in an abundance. Fostering a sense of home can be the people we love and those who love us. Relationships are key to fostering belonging and must be made an ultimate priority. Celebration, collaboration, and contextual research have combined to provide an environment of flourishing and creative hunger. For me, educational belonging seeks to push me to new heights and take new risks. the Program for the Future Church has challenged many to dream big, while keeping our minds focused on the communities we serve.

4.3   Erin Moniz, College Chaplain

My entryway to this methodology was a Ministry Partner Gathering Celebration at a local community arts establishment. I had no expectations for the gathering and was curious about the existence of this venue that I was unaware of even though it was basically in my backyard. But I came to realize that bringing people together in intentional spaces that are connected to the local community was all part of the design for this project. The Ministry Partner Gathering situated me with friends and strangers. But through some accessible, collaborative, reflective activities, the gathering created a beautiful mosaic of ideas, hopes and challenges. This purposeful piece of art prompted open discussion and sharing, and was a glimpse of things to come, and the space, voices, diversity, creativity and candor were hallmarks of the entire experience.

There is a tendency in research methodology to rush towards outcomes and objectives. Being a part of the PFFC's BTL was a wholly different experience from other projects and research teams I have been a part of. While there were parameters

and expectations, this approach would prioritize embodiment and an invitation to an organic process. There was an integration of space and story. The objectives of celebration, collaboration and contextual engagement rang as more than a moniker slapped on conventional methods as it wove setting, stories, people, and posture into a tapestry of research on the topic of Belonging.

For the sake of productivity, it is easy to take for granted the synergy created in convening. This intentional hub of people was able to gradually complexify the anchoring concepts of Belonging by embracing the simplicity of abiding and engaging. For me, the concepts of Belonging moved from the abstract to the concrete as they were materializing in the very moments we shared as a research hub. This resulted, for me, in a series of reflections on my own ministry context. As a college chaplain and Director for Chapel, much of my work is to curate chapel experiences that orient and enrich the students' faith journey. Belonging is a metric that my team was already entrenched in as we created the new chapel model we were tasked to create for the University. We know that if, early on in their undergraduate experience, a student gains a sense of belonging, it greatly increases their chances of academic success and overall wellbeing at the University. But belonging is a difficult metric to create and track, and there are challenges in implementation. Belonging can be reduced to homogeny. We do not wish for chapels to become echo chambers. The question I brought to each Contextual Research Hub gathering was, "How can I create an environment for student belonging without silo-ing demographics?"

One significant way this methodology has informed my own ministry is by demonstrating an embodied framework for group discovery. Our Hub allowed for diverse people and opinions to sharpen each other because the model, the invitation, and the very spaces we occupied, invited us to bring ourselves to the discussion while also welcoming how difference enhances our goals. As a result, I brought back an ecological framework for my team to consider with chapels. Belonging, spiritual formation and maturation are all difficult objectives to ensure. Instead of creating learning outcomes in an effort to synthesize these goals, we now approach our chapel model and the student experience as though we were gardeners instead of mechanics. We work to create environments that promote the best possibility for spiritual flourishing.

5 Theological Reflection: Bending Imagination Toward Hope

We purposefully describe the broader frame as a methodological structure for theological inquiry. Indeed, as described and embodied above, it is a process that guides individual and collective discovery, leading to research and resources that intend to support the current and next generation of faith leaders. The structure and process, however, offer more than rote production: it cultivates collective imagination that moves into the future with hope. Hope cannot always be quantified, and the enduring hope that nourishes a theological imagination extends beyond a single year of engagement together. Nonetheless, in this final section we want to expand on the three Properties of this methodological structure, and theological formation more broadly, that allow imagination to bend toward hope: belonging, place and worship.

Belonging is an essential condition for the formation of hope and imagination this methodological structure provides. While the English word "belonging" is not widely found in Scripture, the concept is. Our work over the course of this inaugural methodological cycle purposefully centered belonging because without it the relational connections that are required to nourish creativity, a common life, and imagination cannot form and flourish (Cohen 2022). Moreover, recent theological reflection about belonging (e.g., Jennings 2020; Barreto 2021) demonstrates the timeliness and relevance of translating the science of belonging into constructive social and theological proposal about the (re)ordering of a common life. The ongoing work of this methodological structure to bend imagination toward hope requires beginning with, building from, and working together in light of a structure of belonging. Representing a central property, subject of contextual reflection, and a theological condition, belonging is essential for and emanates from the BTL methodological structure.

The participant reflections and the broader community that gathered around this collective inquiry are animated both by a sense of and search for belonging. While individuals certainly experienced a sense of belonging through this work together, many of us also came to this conversation precisely because who did not always know who, where, or how to belong. "The longing to belong is a persistent ache," Coe notes above. To put it differently, we each brought a people, but we were also in search of a people. We began our work together by noting how collaborative theological inquiry requires taking the risk of belonging, and over time we came to realize how theological imagination can neither form nor flourish without the risk of belonging. Theological imagination emerges from a sense of feeling safe, seen, and carried in the hands of others, but it also requires the ability to "see in depth" (Dykstra 2008: 48) in a way

that draws our common work together. And even as we seek to build structures of belonging, that longing for belonging may never fully abate.

Place is a second essential condition to bend imagination toward hope in and through this methodological structure. Much as with belonging, "place" is a category that provides an opportunity for contextual and interdisciplinary engagement. For example, Jennings (2010) notes how theological imagination forms in and through a relationship to place and land, and Fulkerson (2007) details how our contemporary constructions often render place as a commodity, rather than as a site of encounter. The work of this methodological structure similarly seeks to ground – quite literally – theological reflection within the particularities and complexities of place. It seeks to make familiar places feel slightly less familiar, and it aims to make unfamiliar places feel a little more like home. Moreover, the practice of convening performs an alternative social imaginary about what is possible through gathering and being gathered by God. As such, the three sites of convening, collaboration and collective discovery are reconstituted places that bend the light of imagination toward hope.

Our turn to place allowed our work to be grounded in the particularity of our local geography, while also drawing wisdom from our broader embodied experience. As Miller noted above, one of the outcomes of this contextually-centered collaborative inquiry was it brought to mind how people and communities in other places shape our theological imagination. Similarly, bending imagination toward hope requires seeing and acknowledging the realities of place and displacement. Place is more than a pragmatic consideration in the work of collaborative theological inquiry; it is an acknowledgement of our creatureliness as well as the reality that every place and community has structures that cultivate and inhibit belonging.

Finally, worship describes how the individual and collective work of this methodological structure are a doxological expression of lives lived in light of the reality and possibilities of God. God's presence in time is the prime condition of possibility for theological inquiry and imagination about the future of theological education, the future of the Church, and Church-related ministries. As such, this individual and collective work begins and ends in celebration, or worship, seeking to discern and support the way of life that invites us to live as people of God and in the company of those God calls us to. The methodological structure that grounds and guides this work draws others into space of encounter through the alternative social reality of worship. Insofar as this process participates in God's gathering, it seeks to draw individuals and communities into a doxological life of worship and service.

Worship is also a practice of celebration and anticipation. Accordingly, our work together was ordered by simple and ordinary practices: eating, naming gifts, and sending people out into the world. These times together also purposefully include rest. We gathered in traditional spaces of worship, such as chapels and congregations, but we also met in non-religious spaces, gathering in nonprofits, startup accelerators, classrooms, art galleries and public event spaces. And in a manner that was entirely unscripted, individuals who gathered began to incorporate belonging into the patterns of worship that order their lives and communities. "We do not wish for chapels to become echo chambers," Moniz reflects above. This movement from celebration to anticipation emerges from a fabric of belonging and draws us forward, with hope, into the ways in which belonging may emerge more fully.

6   Conclusion

Several months after this initial gathering, one of the thirteen participants in this inaugural "Bending the Light" methodological structure shared a poem from Jan Richardson entitled "What the Night is For." The poem begins by describing sorrow as "shattered glass." It then wonders what account we give of these fragmented pieces of our lives and communities. As our work together noted, the longing for belonging is not something that can ever be entirely remade. And yet, Richardson suggests there is another way: scattering these fragmented pieces "into the soil, into the sky." Rather than trying to pick them back up, we take the fractures and fragments – the very longings for belonging that make life together difficult to bear – and allow them to form a luminous witness in the dark. This is what the night is for, the poem notes: "it takes the broken things and sets them shining to light our way from here."

The proposed methodological structure for theological inquiry, "Bending the Light," bears similar witness. Just as the three participants described how they picked up and incorporated aspects of this methodology into their work, the combined methodological structures bends the light into individual lives and into local communities. It begins in the space of crisis, which often looks and feels like broken glass or shattered mirror, and follows a pathway to bend the light in order to give an account (Benac, forthcoming b). This structure consists of three Properties: belonging, place and worship that constitute three sites of inquiry: a Celebration, a Collaboratory, and a Contextual Research Hub with nine practices of individual and collective inquiry: 1) naming present gifts; 2) creating connections; 3) identifying commonalities; 4) clarifying presenting crises; 5) developing shared language; 6) elevating individual and collective imagination; 7) complexifying anchoring concepts; 8) exploring shared practice; and 9) piloting research and resources. When pursued over time and in

the company of others, it creates space for people and communities to imagine and pursue a hopeful future for the Church.

About the authors

Dustin D. Benac (ThD, Duke University) is an educator, practical theologian and organizational strategist. He teaches at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, where he serves as Director and co-founder for the Program for the Future Church. He is the author of *Adaptive Church: Collaboration and Community in a Changing World*. Contact: Dustin_Benac@baylor.edu

Hannah Coe is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. Before serving with Calvary, Hannah served on church staff in Jefferson City, Missouri (2015–21) and Athens, Georgia (2008–15). Hannah earned an MS in Integrative Creative Therapy at Berry College and an MDiv at McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University.

Juli Kalbaugh is the Project Manager for the Program for the Future Church at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary. She is a breast cancer survivor, community cultivator and creative strategist. She lives in Bloomington, Indiana with her husband, Corey, and two daughters, Novella and Evia.

Tatum Miller is a third-year student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary and completed his undergraduate work at Georgetown College. Upon graduation, he aims passionately to pursue community development, racial education and the intersection of faith.

Rev. Dr. Moniz is an Associate Chaplain and the Director for Chapel at Baylor University. Dr. Moniz is ordained as a Deacon in the Anglican Church of North America. She received her academic and ministerial training at Berry College (BS), Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv) and Trinity School for Ministry (DMin).

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ARTICLE

Nigerian Pentecostal Mission in Europe: Ecumenical and secular relations in Britain

Bisi Adenekan-Koevoets

Abstract

African churches face diverse obstacles while attempting cross-cultural mission in the West. These include the influence of external forces such as racism, lack of understanding of European cultures, lack of worship spaces and various perceptions that many wider indigenous Europeans have about Africans and their churches, particularly their theological beliefs. These external factors impose real challenges, which are beyond the control of the leaders of diaspora African churches and interfere with the effort to build relations with the wider white indigenous European host population, whether spiritual or secular. This qualitative study explores the different ways through which Nigerian-initiated churches in London are engaging with British society, both ecumenically and as a social force within the communities. There are indications that a few of the larger churches are building ecumenical relations with mainline British churches, although this is prevalent at leadership level. Similarly, they are well-enough resourced to embark on social community projects which are beneficial to nationals of all races and political activities to court the British royal and political elite and are therefore establishing their presence within and creating pathways to British society.

Keywords: Cross-cultural mission, Ecumenical relations, Social action,
Nigerian Pentecostal Churches, Ministry of presence

Introduction

For many academics who are exploring the concept of 'reverse mission' of African churches in Europe, one challenge involves the dynamics of repositioning themselves from 'migrant enclaves' into communities able to engage in diverse relationships with the wider white indigenous European population they wish to evangelize (Adedibu 2018: 182; Olofinjana 2020). Although these scholars do not agree on some of the challenges to the 'reverse mission' agenda, there are some common threads linking

their arguments. These external factors impose real challenges, which are beyond the control of the leaderships of these diaspora African churches and are consistent with some of the observations made in my doctoral research (Adenekan-Koevoets 2021). However, some large Nigerian-initiated churches or their branches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Jesus House in London, Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) and Winners Chapel engage in various social activities within their locations and have become accepted features of those communities (Cartledge et al. 2019). The leadership of these denominations cooperates with governmental, non-governmental, church and non-church organizations to identify and meet community needs while also building ecumenical relations with British mainline church denominations such as the Church of England at various societal levels, thus establishing cross-cultural relations. Using empirical research methods, this article first describes ecumenism, discusses Pentecostals' ecumenical engagements and the missional benefits of establishing social projects within host communities. Second, it discusses the approach of the first-generation-led Nigerian churches to mission in Britain, the differing view of the Nigerian-British second-generation to this approach and the possible relevance of these conflicting views to Pentecostals' ecumenical engagements.

Ecumenism and African Pentecostals: A brief historical analysis

Ecumenism or being ecumenical refers to events, actions by individuals and/or organizations or ideas that bring Christians from different traditions together to dialogue and act in ways that reflect the household of God (Nelson and Reith 2017: 5–6). It is a coming together that presupposes that all participants share a belief in the work and person of Jesus Christ as God incarnate and Lord. The most important goal of the ecumenical movement is the building of relationships between the followers of Jesus as they encounter each other and seek to spread the message of the gospel and envision the unity of God in the world (Robeck 2014: 115). In John 17.20–26, Jesus is praying for the Church and in verse 21 he says, "that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me". However, there are reported challenges to this hope for structural unification and a widely held opinion within the ecumenical debate that the dialogue is stuck in an "ecumenical winter" (Murray 2014: 3; Nelson and Raith 2017: 97). This is due to a sense of disappointment among ecumenists about the seeming failure of some of the major initiatives to establish visible expression(s) of church unity. Murray further asserts that the movement has transited from the one-way ecumenism of the pre-Vatican II era (which promotes a one-way return of Christians to unity in the Catholic Church) to the Life and Work or practical model

(which encourages the building of shared relationship and practice across formally divided traditions)] of the early twentieth century. Next is the theological dialogue model which specifically addresses doctrinal issues and operates at church leadership level with little effect experienced by members at the local level. The main aim is to clear misconceptions and establish agreements and disagreements about divisive theological topics through bilateral and multilateral dialogues. Then there is spiritual ecumenism which started in the 1930s from the work of Paul Couturier and focuses on the conversion of the heart required for Christian unity through common prayer privately and publicly with little concern for practical work or theological dialogue. Finally, there is receptive ecumenism which is projected as a way to get out of the ecumenical 'cul-de-sac'. It focuses on developing and modelling a fresh strategy in ecumenism that takes contemporary realities seriously as well as the abiding need for churches to find an appropriate means of engaging towards achieving a more visible structural and sacramental unity. Paul Murray describes it as an ecumenism that invites learning from the other on all levels of ecclesial life without asking what other traditions can learn from us and without compromising one's own ecclesial identity. It emphasises ecclesial discernment of own imperfections and the importance of learning and receiving wisdom and gifts from others to address them (Murray and Confalonieri 2008: 280; Murray 2014: 1–3; Hawkes and Balabanski 2018; Pizzey 2019).

Although sporadic, Pentecostal denominations have been involved in ecumenical conversations from the beginning of the twentieth century although scholars suggest that it has existed in Christian antiquity since the era of the apostles (Odeyemi 2019: xvii). However, the multiplications and splintering of the movement hindered ecumenical work, causing differences in ecumenical attitudes which over time underscored the need for Pentecostals to initially focus on building worldwide cooperation among themselves. This resulted initially in the formation of national Pentecostal fellowships in Europe, North America, Africa, Asia and Latin America and later an international fellowship. Following this, a series of Pentecostal World Conferences were organized which resulted in the formation of the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF). This is a global cooperative body open to all Pentecostals although not all Pentecostal groups participate and those from North America and Europe are more influential in matters of international cooperation. Through the PWF in cooperation with the WCC, Pentecostals participated in the first official ecumenical dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in 1972 and this has become the model for ecumenical conversations between Pentecostals and other traditions (Vondey 2014: 79–80; Stephenson 2018).

From the perspective of African Pentecostals, ecumenism as presently conceptualized, particularly by the World Council of Churches (WCC), is seen as ideological and more focused on liturgy and sacraments as shown by the WCC document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. This document portrays the church as a eucharistic community, a definition of faith and Christianity dominated by a Western or Catholic definition which makes ecumenism that is dominated by a European perspective of religion a disincentive for the participation of African Christians (Rausch 2017: 91). According to Pentecostal historian Cecil Robeck (2015), who was the only Pentecostal on the Working group that drafted the document, the constitution of the delegates was slanted toward the ancient churches, which made it difficult, for a representative of the "free church" tradition to make any substantive contribution. John Segun Odeyemi, an ordained Catholic priest, in his book *Pentecostals and Catholic Ecumenism*, notes (and I agree) that African Pentecostals, whether in Africa or the diaspora, are hardly focused on weekly celebration of the eucharist or sacraments choosing rather to concentrate on biblical authority, demons and spirits, signs and wonders, and indigenous leadership. Unlike churches in the Enlightenment-influenced West, African Pentecostal churches emphasize the supernatural, the oneness of the spirit, soul and body (holistic approach) and everyday issues of poverty and violence confronting their congregations across Africa (Rausch 2017: 92; Odeyemi 2019: 55).

Many also stress the gospel of prosperity in their context where the majority of the population lives below the poverty line and looks to church leaders for political and economic direction. Findings from my PhD indicated that although there is growing sympathy for ecumenical participation among the more cosmopolitan African churches and their leaders in the diaspora, pastoral care of their largely black congregations remains a priority. My interactions suggest that suspicion of the ecumenical movement and the WCC persists, particularly among Pentecostal members (Adenekan-Koevoets 2022: 359–77). For example, the World Council of Churches document does not recognize "church" as a group of Christians living by the example of Jesus and witnessing to his reign but rather as a eucharistic community. The new churches from the global South including African Pentecostals characterize the document as one written from a Catholic perspective, too Western, Eurocentric, and not representative of their position (Loughran 2013: 9; Rausch 2017). This is where the teaching of "exchange of gifts" by receptive ecumenism becomes relevant. It is a way for the post-Enlightenment Western church to see that in addition to their often-abstract theological language about faith, there is an experiential aspect to faith through the indwelling power of God, the importance of prioritizing mission, and about the forgiveness of sin that African Pentecostals (in their various forms) profess (Rausch 2017: 94). Pentecostal churches, on the other hand, should train upcoming leaders to

understand the nature and purpose of ecumenism. As Keshishian (1992: 2) suggests, unity should not be taken to mean ecclesial uniformity, so it is pertinent that Pentecostals maintain the independence of their churches, preserving denominational boundaries while addressing unexplored or unexamined assumptions to improve ecumenical relations (Robeck 2015: 5–7).

Research Methodology

I adopted an ethnographic approach. Data was collected through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups which ensured that the research questions were viewed from different angles to give as well-rounded an account as possible. A total of about 80 people and three Nigerian Pentecostal churches, the RCCG, House on the Rock (HOTR) and Winners Chapel, participated in interviews and group discussions both in Amsterdam and London from 2017 to 2019, although this article refers mostly to the London results. The case studies included two parishes[1] of RCCG – a small parish of about 30 members named RCCGLKP located in Southwest London and Jesus House located in Brent Cross, London with about 3000 members; HOTR, housed in a renovated Anglican Church building, the 'Rock Tower' in Islington with 100-150 members. There were also branches of Winners Chapel, a small branch (WCIL) with 100-150 members and the European headquarters with about 2000 member-capacity campus. Congregation size was vital in this study, and this will be discussed shortly. In data collection and analysis, one of the challenges is the issue of researcher bias, whether as an insider or outsider. As a Pentecostal Nigerian migrant, I was an insider, but as a female educated researcher, I was also sometimes an outsider. This is important because the stance of the researcher can affect the interpretation of the data and therefore the validity of the study. Since qualitative research cannot be value-free, it is vital to acknowledge own biases and assumptions and be as neutral as possible (Gillani 2021). It was not possible to identify with the researched group in all cases and sometimes not with the same intensity, therefore, I adopted a dialectical (logical argumentation) approach which allows the preservation of the complexity of differences and similarities (Kawulich 2012: 154; Dwyer and Buckle 2009). My positionality as a Pentecostal but also a researcher was made clear to participants and I was also very self-aware. In listening to and interpreting their stories, the experiences of the sacred were not excluded from the research. Rather, I was open to the way in which those being researched, "intersubjectively"

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1   In the RCCG, a parish is a congregation or unit of administration ranging from as little as ten regular attendees to large mega-parishes of 4000 members and the number/area is not limited by geographical distance.

experience reality and to use that as my reference point. Additionally, ethical considerations around anonymity, confidentiality and freedom to participate were taken seriously, discussed and agreed with participants in advance using Consent Forms which participants read and signed. Ethical approval was received from the graduating institution.

Research Findings

In the UK, the RCCG is one of the Churches that is more ecumenically engaged and in its ecumenical statement, affirms "its commitment to work with other ecumenical partners in the United Kingdom and beyond to promote Christian unity and advance the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (RCCGUK 2017) While acknowledging that differences exist within and between Christian denominations, the RCCG seeks to continue to collaborate based on the love of God that embraces difference "as enrichment to the various valid expressions of the Christian faith" (RCCGUK 2017). RCCG's strategies for ecumenical engagement include inter-church worship, knowledge exchange and partnership with other churches to enhance Christian social action and services to the needy within the communities. As a matter of church policy, parish pastors at all levels are motivated to relate in different spheres and cooperate in local prayer meetings and mission activities; findings from my study confirmed this cooperation. Agu Irukwu, the senior pastor of RCCG Jesus House, while speaking during a Vineyard leadership conference acknowledged some interactions, noting:

> we have 850 odd churches spread across the nation. I visit those churches, I get the report, I hear about prayer meetings being held with the vicar of the Anglican church, with the priest of the Catholic Church, with the Reverend of the Baptist Church and they are meeting once a month to pray for their community and their cities (Irukwu 2018).

This statement underscores the fact that there are collaborations between leaders of RCCG and mainline churches (Anglicans, United Reformed, Baptists) at local, city and regional levels. As Dyer (2019: 110–11) notes, this is particularly successful with the mainline churches which have absorbed a flavour of charismatic styles of worship used in Pentecostal churches like the RCCG. Nevertheless, the need for increased mutual recognition and dialogue leading to a renewed understanding of each other's ecclesiology must not be overlooked. Ecumenism and ecclesiology are linked in the work of Christian unity, and it is beneficial for Christian communities to develop compatible ecclesiastical operating systems and recognize "church" in one another; this could be a key to a truly multicultural church (Gibaut 2015: 222).

Another observation is that the size of the congregation has implications for the ability to engage and the level of engagement in ecumenical discussions. Large churches like RCCG Jesus House, with a more diverse congregation not only in stock of human capital (having a higher population of young university-educated members) but also age, are better positioned to engage in ecumenical relations. During my field-work, I observed that its members cut across age, gender, economic and educational attainment with an average age of 35 years. In that regard, smaller congregations like RCCGLKP, made up of much older members, with less stock of human capital (in terms of theological/secular educational qualifications) do not have the capability for effective participation in ecumenical debates with mainline churches who empha-size theological training for their clergy and, in some cases, profess different theol-ogies. This corroborates the findings of Cartledge et al. (2019: 20) in their work on London megachurches that size is vital and influences the amount of capital (human, social or physical) available for engaging with local communities. Others, like HOTR with more members and its own worship premises, face challenges in participating in church networks or ecumenical discussions because their resources are more focused on pastoral care of members; as its lead pastor explained, "our activities as a local church are so consuming" (Pastor T, interview 4/2/2020).

How have leaders like Irukwu become prominently involved in ecumenical conversa-tions? There may be some attributes that differentiate those who are ecumenically engaged from others who are less involved. Irukwu is a former corporate banker, well-educated and very cosmopolitan in his approach in both spiritual and secular domains. He was sent to the UK as a missionary from his home Nigerian church to pastor the then newly-established RCCG London parish. Additionally, Irukwu is one of the visible Nigerians who is a prominent leader in ecumenical organizations like Churches Together England (CTE) where he was Pentecostal president from 2017 to 2021. According to Davey and Reardon (2005: 5), CTE has been rooted in inter-de-nominational consultation and debates at local and national levels since its inception and has been at the forefront of inter-church relations in the UK. In a sermon at the leadership conference of Vineyard Churches (a movement established by John and Carol Wimber in 1977),[2] Irukwu revealed his commitment to inter-denominational relationships and cooperation in the UK.

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2   Vineyard churches are a movement of churches in the UK and Ireland which was started by John and Carol Wimber in the United States of America in 1977. Its goal is to plant, or begin, new, healthy, fully functioning churches which in turn will plant healthy churches (Vineyard Churches 2012; 2019). It is known by many Christians today through its well-known worship songs that are sung in different churches.

When we gather once a year that meeting is a cloud, when I sit in a meeting with leaders of the orthodox churches ..., now I'm Pentecostal, Orthodox Church leaders traditionally think Pentecostals are rascals, they don't even understand us. Now we think they are archaic and dinosaurs so there is no meeting point. ... But we are talking about Christ, we are talking about revival we are talking about the persecuted church, we are praying together. I'm praying with the Archbishop of Canterbury, my wife and I .... We are sitting down and talking about strategies for thy kingdom come (Irukwu 2018).

Irukwu is convinced of an imminent change in the missional, political, social and economic situation in the UK and urges the Church to unite and "pray for the cloud to cause a rain over the nation". He has also involved leaders of British mainline churches in RCCG's programmes, despite differences in ecclesiology and theology. The RCCG Festival of Life (FOL) has been a platform where individuals like the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, the British Charismatic worship leader Lou Fellingham, and Sam Miller of Open Heavens have participated. The Archbishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in London, Anba Angaelos, was the special guest speaker at the 2019 festival (RCCG 2019). Interdenominational collaboration has the potential for achieving one of the central objectives of receptive ecumenism, which is, seeking what one church tradition needs to learn and can learn from others without compromising its own tradition and thereby developing deepened relationships. This is perhaps one way that receptive ecumenism helps towards achieving an ecumenical ethic and strategy for living between the times (Murray 2014: 1).

Pastor E explains that ecumenical engagement is relational, and the interested individual should be able to network across cultures and church expressions wherever they are located. He discussed his ecumenical connections in the UK referring to the period when he left his old church to start a new one: "I spent more time with Hugh Osgood getting to know him as a person and got quite close to him as a mentor" (Pastor E, 11/2/2019). Through this relationship building, his new church became actively engaged with CTE, the Free Churches Group and the Evangelical Alliance. Pastor E emphasized the interpersonal aspect of inter-church engagement, which, he argues, is only possible through close relationships built over time. As Robeck (2015: 9) explained, ecumenical encounters begin with personal relationships and friendships. Given time, the friendships can grow into genuine love and care for one another and the potential to mesh into each other's lives. When this ability to grow into each other's lives is extended to churches, it results in mutual respect of each other's beliefs and actions. These interactions can be the basis for critical reflections on institutional differences and create opportunities for change. Getting to know Christians from different traditions, sharing the joy of being Christians, becoming

friends, associates and brethren removes the tag of being the "other" and breaks walls of tension and alienation erected against each other. Grassroots level engagement where every day Christians engage in "real dialogues" that address the many practical problems that churches face could be vital in this process (Murray 2014: 3; Rausch 2017: 96).

Rubbing against each other and gravitating towards each other provide the opportunity for loosening creedal characteristics and bringing Christians closer to their original identity as family members. Ecumenism brokers relationships, both at micro and inter-church levels, and relationships enable better self-awareness, opening the possibility of gaining another perspective; thus people can move outside of their comfort zones, creating the likelihood of taking seriously those who are different. Developing new ecclesial relationships may begin with leadership but this can shift to members if leaders teach it from their pulpits. As Rausch suggests, ecumenical engagement needs to be on multiple levels. Finally, it is through ecumenical and ecclesial relationships that the Church can demonstrate reconciliation and unity to the world and therefore enhance mission (Mladin et al. 2017: 25–26).

Social and political participation

My study also indicated that despite challenges, African Pentecostal churches provide different types of support to their host communities. These activities include provision of groceries indirectly through food banks and directly to the public as during the 2020–21 lockdowns brought about by Covid-19. Pastor T explained how his church had collected (from church members) and donated great amounts of groceries to their local food bank and received commendation for their support (Pastor T, interview 4/2/2020). In cases where direct distribution to the public was necessitated, the churches cooperate with local governmental and non-governmental agencies to identify and support the needy (Burgess 2021: 331). These churches also distribute food packs during festive periods like Easter and Christmas. An example is RCCG Jesus House "Christmas lunch on Jesus" initiative which started in 2007. Through the programme, quality food hampers are delivered to individuals, families and homes in communities across the UK who would otherwise face a difficult or lonely Christmas. Initially started in North London, it has now been franchised to the south-west and in 2021, more than 9000 hampers were distributed across ten London boroughs. Others are Abigail's Court, which organizes regular visits to elderly care homes, and the Novo centre, which provides a safe space for families to help combat the causes of youth-related offences through mentoring of young people and providing alternative social contexts for self-expression (Cartledge et al. 2019: 220–26). In addition to providing sustenance and other social services to the vulnerable within British

society, migrant churches like Jesus House use these as opportunities for public-facing engagement at the grassroots to build relationships and do the work of mission. For them this is a way of being rooted in the place and context in which they are located. It is about being part of the communal life and being present, which is deeply human, very personal, communal and God-shaped (James 2016: 20). Other aspects of RCCG UK's social activism include empowerment programmes, such as the African Caribbean Education Project (ACES) aimed at improving the educational outcomes of young people of African and Caribbean descent (Cartledge et al. 2019: 221–8).

There is socio-political activism through which RCCG congregations and leadership interact with those in the position of political and civic power in ways that have indicated significant forms of "give" as well as "take". This implies letting these powers see not just what they can do for the Church but what the Nigerian community is contributing to British society. Irukwu has been consistent in cooperating with Christian and secular leaders and has a wide sphere of influence in the UK which has been beneficial in RCCG's efforts at building relations across church traditions albeit mostly at leadership levels. For instance, in 2008 Tearfund celebrated its 40th birthday at Jesus House with Archbishop Tutu as guest, while in 2015 David Cameron (then Prime Minister) made a key speech at FOL (RCCG 2015). Through these connections with the seat of power, RCCG Jesus House brings its contributions as a faith-based organization into the limelight and public discourse. For example, as member of Parliament, Boris Johnson visited the Novo centre (a drop-in centre run by Jesus House to help combat the causes of youth-related offences through mentoring of young people and provision of alternative social contexts for self-expression), while in 2021, as PM, Boris Johnson and Charles the then Prince of Wales visited Jesus House to observe the church premises being used as a vaccination centre for the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. They both later commended the church as an example of faith-based intervention that should be emulated (Jesus House 2021, March 7). African churches like Jesus House take social responsibility seriously and operate it in such inclusive terms that the British public benefits, including people of other faiths and none and those of diverse cultures.

Second-generation Nigerians: Way Forward

In another paper, I highlighted the inter-generational differences observed among Nigerian Pentecostal diaspora churches around beliefs and practices and the impact on cross-cultural missional engagement (Adenekan-Koevoets 2021). The hierarchic power structure, where the first generation constitutes the majority of the leadership, ensures that power is concentrated at the top and trickles down to members

including young people. Pastor E describes it as the "very big head and very small body" type, the "kwashiorkor" kind of depiction because that is the reality of our systems of leadership in the diaspora. He argues that such leadership styles will invariably affect the way church missions are planted (interview, 11/2/2019). Both hierarchic leadership and power dynamics that concentrate authority in the hands of the first-generation, who are mostly influenced by their Nigerian cultural and religious background, institutes Pentecostal liturgies that are designed along familiar "home" beliefs and practices. The second generation is wary of hierarchical leadership structures, arguing that they create unequal power relations which allow limited opportunity for youth to influence change. This discourages sincere and constructive discussions between the leaders and members, leading to frustration and diminished participation in church activities (focus group, 23/2/2018). Decisions around strategies and practices for evangelism – important for building cross-cultural relations – are made by church leaders who are mostly first-generation Nigerians. The result is that methods like street evangelism, door knocking and leafleting – described as "in your face evangelism" (Catto 2008: 123) – that worked in Nigeria but are less effective in western liberal societies, persist. These young Nigerian-British citizens are convinced that there is a need for contextualization and adoption of attitudes and strategies that are more inclusive for non-Africans. One of the suggestions is "taking the church outside" to meet the people through conversations, demonstrating the love of God (power evangelism) and building relationships. "Apostle Paul did not give out leaflets, they [the apostles] just went into the fold … you [need to] make it personal to people. It is about how you make people feel" (focus group, 23/2/2018). The limited level of success of cross-cultural mission by other African migrant churches in the UK is similar as attested to in a study of the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost UK (Neate 2022: 33–34).

Social action is seen as another activity which could be beneficial in bringing the activities of Nigerian churches to the British public space and has been useful in creating public awareness and establishing the presence of Nigerian churches within different communities. However, it has had limited success in the aspiration of Nigerian migrant churches to build cross-cultural congregations. Most of these young people were born in Europe, others migrated as young children, but all of them went through both African and European socialization processes so they can be described as African Europeans. Their worldview is neither African nor European but a blend of both and they are therefore well positioned to be the bridge between cultures and begin the process of building cross-cultural denominations in Europe. They have the societal reach that the FG does not have but need their seal, zeal, experience and resources.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the external relations of Nigerian Pentecostal churches and how their missional aspiration is affected. First, the study indicates that Nigerian diaspora churches respond, within their capabilities and available resources, to some of the social problems encountered within their host communities. Whether through empowerment programmes, such as the African Caribbean Education Project (ACES), care for the homeless and the elderly, food donation to the needy or hampers at festive seasons, large branches of established churches like the RCCG or others like KICC have been at the forefront of community engagement in and around London. Second, contextualization of Pentecostal beliefs and practices, both in terms of outward-facing evangelism and embedded religious and spiritual activities, remain the key to missional success. Street preaching, leafleting and other Nigerian-tested methods are the preferred practices despite their ineffectiveness in evangelizing white British people. Third, although the level of ecumenical engagement is limited, through the actions of some of the more cosmopolitan leaders of these churches there are ongoing efforts on matters of liturgy, joint evangelism, learning, caring and sharing in faith matters and shared worship and prayer sessions. These activities are also means of building personal relationships and friendships which are vital for receptive ecumenical encounters that are based on mutual respect and willingness to learn and accept what the other has to offer. In addition to engaging with those in the seat of British power and politics, Nigerian Pentecostal leaders also encourage members to serve in various spheres including politics, jury service, magistracy, voluntary service, fire service and so on. These are seen as means of societal participation and engagement through which they can build cross-cultural relations and influence policies that affect their lives. Finally, the second generation is a resource that could be the transitional factor towards achieving the aspiration for cross-cultural interactions, church growth and territorial expansion of migrant churches. As one participant noted, kingdom work is inter-generational, and it is important to

> train our children who are more integrated in Western societies and straddle both cultures in the things of God … so that they have the skill, our seal, and the fervour we have but then they also have the reach we do not have. They in turn can bring their friends who cut across all cultures and races and be more effective than us. They can use their language and technological skills in combination with the culture of their parents as tools to reach the wider community (Pastor E, interview 11/2/2019).

There is need for the means and ways of achieving the missiological agenda of African diaspora churches, especially Nigerian Pentecostal churches in this study to be more contextual as the audience and context change. The UK is a different context compared to Nigeria and evangelizing white British people requires that

African Pentecostal churches design evangelistic strategies that take British thought and culture into consideration. This will be vital for future ecumenical encounters.

About the author

Adebisi Adenekan-Koevoets received her PhD from the University of Roehampton in 2022. Her research focused on Nigerian Pentecostals and reverse mission in London and Amsterdam. She is passionate about second-generation Africans and their engagement in mission and other issues such as identity construction, belonging and social mobility. Her publications about young people include "Nigerian Pentecostal Diasporic Missions and Intergenerational Conflicts: Case Studies from Amsterdam and London" in *Mission Studies* (Brill) and *Targeted Evangelism and Knife Crime in London: A Case of Corporate/Church Social Responsibility by Migrant Pentecostal Churches in the UK* (Galda Verlag).
Contact: debisiade@yahoo.com

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ARTICLE

The LIMM Model: Paradigm for Missiological Research

Pieter Hendrik Johannes Labuschagne

Abstract

This article proposes a missiological research model, guided by three key missiological concepts: missio Dei, Christocentricity and contextuality (MDCC). The model is derived from a practical theology model that was developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM). The new missiological model is called the LIMM model, where the added 'M' represents missional action.

Since the introduction of the term missio Dei during the last century, the focus has shifted from missions initiated and conducted by the church, to the one true mission: God's mission. In the missio Dei, God sends his Son and the Spirit to the world, and through them sends people to the ends of the earth. This means that God is the sender and the content of mission Dei. The incarnation of God's message in every culture is of great importance.

The LIMM model is characterized by the three key missiological terms mentioned above, and it directs the research, from defining the research topic all the way to the practical suggestions for improved ministry. If a research topic does not correlate with MDCC principles, it does not belong I the field of missiological research and another field of theology should be considered.

Keywords: Missiological research model, *Missio Dei*, Christocentricity, Contextuality.

1   Introduction

Ever since his earthly ministry, people have been spreading the gospel in obedience to Christ, yet no designated term existed to described this mission. The Latin word *missio* was reserved for the Father sending the Son and the Spirit. This changed in the mid-sixteenth century when Ignatius of Loyola started to refer to the places and tasks to which Jesuits were assigned as "missions" (Kollman 2011: 425–26). Similarly, missiology as independent theological discipline, was only established in the late

nineteenth century (Langmead 2014: 68). As it is a young field, some seminaries still do not recognize it as an autonomous discipline but relegate it to a sub-section of another field, like practical theology. When research methods from these fields are used, it strips missiology of its distinct character.

One such method is as an in-house research approach to practical theology that was developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry (we will call it the LIM model). Even though it is a practical theology model, LIM is also suited for missiological research and some postgraduate students at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) have used it for their research. This article proposes adaptations to the LIM model to repurpose it as a missiological research model. This will be accomplished in three stages:
– Describe the LIM model.
– Define the three key missiological terms to be incorporated into the model.
– Adapt the model for missiological use.

2 Methodology: integrative literature review
Integrative Literature Review was used as research model in this article. It is "a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge about a topic by reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco, 2016: 62). The following principles were adhered to:
– Limited publications exist on the LIM model. To describe the LIM model and its historical development, the author used the following as anchor publications: the summary by Smith (2016) and publications by Professor Barbara Fleischer, of the Loyola Institute for Ministry.
– The author looked at three foundational aspects of missiology: *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality. We refer to the combination of these terms as MDCC. There is a close proximity between the concepts, and they are interconnected, defining the essence of missiology.
– The author holds that missiology is an independent field of theology, which directly fulfils the *missio Dei* and that missiological research models should be guided by missiological concepts.
– Through analysis and synthesis of the research findings, the LIM model was adapted for missiological purposes. This aligns with Torraco's (2016: 66) suggestion that Integrative Literature Review, as research approach, must generate new knowledge and pose new questions and propositions for future research.

3 The LIM model

3.1 Introduction to the LIM model

During the last few decades the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) developed an in-house approach to practical theology (Lamont 2018: 2). The only external effort to describe the model is Smith's (2016: 151–60) summary of the model, which is based on a single course document, written by Michael Cowan (2000) of the Loyola Institute for Ministry. Woodbridge (2014: 89–121) briefly referred to the LIM model in an article but used Smith's article as only source of information. The current article delves deeper and provides a detailed description of the LIM model, based on additional publications by professors from the Loyola Institute for Ministry.

The development of the model started with Cowan's (2000: 3) introduction of a process of "pastoral praxis" where theological reflection is in constant dialogue with action. Lamont (2018: 3) described this dialogue as a horizontal relationship that requires mutual trust between the conversation partners, as it "creates a democratic, trusting space that welcomes, encourages, and listens to all voices" (Lamont 2018: 9). Dialogue is a slow, deep conversation that exposes hidden assumptions and leads to new insights, awareness and understanding.

Cowan (2000 :1) stated that practical theology is not only concerned with understanding the world as it is, but to "contribute to the world's becoming what God intends that it should be". He identifies four characteristics of practical theology, namely the *correlational*, *hermeneutical*, *critical* and *transformative*. The *correlational* character of practical theology refers to the fact that two things, the world as it is and the world as it should be, stand in a reciprocal relationship. The *hermeneutical* character highlights the importance of interpreting our world and our traditions. The *critical* requires that we evaluate our own understandings that influence our interpretations and actions. It is *transformational* because it brings "the real world into greater harmony with the Creator's intentions".

3.2 Historical development of the LIM model

For Imbelli and Groome the major methodological shift in practical theology in the twentieth century was theological inquiry, grounded in the human experience of those doing theology (Fleischer 2000: 23). Since 1983 when the Loyola Institute for Ministry Extension Programme (LIMEX) began, the focus was on an experientially based method of theological reflection, founded on the work of David Tracey and Bernard Lonergan (Fleischer 2000: 24). Tracey's revisionist model was based on a critical correlation between Christian tradition and contemporary understanding of human existence. Lonergan identified four levels of critical consciousness which formed the basis for the LIMEX programme: (i) identify an experience to reflect on

(ii) express an initial understanding of this experience (iii) test this initial understanding, and (iv) arrive at a new decision about the initial understanding and future action plan.

The LIMEX programme was further influenced by the work of James and Evelyn Whitehead. Where Tracy's model focused on Christian tradition and contemporary understanding of human experience, the Whiteheads' model of theological reflection identified three sources of context: (i) Christian tradition, (ii) personal experience, and (iii) the resource of culture. The Whiteheads' contribution was employed in LIMEX for more than seventeen years (Fleischer 2000: 26). Charles Winters of Loyola University New Orleans added a fourth source to the Whiteheads' tri-polar model. "That fourth source, or 'context' as he called it, was the institutional context of ministry: the organizational dynamics and structures that largely shape how ministry is legitimized and who is authorized for what roles in any ministry site" (Fleischer 2000: 29).

Theology that is focused primarily on abstract, universal, or static truth, pays little attention to the dynamics of human conversion. That is why the contributions of Lonergan are important: he "proposes that as a human endeavor, theology proceed through the phases that all human learning follows; learning begins with experience and moves through initial understanding, judging (or critical reflection), and decision" (Fleischer 2000: 30). Lonergan, thus, shifted the focus of practical theology from starting with theological truth, to starting with experience. This approach turns from "deductivism to an empirical approach, from the static to the dynamic, from the abstract to the concrete, from the universal to the historical totality of particulars, from invariable rules to intelligent adjustment and adaptation" (Lonergan 1968: 11). Lonergan's four operations (experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding) became the basis for the LIMEX programme (Fleischer 2000: 35). It also forms the basis of the four phases of the LIM model:

3.3   The LIM model
3.3.1   Phase One: Identify a real-life problem (Experiencing)
Researchers identify a ministry, life experience, or experience of a text that they want to reflect on (Cowan 2000: 2). This is something that exists in one's context that affects the life of believers or the church. Researchers must pay attention to (i) the details of their experience, (ii) significant aspects of the experience, and (iii) emotions stirred by the experience. This is an experiential phase: there is no scientific observation and reflection in this step; one simply states the problem and the reasons why you believe it exists (Fleischer, 2000: 35; Lamont 2018: 2).

This makes the first phase of the LIM model refreshingly unique because it invites researchers to express their own, unresearched experience and understanding of a situation. In fact, this phase cannot be undertaken without the researcher's involvement, expressing his or her own subjective understanding and experience of a situation, without having to justify it with research data. In this regard, Smith missed an important aspect of the LIM model that distinguishes it from other practical theology approaches. In his summary of the model (2016: 153) he mentions the initial, non-scientific opinion of the researcher, based on his or her understanding, but in his description of how a thesis would look when using LIM, Smith (2016: 154) omits this distinctive feature of the model.

3.3.2 Phase Two: Interpret the world as it is (Understanding)

This phase seeks to understand the experience, evaluates the researcher's initial views, and lays bare meanings, interpretations and questions that arose in the first phase. A dialogue develops between the researcher's initial experience and the meaning that emerges through the research. A disciplined, practical investigation is conducted to determine the *what*, the *how* and the *why* of the problem (Cowan 2000: 2). It is important to determine what the real situation is because one might have been mistaken in your initial experience. This phase uses descriptive research based on literary and/or empirical methods. A historical survey of published works, archived records and interviews are useful to get a clear picture of the historical development of the situation.

An important part of Phase Two is how the problem developed and why it is the way it is. One wants to determine which forces are at work and led to this problem. This sets the direction for the biblical and practical response in the next phase (Smith 2016: 155; Fleischer 2000: 35).

3.3.3 Phase Three: Interpret the world as it should be (Judging)

The judging or testing phase is the heart of the reflective process that interprets the world as it should be. For evangelical theologians the Bible takes centre-stage in this phase, and other sources as seen as secondary. The focus is on one's ministerial praxis in light of the four contexts of ministry defined by the Whiteheads and Lonergan: (i) Christian tradition; (ii) personal experience; (iii) culture; and (iv) the institutional context of ministry. This phase is a hermeneutical task that offers a summary of insights gained and judges one's understanding of Christian tradition and human experience, and arrives at suggestions for responsible living (Fleischer 2000: 36).

This phase develops a theological model, based on biblical perspectives and the sources of context that were discussed earlier. Smith (2016: 155) suggests that the biblical aspect should take the form of a survey or overview analysis of Scriptural teachings related to the research problem. One must work though the Scriptures and explain how they address the topic. The works of authoritative biblical scholars must be consulted.

3.3.4 Phase Four: Interpret your contemporary obligations (Deciding)

The decision phase is a summary of the new insights that were gained in the previous phases. It leads to new action in the praxis cycle, which has the potential of bringing positive change to the situation (Fleischer 2000: 35). This action plan must reflect the theological findings of the previous step. Though implementation of the findings does not form part of the LIM model, one should offer concrete and detailed recommendations to remedy the problem that exists, with reference to (i) the historical and empirical analysis of the present situation, (ii) the synopsis of biblical and theological findings, and (iii) practical suggestions to correct the current problem (Smith 2016: 156).

This must be done with sensitivity toward the people involved, and the recommendations must be described in terms of the context of the contemporary church.
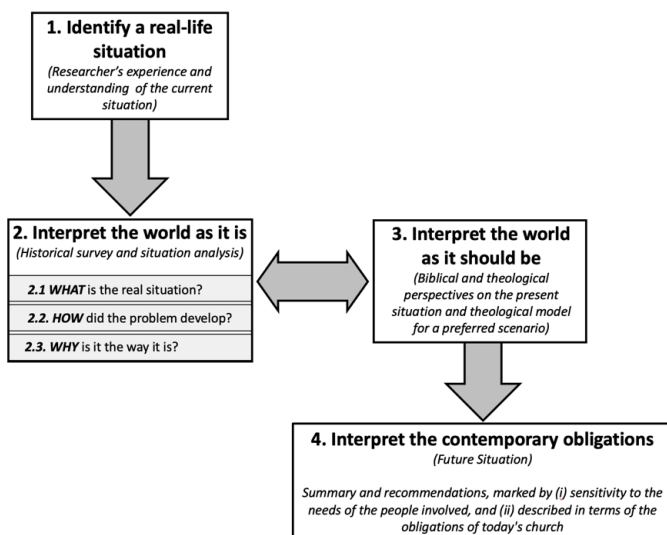
Figure 1   Schematic representation of the LIM model[1]

4   Key aspects of missiological research

In order to adapt the LIM model for missiological use, we briefly summarize three key concepts which are indispensable for missiology.

4.1   Missio Dei

For several centuries, the church saw itself as the 'author' or 'authority' on mission, travelling to foreign lands, taking the gospel from Western countries to the so-called uncivilized. This view has undergone major changes in the last century, and in modern missiology there is only one mission – the *missio Dei* (Whitworth 2019: ix, 5). The basic meaning of the Latin term *missio Dei* is 'the sending of God' (Whitworth 2019: 3). This connects well with the LIM model, which takes place "within the wider meta-context of all God's Creation …transcend the limits of human knowing … to learn from Creation by listening to God's voice in the diversity of the natural world" (Lamont 2018: 2).

The starting point of *missio Dei* is not the *ecclesia* or the *missio humanitatis,* but God himself (Rosin in Whitworth, 2019: 4). We are not sent by the church to make disciples that conform to our ways; we are sent by God, through the *missio Dei,* to draw people

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1   This is the author's own schematic representation of the LIM model.

to him (Niles 2002: 363). Through the *missio Dei*, we become part of God's family, witnessing to, and participating in God's work of saving and reconciling people to him (Johnson 2016: xvi). *Missio Dei* is God's mission, which becomes our mission. It propels the church from "worship and fellowship into the frontiers of God's reign" (Sunquist 2013: 16; Teer 2020: 535, 553; Whitworth 2019: 3). In *missio Dei* (i) God sends his Son and the Holy Spirit; but (ii) God is also the content of this sending (Heikkilä 2018: 79).

Already in the early church, Irenaeus and Tertullian taught that the Son was sent from God. Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers expanded this sending of the Son from the Father, by adding that the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father through the Son. Augustine referred to it as the "sentness" of Jesus by the Father (Ubeilvolc 2016: 7). An important turning point came in the last century with the formal introduction of the term *missio Dei*. It started with Karl Barth who gave a lecture in 1932 on the relationship between the Trinity and mission (Voss 2016: np; Langmead 2014: 69; Newbigin 1989: 119). He believed that theologians and the church have wrongly defined mission from an anthropocentric vantage point (Whitworth 2019: 4).

Barth's concept was further developed at the 1952 IMC gathering at Willingen, Germany; the focus shifted to the fact that the church's mission was grounded in the divine mission (Konz 2018: 336; Kollman 2011: 433). This was further developed in Georg Vicedom's book, which was published in 1958, entitled *Missio Dei* (Konz 2018: 336). The goal of God's mission is not the Church but his kingdom, and therefore God acts both in and apart from die Church (Moreau 2000: 637; Pocock, van Rheenen and McConnell 2005: 503; Mashau 2018: 132). God is missionary by nature, and he calls the Church to participate in this activity (Heikkilä 2018: 83; Voss 2016; Moltmann 1977: 64; Langmead 2014: 69). Three significant changes took place in the understanding of mission in the second half of the previous century: (i) *missio Dei* became the foundation of all mission; (ii) this led to a shift from missions to mission; and (iii) a missional ecclesiology emerged (Ott Straus & Tennent 2010: 376).

All fields of theology need to contemplate how the *missio Dei* affects their respective domains. If indeed God is a missionary God, all theology should centre around this. And if the focus of Christian faith is on God's Son who was sent to forgive and save, then all theology should seek to understand the *missio Dei* and promote it (Langmead 2013: 70). Bosch (2011: 494) states that the Church stops being the Church if it is not missionary. Similarly, theology that is not missiological is not theology. *Missio Dei* is the essence of mission and missiology (Bosch, 2011: 494–96; Langmead 2013: 67;Whitworth 2019: x, 14–15; Wright 2006: 20).

Whitworth (2019: 7–8) presents four views of *missio Dei*, defined by prominent missiologists over the last century. (i) David Bosch focused on God's nature and activity as the centre of *missio Dei*. The church participates with God, who is involved in the world. (ii) Johannes Verkuyl emphasized God's reign over creation and humanity, with the aim of establishing his kingdom. (iii) For Emilio Castro, the mission of God was focused on God and his activities, and Christians and the church were drawn into communion with him. (iv) Christopher Wright described *missio Dei* as our participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation (Whitworth 2019 :8).

We can conclude this summary of *missio Dei* in Kritzinger's (2011: 52) words, "It is about the Reign of God that has entered into this broken world as a transformative power in Jesus; that continues to be manifested transformatively in our midst by the work of the Holy Spirit … so that we too may encounter other people, thus creating the church as the community of the kingdom, working for and waiting for the coming Reign of God."

4.2   Christocentricity

It is impossible to conceive of mission without focusing on Christ, who is the centre of God's mission. He is the Son of God who became flesh to take away the sin of humanity (Jn 1). Driven by the *missio Dei* and his sacrificial love, Jesus emptied himself to become one of us.[2] "To see the gospel, and our mission, as being not only about spiritual good news, and not even only about people, but about God's good plans for the whole created order is a fundamental shift in mission thinking" (Ross & Smith, 2018).

4.2.1 Divinity of Jesus

Jesus shares the identity of *YHWH*, and performs actions that are uniquely and exclusively associated with *YHWH*: Jesus is Creator,[3] Ruler,[4] Judge[5] and Saviour,[6] The New Testament made no distinction between Jesus and the God of the Old Testament (Wright 2006: 121–22). If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father (Jn 14.9). The Father sent the Son and the Son obeyed God's mission to Israel and beyond. "The God of Israel, whose declared mission was to make himself known to the nations

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2   Isa. 7.14; 8:8; Mt. 1.22-23; 28.20; Jn 1.14; 3.16; Phil. 1 & 2; Rev. 21.3.
3   Jn 1.3, 10; 1 Cor. 8.6; Col. 1.16; Heb. 1.2.
4   Jn 18.36; Eph. 1.20-21; 1 Tim. 6.13-16; Heb. 1.3-4; Rev. 1.5-6; 10.13, 16; 17.14.
5   Mt. 19.28; Jn 5.22, 27; 9.39; Acts 10.42; 17.31; 2 Cor. 5.10; 2 Tim. 4.8; Rev. 19.11.
6   Mt. 1.21; Lk. 2.11; 19.10; Jn 4.42; Acts 4.12; 13.23; Eph. 5.23; Phil. 3.20; 1 Tim. 1.15; 2 Tim. 1.10; Tit. 2.13; 1 Jn 4.14.

through Israel, now wills to be known to the nations through the Messiah, the one who embodies Israel in his own person and fulfills the mission of Israel to the nations" (Wright 2006: 123).

The *missio Dei* expresses God's desire to make himself known. He did that throughout the Old Testament using various messengers, he did it in the New Testament through his Son, and he does it today through every obedient servant. Wright (2006: 129) points out that our involvement with God's mission is both humbling and reassuring. It is humbling because it reminds us that we are not the initiators of mission but only secondary messengers and participants. It is reassuring because it reminds us that we are part of the greatest mission of all, with Christ at its centre.

4.2.2 The supremacy of Jesus

Christ is supreme over all, and he is exalted above horizontal comparisons with founders of other religions. The only comparison that is possible, is with God himself, and in that lies the truth of Jesus' divine identity. "Christocentric biblical monotheism is profoundly missionary … YHWH is God in heaven above and the earth beneath, and there is no other, and that Jesus is Lord, and there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we must be saved" (Wright 2006: 131). Verster (2021: 122) rightly points out that "without the eternal existence, the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus, there is no mission. Without the deep Christological implications of the Divinity of the Man Jesus Christ, the clear understanding of mission is blurred. A *Theologia Crucis*, or theology of the cross, must always be the main element of mission and missiology."

Missiology is Christocentric, and cannot exist without focusing on the cross. "Without the cross, no hope and salvation is possible … the cross is followed by the resurrection as proof of Jesus as Son of God … at the cross, God is present in this tragic world. At the cross, one sees God's reply to the world. The glory of the resurrection fulfils what happened on the cross" (Verster 2021: 123). Mission gives hope to a lost world (Verster 2021: 125). "When human beings in this world have nowhere to turn to, the church through the *missio Dei* in mission reaches out to them. This is the hope of the cross. Only then will mission and missiology have a future" (Verster 2021: 130).

4.3 Contextuality

In our discussion of contextuality, we focus on the integration between the contexts of the researcher and the research topic.

4.3.1 All theology is contextual theology

Bevans (2018) is famous for stating that universal theology, with universal application, does not exist – the only theology that exists is contextual theology. A particular place, time and culture form the basis of theology. Contextual theology comprises two elements: (i) the experience of the past, represented by Scripture and tradition, and (ii) the experience of the present, represented by the real-life situation of Christians in a particular time and place (Bevans 2018: 2; Ngubane 2013: 93).

Contextual theology requires critical dialogue between past and present experiences. The Scriptures and tradition aid us in measuring, judging, interpreting, and criticizing our present experiences (Bevans 2018: 2). Likewise, our experiences measure, judge, interpret and critique the classical sources. According to Bevans, contextual theology consists of four elements: (i) the spirit and message of the gospel; (ii) the traditions of Christian communities; (iii) the culture of a particular group or region; and (iv) the social changes that occur within each of these communities.

Pocock, van Rheenen and McConnell (2005: 502) state that the term contextualization was introduced in 1972 in order to encourage mutual understanding between the researcher and the research context. Our participation in the *missio Dei* requires sensitivity to our context and the research context. Jesus's incarnation was an example of contextual sensitivity because he emptied himself and took on human form (Phil. 2.1-11). Contextual research can only succeed if we approach it with an open mind, inviting critical dialogue between the conversation partners (Ngubane 2013: 144). Some skills to help with this include "'I' statements, concreteness, appropriate self-disclosure, gatekeeping, and inviting more information" (Fleischer 2016: 80, in Lamont 2018: 4).

4.3.2 The dangers of universal theology

Niles (2002: 363) states that "the *Word* in isolation in and of itself is not good news, but the proclamation and action that shows how the *Word* has become flesh in specific situations, is good news". Historically, missionaries colonized those who were perceived as inferior, by conveying a message that was isolated in and of itself. It is not good news for the oppressed to hear that their ways are evil, and that the only remedy is to conform to the ways of their oppressors. In fact, that is rather grim news (Kraft 2011: 6–10).

Duraisingh (in Barnes-Davies, 2002: 592) blames two social forces for this, (i) you either stand opposed to the "other", or (ii) you assimilate life elements and call it "your own". We must not succumb to forces that silence the "other" but must rather value the "other" as "other". This shifts missiology from a quest for power and

control to a place of service. Instead of only focusing on our own story, which rejects and excludes the "other", we must allow multi-voiced inter-contextual communion, listening to the different narratives of the "other" and maintaining a creative tension between us and them (Duraisingh in Barnes-Davies 2002: 601).

4.3.3 Questioning as key to contextuality

Questioning formed part of the Jewish-Christian tradition, and is a still an effective way of contextualization and mutual transformation (Kritzinger 2002: 144–45). Questioning establishes a special connection between God and humanity. God connects to us through questions and our responses to his questions lead to accountability. Humans can also ask God questions and in the process gain understanding.

In Mark 8.29 Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was.[7] When we read the passage today, the same question confronts us. There is no final answer to Jesus' question and traditional orthodoxy and colonial missions were wrong to presume that they had *the answer* to this question and simply had to export this answer to the rest of the world (Kritzinger 2002: 145). "What the church of Christ … should seek is not the definitive answer to this question but tentative and provisional answers in concrete contexts … to discover who Jesus is for us today and therefore what our missions in his name could look like in our respective contexts" (Kritzinger 2002:145).

Inasmuch as the researcher questions the context, the context questions the researcher. Like the examples from Scripture, the goal of this questioning is not to find definitive answers but to ask probing questions. In the process we learn about the research context and our own context. "When LIM students explore their concerns within their personal ministry context; for example, they often analyze their personality type and explore the strengths and weakness in their communication skills" (Lamont 2018 :4). Our horizon (Thiselton 1992: 44–46), our context, or our cultural environment (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) influences our epistemology and determines how we interpret the world. "When we do not understand, for example, how much our culture influences our theology, we are easily seduced into believing that we are communicating a gospel free of cultural bias, when, in fact, we may be blind to our own cultural and deminational ethnocentrism. We will confuse what is cultural with what we *think* is biblical" (Whiteman 1997: 137; also see Kraft 2011: 30).

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7   Other examples of questions asked by Jesus include Mk 8.27, 29; 15.34; Lk. 18.41; Jn 5.6; 6.67; 8.10; 21.15; Acts 9.4.

Western logic seeks truth that is applied universally. "This happens when a religion, a nation or a culture is made into a centre, and is the same logic which operated in the colonial conquests, and today continues in the neo-colonial dynamics of globalization" (Duraisingh 2002: 363; Kraft 2011: 7, 30). Missiology departing from this premise promotes an "us" and "them" mentality where the "other" from another context is seen as inferior, and in need of redemption from their ways. Missional contextuality is needed where the researcher and the "researched" as partners, or co-workers, learn from one another. "Mission as praxis is about concrete transformation...among people, and between the living God and people, leading to people being called, sent, healed, and empowered" (Kritzinger 2011: 52).

5 The LIMM model of missiological research

For the LIMM model of missiological research, we kept "LIM" in recognition of the work done by the Loyola Institute for Ministry but added an additional "M" to represent missional action. We renamed each step of the model to correspond to the acronym LIMM:

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

Missio Dei, Christocentricity and contextuality (MDCC) are three distinct terms that are interrelated and impossible to separate because (i) the Father sends the Son, (ii) the Son comes to live in our context, and (iii) he sends us out to make him known in all contexts (to the ends of the earth, Mt. 28.19). MDCC has a key function in the formulation, examination and explanation of every phase of the LIMM model. It is not necessary to describe every phase of the research in terms of all three concepts because in certain cases one aspect might be more applicable than another.

5.1 The LIMM model

At the time of writing, the LIMM proposal is nothing more than an experimental model. However, the author intends to test the model in the near future, by researching the challenges faced within the context of his own church, as the church is transitioning from a traditional church model to a cell-church that meets in the homes of believers.

5.1.1 LIMM Phase One: Life-situation

Guided by MDCC, the researcher shares his or her own experience and under-standing of the topic under investigation, expounding (i) the details of the experience, (ii) important aspects of the experience, and (iii) emotions aroused by the experience. This is not based on scientific observations and reflections but the researcher simply states his or her understanding of the problem and the reasons it exists (Fleischer 2000: 35; Smith 2016: 153).

In this phase, MDCC principles are used to examine, evaluate and formulate the research in missiological terms. The researcher uses his or her understanding of MDCC to evaluate the research topic. Here are some examples of questions that could be asked:

– To what extent is the *missio Dei* promoted or neglected in the current situation?
– Does the situation sufficiently focus on the proclamation of Christ, and how will the research advance the proclamation of Christ?
– What are the differences between the researcher's context and the research context? How does the researcher's context affect his or her view of the topic? What questions are being asked *by* the researcher and *to* the researcher?

This phase ends with a clear formulation of the research in MDCC terms.

5.1.2 LIMM Phase Two: Interpret the life-situation

The researcher gathers data to interpret the life-situation, by breaking it down into three categories: (i) what is the real situation; (ii) how did it develop; (iii) why is it the way it is? The personal experience described by the researcher in Phase One is now scrutinized through research based on MDCC principles. The researcher wants to understand what missiological deficiencies led to the situation. Suitable methodologies to trace the historical development of the situation include descriptive research, based on literary and/or empirical methods, and a historical survey of published works, archived records and interviews.

Note that there is a twofold focus when interpreting the life-situation: (i) the researcher examines the elements of the research problem that was formulated in phase one; (ii) this is not done in a vacuum but against the backdrop of MDCC. For example, when the researcher asks "what is the real situation?" he or she wants to know what the real situation is in light of MDCC.

MDCC is the plumbline of the LIMM model. It is both a tool to determine what is going on, and it facilitates the discovery of possible solutions. Helpful questions that could be asked in Phase Two include:

– How can the present situation be described in terms of MDCC?
– What role did the presence or absence of MDCC play in the development of the current state of affairs?
– Why is the situation the way it is, in terms of MDCC?

5.1.3   LIMM Phase Three: Model the preferred scenario

This phase envisages the situation as it should be, from a biblical and theological perspective. In Phases One and Two we introduced the research topic and defined it though research, in light of MDCC. Phase Three follows the same logic: (i) the researcher searches for biblical and theological guidance related to the life situation under investigation; and (ii) the researcher seeks for biblical and theological support that will promote MDCC principles.

– What can we learn from the Bible and theology about the research topic?
– What would an applicable contextual theology be for this research topic?
– How should MDCC best be applied to bring the research topic in line with God's mission in God's way?

5.1.4   LIMM Phase Four: Missional action

Missiological research must never be simply academic but it should lead to participation in sharing the good news across borders to all of humanity. If the outcome of missiological research does not promote MDCC, we have missed the mark. A way forward should be proposed that honours MDCC principles, for example:

– To fulfil the *missio Dei* in this situation, one must …
– To ensure that Christ is proclaimed as good news in this context, one should …
– A new contextual theology that directs the praxis in this situation, focusses on …

In the schematic representation of the adapted LIMM model below, MDCC stands central, and every phase of the model flows from it and through it:

L **Life-situation**
Identify a life-situation for research (Researcher's experience and understanding of the current situation)

I **Interpret the life-situation**
Historical survey and situation Analysis
2.1 WHAT is the real situation?
2.2. HOW did the problem develop?
2.3. WHY is it the way it is?

Missiological lens (MDCC)
Missio Dei, Christo-centricity, Contextuality

M **Model preferred scenario**
Biblical and theological perspectives on the preferred scenario

M **Missional action**
(Future Situation)
Summary and recommendations, marked by (i) sensitivity to people's needs and (ii) described in terms of the obligations of today's church

Figure 2   Schematic representation of the LIMM model[8]

5.2   Potential application of the LIMM model

This paper introduced a new missiological research model, which is being development. In order to stimulate reflection, a few examples are offered that illustrate how this model may be used, either as a diagnostic tool or as a development tool.

5.2.1 As a diagnostic tool

As a diagnostic tool, it examines an existing life-situation or ministry, by reflecting on the researcher's understanding of MDCC and his or her own experience of the situation, as well as the details and important aspects of the experience, and the emotions elicited by the experience (Fleischer 2000: 35; Smith 2016: 153). The research is developed with a missiological focus; questions such as the following are raised:
–   How does *missio Dei* inform the current ministry?

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8   This is the author's own schematic representation of the LIMM model.

- Is there sufficient focus on the proclamation of Christ, and how can the proclamation of Christ be advanced?
- What is the influence of the researcher's context on the ministry context, and vice versa?

These findings are compared to the preferred scenario, and missional action is proposed to improve the life-situation or ministry.

5.2.1.1 Academic research

Academic research is one example of how LIMM can be used as a diagnostic tool, where the researcher identifies a life-situation or ministry that he or she wants to examine. LIMM serves as the academic research model and the elements of the LIMM model direct the researcher's analysis and evaluation of the situation. This is measured against MDCC principles as well as biblical and theological contributions. Based on this research, a more effective approach can be envisioned.

5.2.1.2 Ministry

Another example is when a ministry uses LIMM to evaluate how well they incorporate MDCC principles. For instance, mission organizations could use the model to evaluate their ministry projects in light of biblical, theological and MDCC principles, to determine if their ministries are still fulfilling the organization's mandate.

5.2.2 Development

As a development tool, the LIMM model is used to plan a new ministry, and to determine what is needed to succeed. The researcher explains his or her expectations of the future ministry, including the details and important aspects of the expectations, and emotions aroused by the expectations. The context is surveyed by engaging with, and observing key people and ministries. MDCC principles form the backbone of planning the new ministry and is guided by questions such as:
- How will the new ministry proclaim Christ?
- Are there elements of the researcher's context that could clash with the ministry context, and how can this be addressed?

Based on these findings, the new ministry is launched.

5.2.2.1 Evangelism

A church engaged in evangelism and church planting can serve as an example. As they prepare to launch a new ministry, they could use LIMM as planning tool, to see if their regular approach will work in the new setting. The model brings the church's

ministry-understanding and prejudice into dialogue with the new context. This enables them to adapt their ministry model to be most effective in the new setting.

5.2.2.2 Overseas mission

Another example is when a person senses a call to serve as a missionary abroad. By using LIMM as planning tool, the person can learn about the cultural, economic, religious and social aspects of the people he or she is called to minister to. LIMM will also challenge the person to become aware of, and evaluate, his or her understanding of MDCC principles, and how missionary work should be conducted.

6   Conclusion

The LIM model, developed by the Loyola Institute for Ministry, is based on pastoral praxis, where theological reflection is in constant dialogue with action. Based on mutual trust between the conversation partners, hidden assumptions are exposed that lead to new insights, awareness and understanding. Practical theology is not only concerned with understanding the world as it is, but contributes to the world becoming what God intended it to be. It is correlational, hermeneutical, critical and transformative.

The focus on pastoral praxis, contextual engagement and contributing to the world becoming what God wants it to be, means that the LIM model is an ideal basis for missiology to build on. The aspects of the *missio Dei*, Christocentricity and contextuality resonate with the essence of the LIM model, and contribute to the development of a new approach to missiological research – the LIMM model, as proposed in this paper.

About the author

Dr Pieter Labuschagne is the Curriculum Coordinator at the South African Theological Seminary and leads the Course Development Team. He earned a PhD from the University of Pretoria, and served as a missionary for twenty years with Serving in Mission. His research interests include postcolonialism, Africanization, cross-cultural studies and missiological research methods. Contact: Pieter@sats.ac.za

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ARTICLE

A Congregational Study on Mission Readiness: Toward a Practical Ecclesiology of Practical Action

Mark G. Harden

Abstract

The case study investigates mission readiness as a form of church mobilization involving participants and the investigator constructing a framework of ministry practices for analysis. The participants were from a local church interested in improving ministry practices for social engagement. I collaborated with a local church using a self-assessment tool I developed for church mobilization readiness assessments. The input following the assessment results was based on critical realism epistemology and ontology. Best practices of mission readiness served as a basis for facilitating participants using critical realism methodology in workshops. The workshops included participants using triangulation and thought operations. The question for the study was: how do congregations assign practical theological meaning in assessing their performance in mission readiness for church mobilization? The results demonstrate how a critical realism methodology helps transform and improve ministry practices. Critical realism thought operation methods were appropriate for practical theological analysis in church mobilization. Participants contributed additional action items for the framework. This article includes mapping tables with summary descriptions of elements of the framework. The mapping tables highlight transformation points to illustrate the results of participants' self-assessments and planning activities to improve elements of mission readiness. Further study may help investigators demonstrate how the framework is helpful beyond the limited use of the framework.

Keywords: Missional ecclesiology, Church mobilization, Mission readiness, Congregational assessment, Church engagement

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a shortage of empirical research on church mobilization to assist practical theologians in understanding how congregations perform and assign meaning to these practices. Although studies were designed to establish an empirical basis for community mobilization best practices, these studies were not focused on church mobilization *per se* (Joffre et al. 2002; Kraftarian et al. 1997; Lippman et al. 2016). Other studies on social ministry and social action practices may serve as an empirical foundation for conducting studies in church mobilization (Dudley 2002; Olson 2000; Sider et al. 2002). This case study examined multiple practices to observe how congregations experience church mobilization on several dimensions. The opportunity emerged because of circumstances surrounding a collaborative project to assist congregations in assessing their performance and readiness to engage community members. Moreover, this study examined the practical theological implications of using an analytical framework to develop a practical ecclesiology of ministry practices. This study assumes that church mobilization is a church praxis phenomenon that requires a congregational level of analysis. Church praxis was theorized as a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional practical theological concept defined as a complex set of collective acts or performances by a congregation toward fulfilling its call to participate in God's mission. In this study, church mobilization is broadly defined as *empowering internal and external resources to implement strategies to increase member participation through meaningful social engagement to address one or more issues in the broader environment*. The definition of church mobilization resulted from analysing strong predictors of performance and readiness using the Church Performance Readiness Inventory for quantitative analysis. The performance criteria consisted of items with scales of readiness that make up multiple constructs. Four performance dimensions of church mobilization constructs serve as prospective models. The models for church mobilization were tested using multivariate statistical analysis based on a large sample of church performance readiness profiles. These include (1) mission readiness, (2) spiritual calling, (3) capacity for engagement, and (4) engagement readiness. This study will only discuss the results of one of these dimensions at a local church to lay a foundation for future practical theological investigations. Mission readiness was the dimension of church mobilization selected for this case study. Specifically, mission readiness refers *to a congregation's collective stake in the church's personnel possessing the essential capabilities to execute and achieve its mission goals*. There were six constructs identified for the self-assessment process in the study related to mission readiness, including (1) relational bonds, (2) church leaders, (3) dedicated support staff, (4) belief in the plan, (5) commitment to action, and (6) available capabilities. The question for this case study was: how do congregations assign practical theological meaning in assessing their performance in mission readiness for church mobilization? An answer to this

question may inform further studies investigating the other dimensions of church mobilization.

Review of Literature

Relational bonds refer to the psychological benefits members may enjoy because of relationships and social identity (Dutton et al. 2010; Erdogan et al. 2012) and in an organizational setting (Boyd et al. 2014; Klien et al. 1986; Pretty et al. 1992). Relational bonds may help members establish trust (Kraftarian 1997), and sustainable working relationships with stakeholders may strengthen their commitment to the mission (Diani and Bison 2004; Lippman et al. 2016; Sampson 2003). Some studies suggest successful outcomes in clergy-led relational bonding efforts with outside stakeholders (Cavendish 2001; Morris 1984; Olson 2000). This study's theoretical definition for relational bonds was shared passions with internal and external stakeholders that know and trust congregations and support their public ministry.

Studies have also focused on leading actors involved in community mobilization practices (Laverack and Wallerstein 2001; Norton et al. 2002), emphasizing the importance of leadership (Kraftarian et al. 1997; Laverack and Wallerstein 2001; Norton et al. 2002) and unplanned but expected leadership "from every member" (Joffres et al. 2002). The role of leaders in church mobilization for social engagement has been well documented (Barnes 2005; Cavendish 2001; Lee 2003; McCalla 2005; Morris 1984; Olson 2000; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Unruh 2005). In this study, the theoretical definition for church leaders is those who guide church growth and keep mobilization efforts on track throughout all new or ongoing phases.

Dedicated support staff was those individuals in the organization positioned to perform specific tasks associated with the mobilization effort (Kraftarian et al. 1997; Lippman et al. 2016; McAdam 1999; Norton et al. 2002; Tilly 2004). Churches organize their resources to cope with the complexity of the challenges of social engagement and collaborate with community partners (Barnes 2005; Cavendish 2001; Dudley 2002; Lee 2003; McCalla 2005; Morris 1984; Olson 2000; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Scheie et al. 1994; Sider et al. 2002; Unruh and Sider 2005). In this study, the theoretical definition of dedicated support staff was church-based staff with logistical and technical administrative skills to assist members in implementing church ministry.

Belief in the plan involved members having a sense of ownership and feeling heard when providing input, developing a sense of efficacy, and building trust among the stakeholders (Buechler 1995; Edelman 2001; Joffres et al. 2002; Kraftarian et al. 1997; Tilly 2004). This suggests a relationship between what members believe and the

plan's credibility. Findings suggest that church beliefs are connected to "social-struc-tural realities" until the strategies become implausible (Swidler 1986). Therefore, churches seek reliable and objective information for effective social engagement. Reliable and objective information includes understanding the context, barriers, local institutions and demographics (Dudley 2002). Additional findings suggest that churches take care to ensure the participation of others in the planning process (Dudley 2002). In this study, the theoretical definition of belief in the plan was that members believe it is feasible for the church to achieve its goals with the desired impact.

Commitment to Action findings suggests that this has to do with the members' commitment to action for church mobilization for social engagement (Joffres et al. 2002; Kraftarian et al. 1997). Churches use partnerships to sustain commitment over time and use their church's language of compassion to gain member support (Dudley 2002). In this study, the theoretical definition of commitment to action was church members vested in ensuring the congregation's actions benefit those in need.

Available Essential Capabilities were found to have to do with members in the organ-ization who can take immediate action (Joffres et al. 2002; Kraftarian et al. 1997; McAdam 1999; Norton et al. 2002). Churches regularly use volunteers to implement their ministries as a necessity (Dudley 2002). This study's theoretical definition was members with core competencies to execute the plan to achieve the target goals.

Analytical Framework for Church Praxis

In a previous study, the analytical framework for church praxis in Figure 1 resulted from empirical observations of church performance and readiness for social engage-ment. Central features of the analytical framework consist of two interrelated and interconnected models of interdependent systems: church praxis and missiological praxis models. The models are conceptual tools to explain, interpret, and translate how congregations observe and experience social engagement as a community. Although praxis theory is the starting point for using the framework for model-building, its triangulated elements are sensitive to changes and knowledge about other elements. The framework comprises interrelated and interconnected systems understood within a stratified and differentiated reality (Danermark et al. 2002).

The principal elements of each system in the framework facilitate a practical theolog-ical process toward understanding ministry practices. Three elements of praxis and ecclesial theory require a descriptive process for understanding what is happening or what activities participants are experiencing. *Action* is a generalized term that

refers to activities involving one or more actors toward achieving an intended goal. *The theory* is a generalized term that refers to the implicit logic or rationale of the activities that explain the action. *Context* is the situation or environment of action and theory that enables, creates, constrains or limits activities. The *norm* in the ecclesial theory system refers to the underlying patterns reflective of the congregation's culture relative to performance and readiness that influence praxis theory. *Form* refers to a contemporary characteristic or category that describes praxis theory and its significance for church praxis. *Function* refers to the purpose of praxis theory as a description of the expected benefits and rewards experienced by the congregation and other actors. Ecclesial elements were observed as using practical and theological reasoning about what was happening. This facilitates a triangulated and correlated theological analysis based on the theories and concepts introduced using the doctrinal theory system's principal elements. The doctrinal theory's Mission of God element refers to members' beliefs and knowledge about God's plan for all creation. The People of God element refers to the church and community's spiritual identity as perceived by the members. The Spirit of God refers to how members perceive the empowering work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church. The doctrinal theory elements are structures and causal mechanisms that theologically correspond to praxis and ecclesial theory elements.

Figure 1   Systems, Structures and Causal Mechanisms of Church Praxis
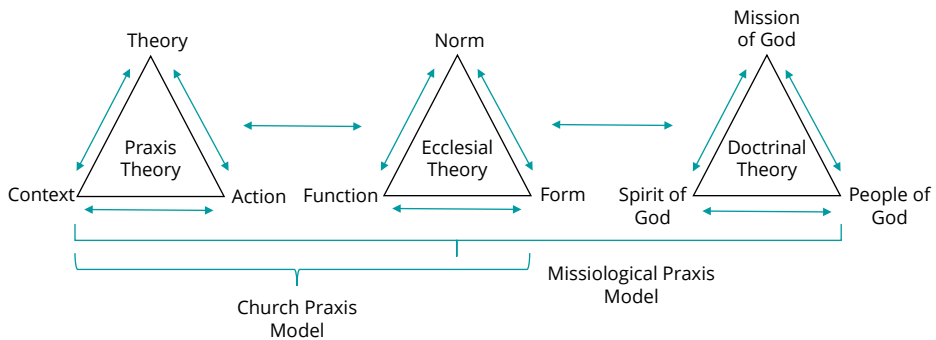
A previous study validating this framework suggested that six propositional axioms may be used to examine church praxis models. These propositional axioms include the following.

1. When a new praxis theory emerges, a new ecclesial theory will emerge, and vice versa.

2. When one praxis theory element changes, the other praxis theory elements will change.
3. When one ecclesial theory element changes, the other ecclesial theory elements will change.
4. When an ecclesial theory element changes and any praxis theory elements remain the same, the ecclesial theory may also correspond to the praxis theory.
5. Changes to any element will influence changes to elements in praxis and ecclesial theory.
6. The doctrinal theory and its theological elements may be true or untrue for a church praxis model.

These features and propositional axioms of the analytical framework assisted with examining the congregation's development toward constructing a practical theology of church praxis. However, the axioms were applied to participant inputs only and set limits on the results.

Background

This study used a critical realism approach to explore and develop a theological-theoretical framework to understand church praxis. A multiple-case study design approach was used to investigate varying degrees of church praxis among conservative or evangelical churches in their respective social context. The convenient sample of churches resulted from collaborating with a national evangelical church denomination seeking to mobilize their churches to address multicultural issues among constituent groups. I developed an assessment tool that measures degrees of performance readiness for social engagement. The denominational church leaders collectively decided to address issues of diversity and inclusion before learning about the study or assessment tool. Upon hearing about the tool, church participants requested access to the readiness assessment. The multiple case study validated the instrument I produced and allowed me to collaborate with individual congregations using the assessment tool. This study aims to demonstrate how results can be utilized for theological reflection and improving ministry practices at a local church through collaboration.

Participants

The participants in this case study were from a large church congregation who completed an online self-assessment survey about their mission readiness for social engagement. The church is in the central part of the United States. Members were interested in learning what they needed to do to prepare to become socially engaged in the broader culture. The participants comprised 23 men and women selected by

a church leader to participate. Participants knew that the entire process of problem-solving and planning would take months and were committed for the duration as needed. According to their eschatological vision, the congregation desired to become a multicultural church, as indicated in Revelation 7.9. The congregation was predominantly a church of Caucasian Americans in a county over 95% Caucasian. The church is part of an affluent community experiencing an increased economic divide, with those earning $75,000 and over per household income against a growing population earning less. In recent years, the community has experienced demographic changes related to income. For instance, household income dropped by an average of 25% in the church's county. However, compared, those experiencing poverty in the U.S. are at four times the county rate. The church is situated within two miles of a growing diverse community that has the potential to influence these changes (Grammich et al. 2023).

Data Collection

This study used the Church Performance Readiness Inventory to facilitate church leaders conducting self-assessments of the church's readiness to be mobilized for social engagement. The items were on a scale to see how ready churches were for social engagement. The Church Performance Readiness Inventory was an online digital survey comprising 18 constructs that functioned as predicates of readiness and action within a multi-dimensional framework. There are 45 behavioral items. The constructs and the instrument items were validated using regression analysis. Mission readiness constructs were significantly correlated as a model of predictors for mission readiness. The scale is a continuum that measures *poor readiness* to *ready* for action. The response choices ranged from 1 to 6, with 6 points designated for the perceived highest frequency of activities indicating readiness at the community level. The scale responses measured perceptions about the church as follows: 1) almost never true, 2) rarely true, 3) usually not true, 4) occasionally true, 5) often true, and 6) almost always true. Questions allowed participants to respond to reflect on their perception of how frequently the actions occurred at the church level. The items measured an aspect of each dimension based on an individual's perception of the church's readiness. The interpretation of readiness scores was based on the percentage of members mobilized for social engagement to achieve mission goals. Scores computed to indicate strong readiness (equal or greater than 90%), ready (80–89%), moderately ready (70–79%), low readiness (60–69%), somewhat unready (50–59%), unready (40–49%), and not applicable (39% or less). Average readiness scores were used to assess performance in each dimension of church mobilization. Mission Readiness was one dimension measured for this study. Each participant received a report of the findings to provide focus group feedback and contribute to an open-ended questionnaire based on a consensus.

Procedure

I facilitated participant involvement through stages in the assessment and practical theological reflection process. The process involves systematically investigating a ministry practice using nomological analytical methods to build a framework. Nomological analytics involves using assessment results, triangulation and thought operations to examine ministry practices to improve performance readiness. Assessment results and the adopted best practices were necessary for valid inferences to produce key success factors and new ideas for additional action. Triangulation facilitated participants validating practical action with the ministry context and biblical values communicated in Tradition. Thought operation reasoning about what key success factors were necessary to produce valid 'concrete' ministry practices for the framework.

After reviewing the average scores on readiness, I guided participants in analytical methods to generate descriptions for the properties of each component part of the framework (see Figure 1) during workshop activities. There were three activities. First, participants reviewed and adopted activities of best practices for mission readiness. Impact analysis methods based on their experience validated best practices of church mobilization and informed the framework.

Participants also triangulated new activities with their values and interaction settings for environmental factors. Participants also brainstormed for new activities to address issues that emerged during their impact analysis of factors they identified. The participants generated practical action input according to the framework components' properties. Participant inputs were mapped as significant points of transformation for the framework.

Results

A detailed description of the results based on the scoring, interpretation, and additions to improve the elements of mission readiness are in the mapping tables below for each construct. The mission readiness assessment indicated that the congregation was experiencing unreadiness with low and moderate readiness. One exceptional development in the congregation's performance on the church leaders' scale indicated they were experiencing a sense of being ready. However, on one action, under church leaders, they were experiencing low readiness. The results of church mobilization for mission readiness were as follows.

Relational bonds performance was assessed as low readiness. *Dedicated support staff* indicated the congregation was moderately ready. The *belief in the plan* assessment indicated unreadiness. *Commitment to action* results showed low readiness. *Available*

capabilities indicated low readiness. The participants further assessed these performances in mission readiness using the framework for assigning practical and theological meaning.

Practical Theological Perspectives

The result of relational bonds was low readiness, indicating a need for performance improvements in praxis theory and ecclesial theory (Table 1). Participation in activities for relational bonds was insufficient. Relational bonds were associated with the biblical concept of compassion because it has to do with helping members experience making a difference in the lives of others. Compassion was the motif for creating opportunities for the people of God to establish relationships to address needs in the community. Community events promote social interaction with actors representing the issues and can lead to listening sessions to increase understanding of the needs in the community. The Spirit of God leads the people of God to experience how showing compassion plays a role in fulfilling a faithful call to participate in the mission of God.

Table 1   Mapping Results of Relational Bonds for Mission Readiness

Action	Theory	Context
Create opportunities for members to develop relationships with community partners. (Low readiness) *Organize community listening sessions to learn about community needs.* Recruit volunteers to participate in relief services for people in need.**	Relationships can develop when people with a common interest come together. *Engaging in volunteer activities will help people to connect with community group members.**	Participant activities that involve creating opportun for people to interact may insufficient. (Low readiness)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
Educational outreach and social engagement processes lead to learning about opportunities and networking. *Social engagement events demonstrate compassion.**	Patterns of infrequent interaction with individuals or groups outside the congregation indicate low readiness. *Patterns of social interaction with individuals and groups outside of the congregation to increase readiness.**	Expand social interaction support church engageme the community context. *Expand social interaction demonstrate support for church engagement and compassion for communit members.**

*Indicates points of transformation

The assessment results for church leaders (Table 2) indicated that the congregation was moderately ready for mission readiness. Moderate readiness scores suggested activities related to church leaders may be insufficient for mobilizing the church. The participants' interpretation was that church leaders might also refer to compassion (as stated above) and the concept of stewarding, which refers to leaders being able to manage and control conditions for the congregation to address issues for social engagement. Stewarding involves helping others to understand how to lead, learn, and steward their resources and abilities to engage others. The motif of stewarding transforms how volunteers learn to lead as the people of God. Church leaders are empowered by the Holy Spirit to model compassion and stewarding to facilitate and support healthy social interaction. The goal is to help the people of God experience competence in leaders who are spirit-filled with a congregation seeking to do God's will.

Table 2   Mapping Results of Church Leaders for Mission Readiness

Action	Theory	Context
Train leaders who are responsible for church mission. (Moderately ready) Recruit motivated volunteers who will support church mission ministries. (Moderately ready) *Facilitate members participating in local ministries through partnerships.* *Inform members about the impact of their investments in time, money, and talents.**	Training helps leaders learn how to lead. Motivated volunteers will engage when invited to participate. *Training will help leaders learn how to care for and manage people.* *Volunteers who are eager to participate will learn what it takes to participate.**	Participation in training and recruiting for church mission to support church mobilization activities may be insufficient. (Moderately ready)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
A process for creating leadership resources in the congregation. Processes for helping people learn how to engage in mission ministries. *Awareness raising to help people to learn how to manage how they can engage in ministry.**	Participation in training activities for developing church leaders is moderate. There is moderate support for helping people to gain experience. *There are informational activities to help people to gain experience.**	Create social support systems to manage activities to achieve mission-related goals. Increase capacity for volunteers to engage in mission-related activities. *Empower individuals to participate.**

*Indicates points of transformation

The results regarding dedicated support staff suggest that the congregation's performance and readiness profile were moderately ready (Table 3). This score means that positioning dedicated support staff, using social networks, and using technology-based services performance may only result in moderate consistency in mobilizing the church to achieve mission goals. Participant reflections about dedicated support staff were associated with the biblical concepts of hospitality and justice. Participants understood that congregational readiness improvements required hospitality to increase resources and present valued resources to the congregation. For instance, dedicated support staff would be used to staff youth events to show support to the youth. Staff could facilitate more members receiving 'blessing bouquets' to cultivate a sense of belonging. A mission goal related to justice is that staff importance is elevated to integrate a sense of justice or morality in defining their role. This will enhance the congregation's reputation as a place where everyone is important. Staff members are the people of God. Attending to their needs involves providing them with resources so that the congregation and other actors receive assistance during mission-related activities.

Table 3   Mapping Results of Dedicated Support Staff for Mission Readiness

Action	Theory	Context
Place dedicated staff resources in a position to support achieving mission goals. (Moderately ready) Utilize social network resources to provide space to implement mission activities. (Moderately ready) Use technology-based services to create opportunities for members to participate. (Moderately ready) *Staff youth activities with members.* Expand blessing bouquets regularly for members to reach more people.**	Assigning staff to specific roles may help support the congregation's participation. Securing unutilized space within the social network may help expand mission activities. *Staffing youth activities will help youth feel welcome or valued.* Positive messages will help to get people involved.**	Current levels of involvement and participation may be consistent with supporting these church mobilization activities. (Moderately ready)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
A system for resource administration. They are problem-solving to expand resources. Ministry development and innovation. *Strengthened capacity for these forms of activities.**	Resource management and development activity patterns suggest that the congregation is moderately ready. *Increase patterns of the above activities.**	Improve the availability of resources and opportunities to support mission-related activities. *Blessing bouquets will help them feel like they belong.* To produce more output for participation to happen.**

*Indicates points of transformation

In Table 4, the belief in the plan performance and readiness profile for church praxis was low readiness. Recruiting members to participate in decision-making and planning was moderate. However, the low readiness performance was insufficient for capitalizing on members interested in involvement and supporting those with skills to organize within the congregation. Participants understood these conditions as emphasizing a need to focus on the biblical values of responding to God's call for compassion on all humanity without exception.

Table 4   Mapping Results of Belief in the Plan for Mission Readiness

Action	Theory	Context
Recruit members who represent constituent groups to participate in decision-making and planning. (Moderately ready) Capitalize on members' interest in being involved in mission-related activities. (Low readiness) Provide support for members who can organize activities to address needs. (Low readiness) *Create time for members to hear testimonials about fulfilling a call to participate in ministry.**	People from different perspectives may provide significant input. Members are willing to participate when they have something to offer. Members with organizing skills need support to engage fully. *Individuals with social organizing skills will know how to identify and recruit members for the mission.**	There is insufficient support for congregational involvement and participation related to members' belief in the planned activities. (Low readiness)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
A process for empowering those who feel excluded. An inclusive approach to identifying volunteers. A process of using authority to appoint people for a specific task. *Church-based community organizing.**	Patterns indicate low to moderate readiness to engage constituent groups in decision-making and planning. The activities for including and appointing individuals are insufficient for achieving mission-related goals. *The level of awareness will increase involvement.**	Empower marginalized individuals and groups who may or may not possess organizing skills to support church mobilization activities. *Increase awareness of the plan.**

*Indicates points of transformation

Members with organizing skills could identify congregants in the margins to involve them in providing input for mission activities as the people of God. Their input for decision-making and planning to implement mission activities to increase participa-

tion is essential. Asking members to share their testimony about their experience echoes the motif of compassion in finding ways to address the needs and circumstances of others. In Table 5, the assessment results for congregational performance and readiness for commitment to action were moderate, with some unreadiness issues. Somewhat unreadiness indicated limited access to opportunities to get involved, and that performance would be insufficient because of low consistency with a commitment to action. Participants suggested the biblical value of stewarding facilitated understanding of the needs. People must feel confident about how members respond to the congregation's call to the mission of God. When members hear about the magnitude of the need and the work the congregations do, it will help them think about their role in mission activities. This type of discernment occurs because of teachings and guidance about stewarding. Congregations strengthen when members learn how the Spirit of God.

Table 5   Mapping Results of Commitment to Action for Mission Readiness

Action	Theory	Context
Provide social engagement training to strengthen the congregation's ability to address community issues. (Moderately ready) Assist members in the congregation who are passionate about the mission to get involved in ministry. (Unready) *Create opportunities for the congregation to hear from members with ministry responsibilities.* *Create opportunities for members to assist with individual helping.**	Members of congregations can learn how to become socially engaged through training. Members will participate in addressing issues about which they are passionate. *Testimonies help people relate to the needs of others.** *One-on-one assistance makes helping more acceptable.**	Levels of involvement and participation are insufficient for consistency to support readiness for these activities. (Unready)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
Teaching activities about how the church's mission can address needs in the world. Guidance about how to participate in God's mission. *Testimonials of fellow members.** *Facilitating helping others.**	Patterns of teaching members about church mission indicate moderate congregation readiness. The congregation's patterns of participation in these activities indicate low readiness. *Personal connections with individuals are regular.**	Build a sense of collective efficacy and motivate members to use their skills. *Make an emotional connection with constituents on the fence.**

*Indicates points of transformation

In Table 6, the assessment results indicate low readiness for available capabilities for mission in the congregation. This suggests that congregation members are infrequently working together to achieve mission-related goals. Participants connected this to members collectively having a purpose that aligns with the biblical concept of calling. Calling means being clear about the relevance of the church in one's life and understanding that participation produces practical and spiritual benefits and rewards. A member's calling is personal and may require someone to help who understands the calling experience. The people of God should set aside time and space for members to explore and understand what "called" means.

Table 6   **Mapping Results of Available Capabilities for Mission Readiness**

Action	Theory	Context
Collaborate with members who are already active in addressing social issues in the community. (Low readiness) *Have lay members ready to help others explore their calling at the end of service.* Schedule a place after Sunday worship for members to assist others in their calling.**	Members can partner quickly with active members who share their desire to address issues in the community. *People are more open to discussing being involved after worship.* Finding a less busy setting will help people share views about calling.**	Levels of involvement and participation are insufficient to support partnering activities. (Low readiness)
Form	**Norm**	**Function**
Co-laboring with fellow members in ministry. *Private discernment conversations.**	Patterns of co-laboring indicate low readiness to facilitate members working together. *Patterns of private conversations to participate correspond to the availability of capable people.**	Create opportunities to experience the benefits and rewards of participation in mission-related activities. *Assist people to help them reach a decision.**

*Indicates points of transformation

Summary

Few studies in practical theology have examined the nature of church mobilization, while other studies have emerged to establish an empirical basis for community mobilization. This case study examined mission readiness as a model of church mobilization as a congregational-level phenomenon. The guiding question was how congregations could derive practical theological meaning of church praxis while assessing their performance and readiness for church mobilization.

The results indicated that the congregation was experiencing unreadiness, low readiness, and moderate readiness across multiple categories of mission readiness. In one area of church leaders, the congregation experienced readiness.

This study suggests that the analytical framework for church praxis was helpful in facilitating a practical theological analysis. Participants were able to identify additional action items to support best practices and glean a theological understanding based on the implications of the results. Theological concepts included compassion, stewarding, justice, hospitality and calling. These themes facilitated the development of a practical theological perspective about concepts within the framework. It is unclear whether the changes suggested by the participants to improve the model will result in the congregation achieving its mission goals. Additional case studies may provide more information to either support or negate these methods for producing findings on church mobilization.

About the author

Dr. Mark G. Harden is an Associate Professor and the Executive Director for Church Engagement for the Gospel Initiative at Denver Seminary in Littleton, CO.
Contact: mark.harden@denverseminary.edu

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ARTICLE

Learning to love: Pastoral care as mission at church-based, intercultural initiatives

Sue Holdsworth

Abstract

This article speaks to the relationship between social action and mission. It argues that mission at church-based, intercultural initiatives is better understood and enabled when principles and practices of pastoral care are applied. A study of four church-based intercultural initiatives in Melbourne demonstrated that the development of intercultural pastoral care practices offers a way to understand mission that is relevant for local-church-based community initiatives.

Pastoral care and mission have a confused relationship in the literature and are brought into conversation with these four case studies, demonstrating that pastoral theology has insights to offer mission. In particular, this article explores themes of compassion and empathy, formation for hospitality, and the need for deeper spiritual formation in local, church-based, intercultural community initiatives. This is an important understanding at a time when many Western Christians seem at a loss to know how to effectively engage with others in a rapidly changing and often indifferent society. It is suggested that mission is framed as pastoral care at similar church-based initiatives. Pastoral formational practices of reflective practice, spiritual engagement and supervision are recommended for all engaged in church-based, intercultural mission and this has broader relevance to all engaged in mission.

Keywords: Pastoral Care, Mission, Church, Community, Intercultural

1   Introduction

For several years during the 2010s, I worked with a mission agency in Melbourne, helping congregations relate interculturally, both internally and within their wider community. During my time in this role, I founded an initiative in a highly intercultural locality in Melbourne, providing a welcome and support for newly arrived asylum seekers. I recruited some missionaries operating in the locality and several local church leaders to help run this initiative. Many of our guests were Muslim, had made

the hazardous journey to Australia by boat and now awaited news as to whether they could stay. The first day we opened people streamed through the doors, confirming my sense of a need that could be met by local churches.

I soon regretted my open invitation to churches and agencies, as it transpired that we had very different ideas as to what we should be doing. I simply wanted to provide a safe space, offering hospitality to people who were largely traumatized, with an offer of English lessons if wanted. I was in a minority, however, in believing the initiative should not be a tool for evangelistic practices. Many guests had lost everything other than their Islamic faith. They needed stability at that point in their lives. Other volunteers insisted on Bible studies during English classes. This insistence overlooked emotional needs in favour of the purely practical and set conditions for receiving care.

One church leader wanted to demonstrate to the local council that Christians cared for asylum seekers by inviting media and local counsellors to visit for photo opportunities. I was horrified, believing the last thing the migrants needed was official visits, many having been tracked down and watched by authorities in their country of origin. Some were not emotionally ready for English lessons. The volunteers were largely untrained, but resisted the idea of training, and I was left wondering what they wanted to achieve, what was really taking place, and what motivated them. I regretfully resigned, being unable to influence the running of the initiative in what I believed was a non-invasive, nurturing manner.

As a result of this experience, I decided to conduct research into what takes place at church-based intercultural initiatives. Four intercultural initiatives, all based at evangelical churches in Melbourne, were studied to find how love of God and neighbour was expressed and what might enhance this.[1]

While such initiatives might be assumed to be missional, I discovered that in contrast to the joint church initiative described above, motivations and practice often aligned more closely with practices of pastoral care. This understanding may be key to effective mission and the following article will explore these connections.

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1   The full study can be accessed at https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.13057/5116

2 Interpathy for pastoral care and mission

Interpathy is a term used to describe a deeply pastoral and spiritual mode of care with great relevance to mission. Definitions of mission have broadened over past decades. Newbigin defines mission as a collaborative partnership in which we share in God's mission, personified in Jesus' love demonstrated towards humankind (Newbigin 1978). Bosch proposed that the Church is missionary by its very nature (Bosch 1992: 372). Together with Flett and based on the work of Newbigin, Bosch describes mission as participation in the *missio Dei* (Flett 2010: chapter 4; Newbigin 1992: 372). Mission is thus an encompassing term, covering many modes. This review argues for pastoral care practices to underwrite Christian practices of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality. These are additionally missional practices in the context of the four initiatives studied.

The motivations of most volunteers were to provide care through the provision of a service. This fits with the aims of pastoral care as mission. St Nicholas[2] was the exception, where the overriding aim was evangelistic, with the sewing club being an entry point for evangelistic conversation and interaction. The following review demonstrates that practices of pastoral care are applicable to mission.

Augsburger defines interpathy by clarifying the boundaries between sympathy, empathy and what he terms interpathy. He argues that interpathy supports cross-cultural counselling or care. It requires a willingness and ability to bracket out or suspend one's own beliefs and worldview, to be fully present to the worldview and consequent lived experience of someone who is culturally (or religiously) different (Augsburger 1986: 26). Most participants in the study did not demonstrate interpathy appearing more interested in talking than listening or guiding conversation onto topics of their choice. The absence of this deeply pastoral and spiritual mode of care was a loss for mission.

Doehring complements Augsburger's discussion by describing empathy and compassion as central to pastoral care, a theme that resonates in the field of spiritual care (Pembroke 2019: 133–46). She explores the practice of empathy and compassion in intercultural contexts where "empathy involves imaginatively stepping into another person's emotional experience while remaining aware of and anchored in one's own emotional state." She describes compassion as empathy with a desire to help (Doehring 2015: 39–40). For the purposes of safe practice and boundary awareness it is clear emotional regulation is important when expressing empathic concern

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2   Pseudonyms are used for all study locations.

as it allows the caregiver to remain involved, rather than withdraw and, therefore, allows for ongoing compassionate care (Doehring 2015: 40). There is a clear implication that training and supervision are required to enhance compassionate care while moderating any damaging effects. These skills are routinely taught to chaplains and spiritual care practitioners in Australian healthcare settings. For instance, Spiritual Care Australia highlights empathetic engagement with clients as a fundamental quality of spiritual care professionals at all levels (Spiritual Care Australia 2021). While this study concerns volunteers rather than professionals, these standards should influence volunteer practice.

Unlike pastoral texts, recent missions texts from evangelical and catholic traditions are noticeably quiet on the specific importance of empathy or interpathy. Although the Cape Town Commitment addresses the necessity for mission to be rooted in love (Lausanne Movement, 2011), there is nothing like the detailed articulation, description and learning opportunity afforded by pastoral literature.[3] In a section entitled "Taking the first step, being involved and supportive, bearing fruit and rejoicing," *Evangelii Gaudium* refers to a theologically-oriented expression of empathy: "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others." (Francis 2013: 124). To better explore the meaning and application of such an embrace, we might ask how this works in practice and how it is evaluated.

2.1 Hospitality and listening as expressions of interpathy, formed out of Christ's mission and ministry

The literature of pastoral theology and missiology reveals common themes on hospitality, in which the roles of hosts and guests are reversed (Ross 2016; Nouwen 1975; Gittins 1989). This reversal is particularly important when our 'guests' have experienced trauma. This "flipped hospitality" builds trust and a sense of safety in relationships (Kiser and Heath 2023: 188–94). Being a guest is disempowering and Doehring focuses on the nature of interpersonal relationships and suggests that the "process of stepping respectfully and compassionately into another's narrative world can be described with the metaphor of hospitality" (Doehring 2015: xvii). Respect and compassion require deep listening, and spiritual practices including prayer and reflection to gain discernment necessary for what Bevans and Ross term prophetic dialogue (Bevans and Ross 2015). This includes bringing hope and peace in situations of despair. We develop deep sensitivity to people in need by connecting with our own experiences of being vulnerable and dependent (Pohl 2022: 65). Those of us

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3   For example, the Spiritual Care Australia literature just noted.

from Western nations will gain insights into how hospitality and community might liberate others when we adopt what Russell calls postcolonial theological perspectives. Western thinking is not superior to other cultures and people should be free to define themselves and to do this as equals (Russell 2009: 29–33).

Expressions of these aspects of spirituality display the love of God within the practices of pastoral care and mission and offer practice goals that each can aspire to. They can also be expressed through practices of hospitality that embrace all people and are earthed in an understanding of who is at the centre and who is at the margins of society. Hospitality offers hope, promotes lasting friendships, considers others within a hierarchy of agendas (Phil. 2.3-4), listens deeply to others, considers group as well as individual needs and celebrates diversity while offering Christ's love to all.

I suggest it is that in Christ there is pastoral care and mission. This is expressed in practices of hospitality and listening, which are visible expressions of interpathy. What might this look like on the ground, at church-based intercultural initiatives?

3   The research context: four intercultural, church-based initiatives

Swindon Baptist is a large, wealthy, suburban congregation running English conversation classes for local migrants, based in its modern, purpose-built building.[4] The classes had commenced many years previously, in response to need. Classes ran for one and half hours, most days a week, with different volunteers each day. Volunteers did around six initial sessions of training before commencing, although no further training was offered. Most did not feel confident to take classes of more than three or four students.

St Nicholas Anglican is also a large wealthy church, in Melbourne's east. It has congregations spread over four locations, including the social housing estate where this study was conducted. The estate was inhabited by many former refugees who had arrived years earlier from south-east Asia. They still wore their cultural style of dress, unavailable to buy in shops and therefore requiring home sewing. The sewing club offered equipment for this purpose and women would arrive and leave as they pleased, bringing their sewing projects with them. The club had run for around twelve years.

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4   Names, locations and other identifying features have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Govan Church of Christ was in a blue-collar area of the city, where many young migrant families had settled. English conversation classes had been started, out of perceived need, by a church member who wanted to help migrants settle in Australia. She decided to teach English as something she knew she could do well. Tutors were drawn from the congregation. All appeared to enjoy their occasional volunteering.

Hope International was a highly multicultural Pentecostal megachurch. A training school was the focus of study, run by members, all but one of whom were migrants themselves. Despite being qualified for other high-paying professions, they had chosen to retrain as childcare educators. Their research of the locality had indicated a need for migrant women to be empowered to adapt to Australian life. The school therefore offered a government-accredited qualification in childcare for migrant women, to help them gain employment.

4   Method

Many hours as a participant observer were spent sequentially at each initiative, between 2015 and 2017. This allowed me to be involved in the running of the initiatives, and able to witness the minutiae of interactions between volunteers and those attending. Interviews with participants and church leaders, attendance at services and other church activities, and searches through church records provided thick data.

Observations were coded together with interview transcripts and data from church records. Reflexive comments were written during note taking and analysis to monitor my responses. Grounded theory methodologies allowed theory to emerge through coding and categorizing data in an iterative manner (Charmaz 2011, Bryant and Charmaz eds 2007). In this way, theory was built which can be further tested and expanded by future researchers.

Qualitative research and practical theology partner creatively when investigating projects based in ministry practice with a pastoral and theological perspective. Nigel Rooms and Cathy Ross argue for a close collaboration between practical theology and missiology, suggesting that practical theology challenges practitioners to "make connections between various disciplines, and within the context of differing global theologies" (Rooms and Ross 2014: 144–47). This study sought to make interdisciplinary connections by letting the data initiate discussion within a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory attempts to engage and capture as much of the complex realities of a situation as possible, attempting to obtain multiple perspectives for

theory generation by recognizing the wider contexts in which studied events occur, very much the context for the four projects (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Participants were mostly volunteers, plus some church leaders. The exception was Hope International where participants received a wage. This acted as a useful comparison with the first three situations, as I noted differences and similarities in motivations and skill levels resulting from wage earning.

Findings regarding themes of mission as pastoral care, compassion and empathy, and hospitality and spirituality will be described in the following section. This will lead into discussion of these pastoral themes for effective, caring mission.

5   "Just caring" for others

Participant observation showed how care was provided differently between the four contexts. Practices of teaching, prayer, and practical offers of help varied across the four intercultural initiatives. Expressions of love were often noted at Swindon where one volunteer helped students make and attend medical appointments, while another invited students to her home at Christmas. The English classes at Govan started after asylum seekers came to church asking for practical help. The founder of classes felt unable to offer goods at that time, but offered what she could in the form of English lessons. These participants spoke of their primary motivation for service being one of care. The training school at Hope was an example of what might be achieved when church members desire to make a positive contribution to the local community, as an expression of care. They pro-actively cared for physical and emotional needs of students and were committed to enabling every student to be successful. The result was an experience for students of love, acceptance and academic success. Teachers were content to offer a high level of care with no evangelistic agenda attached. For instance, meals would be provided to students in crisis and several teachers would pray regularly together for students. Bonds between teachers and students were displayed through student teacher interactions and reports of students in crisis texting teachers late at night, requesting prayer. I was left in little doubt that this was a special time for both students and teachers, one which would probably stay with them for life.

In contrast, volunteers at St Nicholas, while faithful and hard-working, revealed a care hindered by evangelistic aims. For instance, these participants described the women as difficult (for being strong minded) and one described the "tough ground" in which they worked. This resulted in them celebrating and loving the women attending less than they might if they had aimed simply to care.

Spirituality was hard to discern when volunteers failed to pray or work together as a team, something resisted by volunteers at Swindon and Govan. While Govan volunteers mentioned they prayed privately, talk about God was often absent at Swindon, leading me to note, "God has gone underground!" Teachers at Hope and St Nicholas met together weekly for prayer, and this was reflected in the sessions where informal talk about God and faith took place. This seemed forced at St Nicholas, with volunteers actively seeking opportunities to lever talk about God into conversations. Talk about God seemed more spontaneous at Hope International. An example of this was when a teacher spoke during her class of a dream she had about the school's manager taking up art. The manager was reportedly amazed by this, having felt God had recently been encouraging her to do just that. The volunteer, Lilly, later told me this anecdote was shared spontaneously. In other words, this was not a calculated attempt at evangelism. This behaviour reflected a strong sense of God's immanence amongst the Christian teachers, an overflowing of nurtured spirituality.

The following discussion will explore how pastoral care, offered through expressions of love, is an effective and appropriate framework for church-based, intercultural community initiatives, as participation in the *missio Dei*. I will focus on the areas of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality, all practices of pastoral care applicable to mission.

6   Expressing love of God and neighbour

If "pastoral care is an expression of human concern through activities" (Lartey 1997: 25–6), essentially expressions of love, then this can include many activities, from counselling or celebrating, to simply being present with people. The four initiatives aimed to address human need through activities, ranging from learning English to assisting integration into Australian life, and training childcare workers hopeful of employment. For Doehring, pastoral care takes many forms and in North America often takes the form of crisis intervention, followed by supportive care. She describes this as spiritual care that comes alongside others to offer sustaining presence in either an ongoing way or through difficult seasons (Doehring 2015: xxii). Developing internal resilience through tough times is where Lartey sees that "pastoral caregivers have a concern for what meets the eye about human persons as well as what may lie deeply buried within them." (Lartey 1997: 26). These pastoral values often resonate strongly and sometimes by implication with participants.

The provision of a community service is a form of spiritual care according to Lartey, Bosch and Kirk, but given the level of mutuality this care could also be extended through the formation and maintenance of friendships (Lartey 1997: 25–6;

Bosch 1992: 512–18; Kirk 1999: 205–25). Because of this overlap between pastoral care and mission in a practical theological framework, each has a spiritual element, and the source of love is God. Mission is at the heart of the church and when mission and pastoral care are undertaken, evangelism may take place, as appropriate participation in the *missio Dei*.

Caregivers addressed in the pastoral care literature are often specialists, professionals or interns, so it would be unrealistic to expect the mostly volunteer participants to perform as qualified pastoral carers. However, their effectiveness as intercultural pastoral carers is assessed simply on their ability to communicate love. The following discussion is guided by the finding/insight that participants were motivated by a desire to see migrants flourish in Australia. All participants, whether practicing Christians or not, acted on behalf of the sponsoring church, prompting a working assumption that they therefore possessed some level of concern about the wellbeing, and perhaps the spiritual wellbeing of migrants.

6.1   Empathy and compassion

Lartey suggests that empathy has "three characteristics … a *feeling* (affective) level, a *thinking* (cognitive) level and a *tendency to action* (conative) level. Empathy then, is a way of being with other people, which enters into how it feels like to be who they are" (Lartey 1997: 92). While it was not possible to observe and trace the feelings of participants, a cognitive level of empathy was expressed during interviews as participants spoke with understanding of the difficulties faced by new migrants and related these to their own experiences. This was then fed back into their volunteering or work.

For Doehring, the intercultural dimensions of "empathy and compassion play a central role in pastoral and spiritual care. Empathy involves imaginatively stepping into another person's emotional experience while remaining aware of and anchored in one's own emotional state" (Doehring 2015: 39–40). Participants at Northern Training demonstrated such empathy through boundaried emotional involvement with students. Participants at Swindon spoke of a desire to help their students learn English, based on their own experience of living overseas, having to study a foreign language, and observing a family member from overseas adjust to life in Australia.

Participants were engaged in mission, often through formation in the "disciplined exercise" of empathic listening, creating what Augsburger describes as "sharing another's feelings, not through projection but through compassionate active imagination. Empathy is an intentional affective response" (Augsburger 1986: 27). For Pembroke, whether in the parish or healthcare context, care that is "built on a foundation of empathy and compassion is an expression of *agape …* a commitment to

extend oneself in acting in a loving, kind, and beneficent way towards one's neighbour" (Pembroke 2019: 133–46). This is an essential factor if those attending initiatives are to experience and sensitively express God's love.

Pembroke's deceptively simple, but pastorally and vocationally complex principle becomes a highly desirable criterion for selection, training, and formation of volunteers. One participant had previously had little to do with migrants before volunteering at the English lessons, but she was, however, someone who cared deeply for others and this concern was expressed through her plans to serve and her attentive listening and responses to her students.

Shared experiences of migration enabled empathy with new migrants. Cognitive and conative levels of empathy were apparent in the advocacy framework of one person's provision of medical care for women who rarely received the level of care enjoyed by other Australians. The affective level may have been there, but it was "acting in a loving, kind, and beneficent way" that counted.

Lartey describes the pastoral carer as needing to progress from sympathy (often counter-productive) to empathy and then to interpathy. Augsburger's definition captures the movement that needs to emerge across the sites, through formation and reflective practice if possible. He revisits and extends comment on interpathy by identifying the core dynamic of this shift in affect as an intentional cognitive envisioning of another's thoughts and feelings, even though the thoughts rise from another frame of moral reasoning and the feelings spring from another basis of assumptions. "I (the culturally different person) take a foreign perspective, base my thought on a foreign assumption, and allow myself to feel the resultant feelings and their cognitive and emotive consequences in my personality as I inhabit, insofar as I am capable of inhabiting, a foreign context" (Augsburger 1986: 30).

Lartey warns that interpathy must "rest upon the premise of human universality." (Lartey 1997: 94). Interpathy was the next learning bridge to be crossed when participants described their feelings or experiences. A truly interpathic caregiver may become as close as possible to being "emic", as described by Hiebert, based on a definition by Kenneth Pike (Hiebert 2009: 90; Pike 1990). To be emic is to be a cultural insider, while a cultural outsider is classed as etic. The aim of the missionary, the anthropologist, or in the case of this study, the intercultural carer, is to move towards an emic stance, even though this is ultimately not possible for someone from a different culture. Formation and training in reflective practice can still enhance this skill. Few people would be naturally interpathic. For westerners raised into a worldview that often implies that Western culture is superior, this may be a particular

pastoral formation challenge. One participant stated that she did not need to under-stand the cultures of her students, as she was there to teach them English! While she was naturally empathic, embodying interpathy would have enhanced her caring skills.

Doehring describes compassion as empathy that results in action, or more accu-rately, care in action (Doehring 2015: 43). By this definition, compassion was strongly in evidence at all initiatives. Already open to international students because of her intercultural experience, Jean, a volunteer, worried about her students because "they had real trouble getting through to others … what their needs were".[5] Another responded to the needs of asylum seekers by initiating the English lessons at Govan, a motivation not always the reason for engagement. Some volunteers were moti-vated initially by their belief that, as Christians, they needed to serve in the life of the church which meant that compassion was harder to discern at St Nicholas. Partici-pants had a functional approach to their service and spoke of the women in a matter-of-fact manner, indicating some knowledge but no empathy, and at times with some frustration with their lack of responsiveness to Christianity. Formation of volunteers that embraces a pastoral care view of reflective practice while engaged in cross-cultural encounter would enable more honest self-awareness.

Empathy is easier to attain when based in shared experiences, although it is possible to learn. The progression from sympathy to empathy to interpathy is often a reflec-tive journey of self-discovery and if interpathy is like being emic, then being a cultural insider is a goal that pastoral practitioners and anyone in mission can aspire to. Empathy is harder to access when care is driven by a desire for conversions, a tension each initiative faced without effective resolution.

6.2   Hospitality: A friendly and welcoming environment
Hospitality is a gateway to mutuality, friendship and community, and all initiatives held potential for long lasting friendships and community-building. The biblical theme of hospitality amongst Christians served to identify aspects of hospitality noted at each project.[6] For Lartey, loving one's neighbour as oneself

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5   Jean interview.
6   For example, Isa. 58.7, Tit. 1.8. These references support my arguments on the theme of hospitality.

is closely linked in the teaching of Jesus to that of "loving God with all one's mind, strength and heart." The Church as the Body of Christ in the world manifests its theological insights most clearly by the ways it relates within itself and with the world community around it. (Lartey 2006: 121).

The data suggested that the practices of hospitality and friendship-building in a community context should be viewed as key elements of a model of pastoral care. Deep and careful theological reflection upon this theme can inform carers as they re-assess the levels of care they are willing or able to provide, and also reframe the focus of further training.

How do volunteers learn to welcome strangers? Ross describes hospitality as a two-way process in which hosts (participants) have much to learn from those at the margins and indeed become guests of the migrants attending initiatives (Ross 2016). This suggests, therefore, that pastoral care and all expressions of mission are two-way processes of hospitality that become a meeting point where an exchange of power teaches and empowers and holds the possibility of transformation for the carer. Most participants at all locations sought to express some form of friendship with attending migrants and a cultural context of friendliness and welcome were significant findings. While for some this friendship was expressed only in the sessions, others sought to foster relationships at other times. These friendships were life-enhancing and nurturing, especially when attendees were marginalised in Australia due to ethnicity, culture, and limited English.

A commitment to friendship and journeying together (to varying degrees dependent on context) is a realistic expectation of Christian practice in similar intercultural, church-based initiatives. Hospitality is a practice to which Christians are called throughout the New Testament.

Where mutuality was observed, genuine friendships were therefore possible. Gittins describes the roles and expectations of hosts and guests, noting that while guests and strangers are differentiated in the English language, they share the same term in many languages. Therefore, if strangers (and all volunteers were initially strangers to their students) do not allow others to be hosts they demonstrate disrespect and cause confusion. This involves deferring to them and respecting their cultural norms. Not allowing others to be hosts is to demonstrate aggression (Gittins 1989).

Attendees may not experience aggression, but unthinking colonization or lack of awareness of power may well have the same impact. Hosts, whoever they are, therefore hold a great deal of power and the task of balancing this power echoes

Doehring's description of the co-creation of theological meaning in the care-giver/care-receiver relationship (Doehring 2015: 100–102). An appreciation of this can challenge participants and volunteers in similar, church-based initiatives to invite their guests to become, not a part of their culture, but to step into a space within which a third, new and shared culture can emerge – one where roles may be exchanged. I am reminded of Pembroke's application of the "relational space" within the Trinity to pastoral care practice. Members are unified, yet with space between them that allows for distinctiveness (Pembroke 2016: 26–8), a liminal movement potentially empowering and certainly defining of identity.

Glimpses of friendship and sparks of compassion appeared in the findings and while a few volunteers at Swindon only wanted to teach English others were concerned to care any way possible. Northern Training participants clearly wished to empower students in line with the school's rationale and ethos but where on the training and development agenda were processes for developing empathy, interpathy, and reflective listening skills? Where the aim of an initiative is evangelism, love-in-action may demonstrate truth claims but the tension remains of creating what Nouwen describes as the sensitive but life-giving task of creating space for strangers in our lives:

> When hostility is converted into hospitality then fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. Then, in fact, the distinction between host and guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in the recognition of the new-found unity. (Nouwen 1975: 67)

We are therefore called to invite the stranger to "a free and friendly space where he can reveal his gifts and become our friend … Really honest receptivity means inviting the stranger into our world on his or her terms, not on ours" (Nouwen 1975: 98). To do this in an intercultural setting, we acknowledge and contain our tendencies towards ethnocentricity and develop listening skills that take us beyond empathy into interpathy (Augsburger 1986: 27–32). This necessitates education and intentional formation in growing and developing pastoral and spiritual care skills, often lacking in mission preparation and actual settings.

6.3   Spirituality for pastoral care and mission

Christian spirituality may not be readily discernible, as observed at Swindon. It is suggested that a rich inner life will express itself in outward manifestations, in commitment to living a Godly life and in care for others. Care for others is, however, also a societal value and where participants did not easily speak of their faith, it was not clear whether their care for migrants was rooted in the internal and transcendent

movements of spirituality. This is a loss, in that mutual encouragement in fostering a spiritual life was absent and those attending the initiatives could be less likely to appreciate that the care they received was an expression of God's love (Bevans and Ross 2015: xv-xvi).

Bevans and Ross describe mission as necessarily prophetic dialogue in which deep listening to others precedes engaging in what they term prophetic dialogue as mission. Deep listening is a prerequisite for discernment, a mature pastoral skill and a spiritual discipline. Mission can only be done, in the final analysis, by women and men who pray regularly, who spend time in contemplation, who share their faith in theological reflection, who study and read the Bible individually and in community, who understand cultural trends and current events (Bevans and Ross 2015: Introduction).

This applies equally to practices of pastoral care and mission, especially if we add opportunities for pastoral supervision. The value of being a reflective practitioner is strong and clear whether the person is a volunteer teaching sewing or leading complex international programmes.

Jesus teaches us to love others as we love ourselves (Lk. 10.27), often a difficult concept for Christians warned against selfishness or taught that if we lose our lives then we will gain them. Jesus taught that loving others as much as ourselves is the greatest commandment, a benchmark that suggests that to love ourselves and practise self-compassion also provides the psychological flexibility and embracing hospitality important for loving others. When our awareness of God is rooted in a sense of God's love for us, we may gain the sensitivity to discern how he would express God's love for others, through us. This may involve proclamation but more often it will be by listening, celebrating others and through acts of service.

7   Summary and conclusion

This article has explored interactions between pastoral care and mission. I have demonstrated that effective expressions of love of God and neighbour at church-based, intercultural initiatives depend upon pastoral care practices including expressions of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality.

Three proposals emerge from this article. First, I propose that church-based intercultural initiatives will most effectively communicate love of God and neighbour when organisation and delivery follow the principles, practices, and functions of intercultural pastoral care. Second, mission planning and practice should always be informed

by the foundational elements of pastoral care. Third, spirituality needs nurturing in individuals and groups for participants to better express love of God and neighbour.

Ongoing group prayer and reflective practice are recommended as pastoral practices for church-based groups engaged in intercultural community initiatives. Supervision is also important for pastoral carers and warrants further consideration for those engaged in mission.

If I was to return to the ministry I started, outlined in the introduction, I would do a number of things differently. Training sessions would be run for all volunteers before they commenced. It would be taught that pastoral care was our mission, expressed through our care of asylum seekers. Deep listening would be taught and the concept of interpathy. The importance of allowing our guests to take the lead in relationships would be emphasized, with the promise that they would ask questions about the Christian faith, if and when they were truly interested. Team sessions would take place following each session which would include reflection and prayer.

About the author

Dr Sue Holdsworth is an Honorary Postdoctoral Associate at Eva Burrows College, University of Divinity. Originally form the UK, Sue has extensive experience working with diaspora communities in Melbourne and South Korea. She has also lived in France. Her PhD, stemming from these experiences, was titled "A critical, comparative analysis of four church-based, intercultural initiatives in the multicultural city of Melbourne". Sue has been a member of three mission organizations and has served on the executive of the Australian Association of Mission Studies. Contact: sue.holdsworth@divinity.edu.au

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BOOK REVIEW

Farrell, B. Hunter, and S. Balajiedlang Khyllep. 2022. *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development*

Reviewed by Say Young Lee

Freeing Congregational Mission serves as a comprehensive guidebook for the church's mission, anchored in the theology of *missio Dei.* It particularly delves into the vision and practice of short-term mission (STM) within the context of mainline churches in the United States. From a historical standpoint, STM have emerged as a potent missionary strategy, characterized by explosive growth and expansion, fueled by a sense of urgent eschatology. This growth is intertwined with church growth theology and missions for unreached people groups.

The emergence of *missio Dei* paradigm in the twentieth century broadened the scope of missions to encompass various social justice activities, extending beyond mere evangelism and church planting. Nevertheless, the locus of control and agency for missions often resided with the church and mission organizations, rather than attributing the primary agency to God. This inclination also led to a colonial perspective, aiming to transform mission fields from the vantage point of the sending church. Consequently, the practice of STM still continues to retain a colonial undertone, seeking to extend the church's influence and assert cultural and spiritual superiority over the host communities. This enduring dynamic illustrates that while missiological theology has evolved, missions have remained largely within the domain of the church's mission in the modern era.

In this book, leveraging their rich experience in the mission field, denominational leadership, and theological education, Hunter and Bala adeptly reveal the realities of the church's mission practice as described above. They introduce a vision and theological foundation for renewing the church's mission in the first section of the book.

In the second section, they provide church mission leaders with a practical methodology for practising companionship-based missions and enacting tangible transformations that align with God's mission. This book offers a roadmap for nurturing a missional spirituality, addressing challenges such as colonialism, cultural superiority, and consumerism in mission work. It accentuates the significance of companionship-based missions grounded in Jesus' life and a community centred on the gospel, and offers concrete examples for transforming readers' behaviours and habits.

What sets this book apart is its recognition of issues not only within the context of church-centred missions and colonialism but also within the self-centric and self-satisfying mission practices rooted in consumerism prevalent in the US (7). The authors critique self-satisfying missions for diminishing God's role in the mission and reducing it to a mere "to-do list" for human accomplishment (9). They highlight how consumerist missions within American churches, especially mainstream ones, prioritize the individual over God. The authors particularly critique STM participants from American churches for pursuing self-satisfaction by indulging their personal goodwill. In essence, they acknowledge the potential of STM as a form of spiritual training, contributing to the expansion of God's kingdom through human effort. However, they also acknowledge the irony that such endeavours can inadvertently strengthen a human-centred approach to missions, ultimately replacing God's sovereignty with human agency in missionary endeavours. Consequently, they advocate for a renewal in the church's mission practices, emphasizing the need for a shift towards missions driven by God and motivated by a quest for his kingdom, rather than centred around human objectives.

Building upon this awareness of STM challenges, the authors seek solutions rooted in Jesus' life and the Gospel-centred community, providing alternatives to the issues of colonialism, cultural superiority and consumeristic missions. They introduce three elements for fostering a community's spiritual reclamation. First, they present a theology rooted in Jesus' companionship, contrasting with self-centric missions. Secondly, they propose a cultural humility grounded in the Incarnation, as an alternative to colonial attitudes. Thirdly, they advocate for a methodology centred around mutual cooperation rather than a unilateral approach where the giver transforms the receiver. According to the authors, the keyword for gospel-based missions is "companionship", a concept rooted in shared experiences such as meals and journeys (47). Unlike a partnership focused on projects, companionship is a relationship that stems from vulnerability, where weaknesses are shared rather than power dynamics (50). As such, companionship is not about the achievement (52). The authors argue that for readers to engage in companionship-based missions, they need to shift their

focus from self-centred endeavours to God-centred missions, emphasizing the need to display a shared direction centred on Jesus (60).

Consequently, the authors posit that the companionship-based missions they advocate aren't about individually-driven or church-centred missions, aimed at conversions and discipleship. Instead, they promote a journey of humble companionship rooted in Jesus' life and demonstrated through a community united by the gospel (62). Such missions aren't about powerful individuals transforming the weak, but about emulating Jesus' mission, a collaborative effort that transcends distinctions (67). This approach prioritizes a gradual, shared missionary journey (229) rather than swift transformations. In this context, the authors call upon church mission leaders to alter their attitudes and methodologies in order to align their mission practice with the concept of companionship-based missions, providing practical strategies for implementing these changes.

The book also stands out for its role as a guide in cultivating missional spirituality. The authors' focus lies in altering misguided behaviors and habits deeply ingrained in the readers' lives. Their language is pragmatic and grounded in everyday life, avoiding doctrinal or metaphysical complexities. Through practical, real-life examples, they offer a roadmap for adopting more desirable patterns of thinking and behaviour, particularly in the context of mission mobilization. A notable example includes the three stones the authors present as alternatives for revitalizing missions, symbolizing a "home" represented by the cooking fire in Congo, where Hunter served (14). Through this metaphor, they underscore the centrality of companionship-based missions (15). Moreover, the authors share a specific case involving differing opinions between missionary and local inhabitants, regarding the installation of wells or sports fields in Congo (21). This case makes the concept relatable and practical, illustrating the mistakes and challenges that churches in the US might have experienced. Furthermore, at the conclusion of each narrative about the theoretical foundation of the three stones, the authors offer practical methodologies for implementation. In Section 2, they provide detailed practical manuals for short-term missions, children and family ministry, and training mission leaders. These manuals guide the application of *missio Dei* theology beyond theoretical discourse and into the realm of practical church mission, emphasizing both spiritual development and practical action.

However, while the authors emphasize that cross-cultural training isn't a manual approach, system, method or technique, but rather a spirituality emerging from deep meditation on the gospel and obedience to Jesus (100), it's somewhat disappointing that the book doesn't offer more guidance on cultivating an everyday missional spirituality, something that should be an ongoing and regular practice. Moreover,

while the authors' provision of comprehensive manuals for renewing church mission practice can be viewed as a contribution toward God's mission, from the perspective of understanding a community as an organic entity, the practical methodology in the book seems to lean toward modern, Western approaches that aim to change individuals and organizations through planned manuals and deliberate education (234).

Nonetheless, the authors' responses to pertinent and well-articulated questions regarding the mission practice that aligns with the *missio Dei* paradigm and the relevance of short-term missions are astute and aptly presented throughout the book. The authors' emphasis on theology of companionship, cultural humility, and the practical aspects of co-development as the foundation of short-term missions, alongside their presentation of specific ministry models, resonates well with the contemporary role and responsibilities of the church. I firmly agree that these topics are essential and timely discussions and responses. Furthermore, by highlighting that STM have served as opportunities for participants' spiritual training and growth, the book addresses the question of opportunity cost for STM, that is, whether the resources invested in STM are merely consumed for self-satisfaction. The book firmly answers this question with a "no", stating that STM of the church can be valuable and meaningful dedications for the sake of missional spiritual training rooted in God's mission.

About the author

Say Young Lee, President of Mission Incubators, SC, USA.
sayyounglee@fuller.edu

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BOOK REVIEW

Flett, John G., and Wrogemann, Henning. 2020. *Questions of Context: Reading a Century of German Mission Theology*

Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
ISBN: 9780830851089

Reviewed by Rein den Hertog

Flett and Wrogemann offer a welcome compilation of German(speaking) missiological literature on the topic of contextualization. In six chapters, each covering a particular period, they allow different German missiologists – Hoekendijk being a Dutch exception – to speak through articles or excerpts from larger publications. Each chapter concludes with an analysis that places the various authors in a larger context, and in which Flett and Wrogemann search for the current meaning of the texts discussed. The final product is much more than just a collection of texts with comments, but also provides an in-depth reflection on the topic of contextualization.

The book owes its existence to a request for a bibliography of German missiological texts on the theme of contextualization. This request proved difficult to satisfy. However, not because of a lack of attention to the contextual nature of the gospel within German missiology of the past century. On the contrary, from the beginning, the question of the indigenous embodiment of the gospel played a significant role in German missiological reflection.

Flett and Wrogemann begin their compilation with texts by Warneck and Troeltsch. Whereas for Troeltsch, mission is fundamentally about spreading the cultural influence of the West and therefore relates primarily to education and civilization, Warneck - the father of contemporary missiology - stands up for the salvific content of the gospel that must take root like a native plant in foreign soils. The discussion between Warneck en Troeltsch shows that from the outset there was a focus on the complex relationship between mission and the cultural embodiment of the gospel within German missiology.

A generation later, missiologists such as Gutmann, Schomerus and Knak, influenced in part by a Romanticist view on the concept of *Volk*, would emphasize the importance of the primal ties (*Urtümliche Bindungen*) and *Volkstum* of indigenous peoples for the mission of the church. While this missiological approach cannot be equated one-to-one with the National Socialist emphasis on *Volk*, it did fit seamlessly into the conceptual landscape of Nazi ideology.

Not surprisingly, in response to this problematic entanglement, German missiologists sought a different approach. At first, missiologists like Hartenstein and Freytag found it in a highly eschatological perspective, in which reality came under the intense criticism of Divine judgment. However, by choosing this approach contemporary history and culture – and consequentially contextualization – lost almost any voice in missiology.

Beginning in the 1960s, things changed in ecumenical circles. Attention shifted to the existence of world Christianity, and even within German-speaking missiology, missiologists such as Hoekendijk, Margull and Hollenweger brought the world into focus as the locus of God's agency, while emphasizing the need for vulnerability and dialogue. In the decades that followed, this movement would deepen.

To interpret this development, Flett and Wrogemann refer to Shoki Coe's groundbreaking 1973 article, in which he shows that contextualization is a "dynamic process that opens up both the interpretation of the gospel and the local culture to the eschatological future." (165) Coe distinguishes between *conscientization*, *contextuality* and *contextualization*.

Conscientization refers to "the gaining of a critical awareness of the context in light of the *missio Dei*". *Contextuality* refers to the result of this, and concerns "the maturity of judgement that instructs the church where and how to participate in the *missio Dei*". Finally, *contextualization* is embodiment of this "capacity to respond" (166).

Whereas terms such as *contextuality* and *contextualization* have become standard in the English missiological vocabulary, this is not the case in the German-speaking missiological literature. In German missiology there was an increasing emphasis on what Coe called *conscientization*: the critical awareness of the context. In (contemporary) German missiology there is a great sensitivity to issues of contextual embodiment of the gospel, despite – or, one could argue, because of – the problematic history of the 1930s and 1940s. Unlike in the prewar period, however, missiologists realize that attention to the local context alone is not enough if the basic framing assumptions are still Western, as was the case in pre-war German missiology. One may want to be contextual, but if Western standards determine what that exactly means, one

still misses the mark. German missiologists therefore argue for developing a form of theologizing that does not assume a one-way traffic from sender to receiver, but in which all people involved dialogically seek a credible embodiment of the gospel. By taking this approach, missiologists like Sundermeijer, Lienemann-Perrin and Wrogemann himself have contributed to the emergence of a so-called *intercultural theology*.

Flett and Wrogemann's collection of texts and analyses are very helpful and stimulating in several ways. First, they offer a translation of important German missiological texts and thus function as an introduction to German missiology of the past century. In addition, by design, the book also offers a longitudinal introduction to the developments within missiology of the past century. Beginning with the colonial era, the texts take us via the problematic period of Nazism and the postwar response to it, through the era of decolonization to the current situation of world Christianity that demands a cross-cultural theology. Throughout the volume, Flett and Wrogemann engagingly show how the periods, topics, and themes addressed are still relevant today. For example, the problematic emphasis on *Volkstum* and Primal ties resonates even today in Donald McGavran's still influential Church Growth Movement. Clearly, even the developments in German missiology of the first half of the 20th century do not belong to a past that is at a safe distance but still represent a cautionary tale that should be taken to heart again and again. Finally, the book offers an engaging and thoughtful treatment of the concept of contextualization. Contextualization according to Flett and Wrogemann is not an easily applicable step-by-step plan but requires a dialogical process in which the universality of the gospel's message of salvation is not sought in a uniform embodiment, but rather in a multiplicity of cultural expressions interconnected by an ongoing conversation about the normative content of the gospel. Furthermore, this process is never finished since it is directed toward the discernment of God's unceasing and often surprising eschatological agency in this world. In the words of Flett and Wrogemann:

> *Mission is the participation of a community of joy in the ferment of the resurrection, which draws that community beyond itself and so into history and context as the realm of God's own acting. The Word remains a word from outside, meaning that the community is called to encounter its identity as a matter of continual surprise. If we understand the embodiment of the gospel as something that can only come out of the local culture, then mission is itself the process of discovering local expression. The gospel is not something an individual or community can "bring"—it is only something that a community seeks to embody (or is embodied by). (222)*

About the author

Dr. Rein den Hertog, Amsterdam, rgdenhertog@gmail.com

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BOOK REVIEW

Leith, Jenny. 2023. *Political Formation: Being Formed by the Spirit in Church and World*

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Reviewed by Bernhard Schröder

Where and how do we learn to live as disciples in a post-Christendom era? Jenny Leith tackles this question in her book *Political Formation*. It is based on her doctoral thesis at Durham University.

What sets this book apart is the author's unique background and experiences outside of academia. Before pursuing her doctoral studies, she worked in politics as a parliamentary researcher and then in social policy. These engagements have undoubtedly influenced her approach to theological discourse, and this influence is evident throughout the pages of the book. She describes her work as a case study within the Church of England which has specific challenges such as a multicultural society and a colonial history. However, she is convinced that her theory of formation has high relevance when applied in another context (3).

The main thesis challenges the traditional view that Christian formation primarily occurs within the church, with the expectation of then applying Christian ethics in civil life. Leith questions this view due to two significant factors. First, she highlights the church's extensive guilt, she names issues such as sexual abuse and white supremacy. Leith doubts whether the church can still provide a reliable ethical purpose after moral failings (1). Second, she contends that being a disciple often involves navigating the complexities of everyday choices. It is rather a "struggle for integrity amid uncertainty and limited time" (2) than an opportunity for a dramatic act of clear witness to Christ. Therefore, Leith's thesis proposes that Christians are formed by the Spirit both within the church and in the world. She defines formation as the process of being shaped for virtuous action with the ultimate goal of flourishing (7).

The book follows a thoughtful structure as indicated by its subtitle *Being Formed by the Spirit in Church and World.* The initial focus lies on formation through one's connection to and participation in the church, which is explored in the first two chapters.

Leith refers to the works of Sam Wells and Graham Ward, who see prayer and the Eucharist (23) as the main places for formation. According to them, being formed in church often means a "counter-formation" (25). Christians provide virtues and actions needed by the world, which is seen as a deficit place. Leith criticizes this view. Rather, she argues, being formed in the world brings innovation (31). The church can't offer all resources needed for formation in itself. She asks: "Can we properly form love for God and for those around us with the established practises?" (50) Her answer is no, because "we require the perspective of others to know ourselves" (52) – and to be formed.

As a result, she poses the question of what a church that enables formation by the Spirit would look like, which she addresses in chapters 3–5. Here she proposes three "twin callings": The church is at the same time a) *oikos* (household) and *polis* (a political community), b) confident and humble, c) gathering and scattering. With the help of these dynamics, she proposes that "the church is called into being by God *and* the church remains unfinished and incomplete." (73) These callings form the church to dwell in the current complexity (83). In chapter 4 she describes the failures of the church in executing power such as white supremacy and class-based hierarchy (89). She names the role of Anglican theology in the context of colonialism and slavery (96–9) and the clericalism within the church (94). "The church's tendency to under-recognise the presence of sin in its life is not, therefore an accidental feature of ecclesial polity: rather we will never be fully aware of how *unaware* we are of sin." (101)

She offers a "spirit-led ecclesiology" (87), which recognizes the own malformation and is clear about the fact that God is at work at the same time.

Leith is convinced that each member of the church is a unique gift to church and world. In chapter 5 she looks at the formation of the church through each member. She adopts Jenny Daggers' term "troubling gifts" (117). According to Leith, "being brought into recognition of sinfulness is itself a gift" of the Holy Spirit. Through recognition of sin, lament and reconciliation the church can be shaped by the Spirit (124). Looking at the work of the Spirit with the people at the margins of society means gathering the scattered experiences of its member as gifts (125) forming the church. "Ecclesial inclusiveness is thus not pursued for its own sake, but out of the conviction that the life of the church depends on the participation of every member" (131).

In the third part of the book, chapters 6–7, she examines formation by the Spirit in the context of the world, particularly through political engagement. In chapter 6 she offers insights and examples of how an engagement in political structures offers formation as a disciple of Christ. In politics, one encounters the stranger, and politics is thus a field to learn how to love your enemy (161).

In chapter 7 Leith refers to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* and the teaching of Mandates. She outlines the necessity of a Christian disciple to "let go of certain forms of personal sovereignty" (176) because of the uncertainty of political action. However, exactly this place of personal loss is the place of the beginning of life as a person whose identity rests in God. By this, a Christian is set free to political action with responsibility (177).

In a concluding chapter, Leith applies her view of the formation of individuals to the formation of society on a national level. She looks at the field of civic identity and national polity and how the church can play a role here (190).

The book is well structured. Questions and summaries guide the reader in the progress and foster their reflection. The book is very accessible, providing an extensive index of names and subjects, facilitating further exploration of the material.

Leith introduces a new paradigm for understanding the interaction between the church and the world. This is neither the "Benedict Option" (Rod Dreher), a withdrawal from the world into a parallel universe nor a simplistic public theology to regain political power once possessed.

Furthermore, it offers valuable insights and ideas for fostering a church that is open to the transformative work of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, a weakness for me is the lack of substantial engagement with biblical topics, particularly in the chapters addressing sin and reconciliation. According to scripture and confession the Spirit has promised to be found in the context of the Bible, prayer and ecclesial community. In *Ecclesial Futures Vol. 3,2*, Mike Harrison proposes a link with neuroscience to formation within the church, which seems to fill these gaps.

In conclusion, *Political Formation: Being Formed by the Spirit in Church and World* is an important contribution to the discussion about Christian formation in a post-Christendom era. The book challenges traditional notions of formation and offers a paradigm shift in understanding the interaction between the church and the world.

A church open to the work of the Spirit in unexpected ways is envisioned and it invites work on this vision.

About the author

Bernhard Schröder, Practical Theologian, Institute for the Research on Mission and Church, Austria.
bernhard.schroeder@i-m-k.org

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BOOK REVIEW

Okesson, Gregg. 2020. *A Public Missiology: How Local Churches Witness to a Complex World*

Reviewed by James Butler

According to Okesson and his colleagues in the Public Missiology Working Group, it is time for missiology to go public. His book *A Public Missiology* carries the subtitle, "How local churches witness to a complex world" and he argues for a public missiology which moves from solely focusing on individual salvation and begins to understand what it means to witness to 'publics'. This involves engaging with complexity, something Okkesson terms 'thickness' – the interwoven nature of public life. Okkesson's thesis is that within the *missio Dei* there is a basis for understanding the witness of the local church not just as being aimed at individuals but as taking place in the midst of public life and witnessing to those publics. After all, Christians live the majority of their lives engaging with publics, be that in their working, shopping, eating or playing. What is more, any illusion that there might be some neat divide between public and private is increasingly broken down by media beamed into our homes, not to mention social media. Okesson recognizes that churches need to understand the realities they live in, and begin to see themselves as part of, and witnessing to, these publics, not just individuals. Drawing on his missiological studies and research, and many years of experience of mission in the United States, Kenya, Tanzania and Britain, Okesson provides an introduction to the theological basis and lived practice of public witness.

A public missiology, for Okesson, must be one which takes account of the thickness of public life and builds and weaves itself into that thickness. To do this it needs to see its life not as a single flow, but as a dynamic weaving, of coming in and going out. He bases this dynamic in the life of the internal relations of the Trinity and the way the Trinity engages with the world. These dynamics of going in and going out (and Okesson offers a number of different metaphors to understand this dynamic from

weaving, to dancing, to organisms in dynamic relations with their ecological environment) become the basis to understand churches' witness.

The book is made up of two parts: the first explores the theoretical and theological basis for a public missiology and the second provides case studies which illustrate what public witness might look like. Part 1 has five chapters. Okesson begins by laying out his terms and arguing the case for why there is a need to engage in the public realm and why the local church is his focus for that witnesses (chapter 1). There is a passion for the local church in his writings, something which he feels needs defending against a wave of negative feelings towards local churches in a lot of recent writing. He lays out a series of problems which he seeks to address in the book which are based around an enlightenment divide between public and private, the relegation of churches to the private space, the "thickness" of public life and the problem that "thin religion" has in witnessing to thick publics. Through part 1 he builds an understanding of what publics are (chapter 2), providing a helpful account of structural sin, or what he calls "complicated wickedness", and describing what "thickness" entails. He offers an account of the Trinity bringing thickness through their dynamic life (chapter 3), providing a model for churches. This is then developed further to offer an account of public missiology (chapter 4) and an explanation and exploration of "thick congregational witness" (chapter 5).

The introduction to the study of congregations (chapter 6) at the start of part 2 gives the book more of a textbook feel, and perhaps could have been better integrated into the rest of part 2 or offered in a much shorter form in an appendix. As it is, rather than opening up part 2 I felt it interrupted the flow of the argument. The remaining chapters of part 2 offer case studies from Kenya, Montreal and Nashville, to illustrate and illuminate a public missiology.

As I review the book I realize I have a complicated relationship with the book. I am drawn to its vision for public witness, its account of the thickness of public life and its engagement with structural sin. This is much needed, and I found the book stimulating my thinking around these areas. It is a compelling account which resonates with much of my own research, providing helpful language and metaphors for the kind of witness needed. I will definitely use the book in my teaching and encourage my students to think about the "thickness" of publics. What is more, given that Okesson's audience is likely to be evangelical, there is a boldness in the account in challenging accounts of solely individual sin and salvation which are to be welcomed and I hope they are engaged with. Complicated wickedness is a helpful and enriching concept. At the same time I find myself disagreeing and somewhat frustrated with the book. It definitely reads as an introductory text, and while it sought to base its

argument in Trinitarian theology and soteriology, I felt it never really got into the complexities of those conversations. Given its positioning, through chapter 6, within the field of practical theology and the qualitative study of the church, I found its divide between theory in part 1 and practice in part 2 to be misjudged. I was not completely convinced by the case studies, and while Okesson read them as engaging in thickness, I think another reading could easily have seen them as somewhat separated from the publics around them. I would have liked to have seen how his account of public missiology might have challenged these churches, not just affirmed them. I think some of that would have come had the case studies got beyond the accounts of the male leaders of the churches and have heard more clearly from the diversity of their membership.

This brings me to the biggest problem with the book; for all the emphasis on dynamics, of flowing in and flowing out, there was very little emphasis on relationships with those beyond the church, the kinds of broad-based public relationships encouraged by the likes of community organizing. If churches are to go public, then surely this means not just allowing the thickness of the world to shape how they engage, nor simply acknowledging that thickness in the life of the church, but to build those thick relationships with others who are not like them. There was very little about ecumenical relations let alone interreligious relations, and relations with charities, organizations, companies or public bodies. While the book advocated for a flow in and out to build thickness, a weaving with public life, this flow or weaving felt to be controlled and rather one way. The boundaries of the church may be porous, but little time was given to the way the world shaped churches. The challenge from the likes of Al Barrett for the flow of the church to be interrupted by its encounters in the world would be a helpful challenge to such a missiology, seeing how the life of the Spirit in the world might reshape the churches' witness. Similarly, Jenny Leith's work on *Political Formation* pushes further into this dynamic, challenging the metanarratives that good formation takes place in the church and bad formation takes place in the world, showing how the world might be forming Christians and churches for good. For all that the book encourages a bold approach to publics, the focus on sending parishioners to witness to publics could be seen as a reinforcing and slight adaptation of an evangelical approach to mission, rather than a more radical reimagining of witness to publics. I think a public missiology needs to go further and really embrace the thickness, messiness and complexity of being public.

In summary, this book is a welcome challenge to move from individual witness to public witness, and points the way for a public missiology, but there still feels a way to go. I want to celebrate this book as stimulating a vital conversation and testify to the way in which it has caused me to stop, reflect and deepen my thinking. I do

recommend the book as a good introduction to a compelling vision, but it is a vision which needs to continue to build and develop. I concur with the premise and direction of the book that churches and missiology need to go public and yet I wanted a bolder and riskier vision for witnessing to publics.

About the author

James Butler, University of Roehampton, London; Church Mission Society, Oxford.
James.Butler@roehampton.ac.uk

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BOOK REVIEW

Osmer, Richard R. 2021. *The Invitation: A Theology of Evangelism*

Reviewed by David Reissmann

Evangelism and evangelization have been largely neglected in Western academic theology. This has left a research gap that spans the discussions and curricula of many theological faculties and seminaries in the so-called "Western" world. This gap extends to current publications in areas such as practical theology and systematic theology. Meanwhile, there is a dynamic global discourse on this topic, which is reflected primarily in ecclesial and ecumenical documents.

Richard Osmer's book bridges these and several other gaps in a way that is probably unique to date. It is unique in that it is less an exploration of this global discourse or a historical discussion of these ecclesial and ecumenical documents. Rather, the book offers what one might call a "triadic conversation" between Scripture, dogmatic theology (almost exclusively Karl Barth's) and case studies. This serves the main purpose of the book, which is to support new thinking about evangelism that goes beyond the previously dominant particular way of thinking about evangelism, which Osmer calls *evangelism as conversionism* (8). "The new evangelization" then, as Osmer calls it, is a reimagining of evangelism in terms of Reformation theology and implies the transformation of evangelistic practice, especially in that it represents a fundamental shift in soteriology – from being saved by conversion on the basis of human choice to affirmation that we are saved *in toto* by Jesus Christ who takes our place in justifying and sanctifying us before God (193). In terms of terminology, this shift is demonstrated by Osmer using "evangelization" instead of "evangelism". But he sees this shift as more than just a shift in terminology. Rather, it is part of a broader transformation of the Church from an established part of Western culture to a missional community.

The various parts of the book roughly follow what I have called the "triadic conversation": The introduction outlines the idea of evangelism as an invitation. It is followed by the first part of the book and develops the basic principles of evangelism in dialogue with Scripture. By reflecting on case studies, some basic questions are first extracted, such as "What is the gospel?" or "How do we invite people to respond to the gospel?" Answers to these questions are sought using theological guidelines from the Apostle Paul. The Gospel according to Mark and the Gospel according to John then serve to lay important biblical foundations on the topic of evangelization based on the different thematic focuses of these authors.

The second part of the book locates evangelism in dialogue with Karl Barth. Osmer offers in this part much more than a recapitulation of some important passages in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. He develops an independent interpretation of Barth that demonstrates detailed knowledge of the most current Barth research and knows how to deal with the blindspots of other current theological traditions. This detailed dialogue with Karl Barth also provides well-founded impulses for the debates in missiology, in which Barth has already been widely discussed.

Here – and thus also to answer the question of what is actually new about the "new evangelization" – Osmer gains his own point of view. Instead of thinking within the old framework of conversionism, Osmer wants to look with Barth through a "lens of witness". Instead of trying to save people, the Church's role is to serve as a witness and to point beyond itself to Christ. This is the mission of the Church. Osmer gains this understanding of the Church as a witness through an intensive theological discussion of salvation and sanctification. Both election and reconciliation as the fulfilment of election are, with Barth, located entirely in the forensic atonement "in Christ". *De iure* sanctification, and thus also conversion, takes place *de facto* through the Holy Spirit. This is precisely where the implications for the "new evangelization" lie: By taking (1) the Chalcedonian pattern of the unity and yet distinction of Christ and his Church, (2) the Church as witness and (3) the justifying, sanctifying and electing work of Christ in our place seriously, human agency is (4) decentred from the central role it often occupies in the ministry of evangelism of the Church. Instead, it places our reliance on the Spirit through prayer more at the centre, so that the guidance of the Spirit plays a much larger role as the mediator of communion than it often does in the "old" model of evangelism.

This rich dogmatic discussion leads into the third part of the book and back to a practical-theological discussion of evangelistic practice. The discussion of this is based on the already mentioned understanding of soteriological objectivism and the broader transformation of the Church from an established part of Western

culture to a missional community. In this final part of the book, Osmer takes up the initial definition that he presented in the introduction – that evangelism is the invitation to respond to the gospel, the good news of God's salvation of the world in Jesus Christ, which is offered to others as part of the witness of the Church under the guidance and persuasive power of the Holy Spirit – and completes it through numerous "guidelines" that emerged in tandem with the insights of the Apostle Paul, the Gospels according to Mark and John, as well as through the dogmatics of Karl Barth. For example, Osmer emphasizes in his guidelines that it is important for the new evangelization to recognize not only significant moments of change but also longer processes of coming to trust in Jesus' call. It is also less the individual than the congregation that is the first witness to the gospel. Evangelization then develops not only a variety of ways of sharing the gospel, it also involves entering into the pain and suffering of other people as well as celebrating the glory of God and God's beauty. More could be said about these guidelines – about church planting, focusing on children's experience, beginning with God's Yes, helping Christians hear the gospel again and again, good leadership – but it all serves the vision of a broader transformation of congregations becoming missional communities. Ultimately, this reflects the book's normative commitment to practical theology and concrete congregations, which grows from the roots of Osmer's theology in the *Church Dogmatics* of Karl Barth.

The last chapter of the book outlines in more detail what looking at evangelization through the lens of practical theology means, especially to teach evangelization. Here Osmer makes his case for case studies as his methodological tool of choice, and he provides specific insights and materials from his own teaching experience. The materials are prepared in such a way that they can be easily adapted for one's own teaching or even adopted directly. Case studies, Osmer argues, give students the opportunity to think about problems they may face when they begin work in the future. They also help students learn the importance of attending to the particularities of each case, which is the prerequisite of learning to contextualize. And they also learn a lot about themselves, their personality, gifts, history and how to develop their own point of view out of this. After all, practical theology ought to bring practice into the classroom and put knowing in relation to doing, thus turning theology into a lived theology.

Whether the book will develop enough argumentative power to advance the case of evangelization in Western academic theology and cement the issue in their debates remains uncertain. To achieve this, it must reveal the blindspots of the powerful alternatives in the discourse and illuminate their contingencies on the basis of the new evangelization. But Osmer does so and reveals some contingencies of the old

paradigm of evangelism as conversionism in this book. The rich biblical and theological material is a milestone on the Church's path towards missional communities. The fact that Osmer, as a practical theologian, gives this topic a place in practical theology is a process that is, not entirely but almost, unique, in terms of the field of practical theology.

The final pages of the book are devoted to an exploration of the relationship between Practical Theology and Karl Barth. This is where the discussion moves beyond the core topic of the book to a general discussion of the foundations of practical theology. While this part is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book, this move from the concrete to the general not only concretizes Osmer's point of view and methodological commitments, which, as is good scientific practice, he does not hide behind cloudy formulations. It also takes the topic deeper than an awareness and analysis of context and to the Word of God in its threefold form (God revealed through Jesus Christ, Scripture, and the proclamation of the Church) as prerequisite of ultimately resisting all forms of systematization, including the formulation of a practical programme.

In any case, the combination of biblical anchoring and profound dogmatic discussion with practical theological reflection and embedding in concrete case studies is a ray of hope from the field of practical theology. It fits into the framework of a small but fine renaissance of exactly this kind of working method, which is also becoming evident in other places of theological work where the theologically mostly dry wells of mere correlational approaches to theology fail to nourish and convince. The subject matter of theology must, as Karl Barth argued, determine the methods appropriate to its investigation. For anyone who can agree, the book offers some of the best theological material on evangelization that I know of. For those who disagree, the book still contains a number of fine arguments to engage with. In any case, it will help to rethink the currently prevailing ideas and concepts about evangelism and evangelization.

About the author

David Reissmann, Research Center for Christian Empowerment in Secularity (CES), Research Unit for Missional Church Development (MKG), Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg.
david.reissmann@theologie.uni-halle.de

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BOOK REVIEW

Rowlands, Anna. 2021. *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*

Reviewed by Benjamin Aldous

Anna Rowlands is currently St Hilda Professor of Catholic Social Thought and Practice in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Durham. In this book she gives us a unique and thoughtful account of Catholic Social Teaching in an era of permacrisis. A recent recipient of the Joseph Ratzinger Foundation and Razón Abierta Institute Expanded Reason Award the book offers a rich tapestry of thought exploring the philosophical, theological and historical origins of the developing tradition of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Rowlands herself acknowledges that the book does not aim to offer a definitive or even comprehensive account of CST but rather a way into selected parts of the tradition depending on the reader's own interest or confession. Rowlands too notes that the fundamental ideas in CST can look and feel a little worn around the edges as the notions of human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity can at times be collapsed in meaning through their overuse or feel banal in over exposure. As a relative newcomer to the CST tradition I found the book quite dense and sinewy but nevertheless a rewarding effort and I will undoubtedly use the text as a go-to handguide when considering the value of CST in my ecumenical work with Churches Together in England reflecting on mission.

For Rowlands the church is necessarily political since it sees in scripture a call to proclaim a social vision of the human person within human and divine community – a social vision which Rowlands says is about the human person being fully alive and living out the common good. Divided into 11 chapters the first outlines the emergence of modern CST post 1891. Rowlands rightly reminds us that "CST in its modern form is as much a tarrying with the *ideas* that constitute modernity as with its concrete *practices*" (17). Drawing on Social Encyclicals and Apostolic exhortations of Popes from Leo XIII to Francis, she helps the reader to see that CST is far

from being a set and homogenous body of teaching but that each Pope brings their own particular nuance and understanding of CST. For example, in Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* the fundamental model for social order is rooted in the household or family and there is a refutation of the idea of mere contract or transaction as the basis for social justice. Francis in *Fratelli Tutti,* whilst willing to engage with liberalism as a political philosophy, is outright in his opposition to individualism.

Chapters 2 to 4 are rooted in an exploration of human dignity, first drawing on philosophical and theological sources (from Cicero to Mary Wolfstencraft) and subsequently drawing on the varying encyclicals. Chapter 3 deals with the issue of (forced) migration in and chapter 4 focuses on the questions of social and structural sin with regards to human dignity. In this chapter Rowlands helps the reader see ways in which each Pope has understood the core elements of human dignity from different angles. John Paul II, the conservative, was very uneasy about the usage of the concepts of social and structural sin simply seeing them as "the multiplication or accrual of individual sinful acts into consolidated, calcified structures" (101). Francis, on the other hand, has, during his papacy, continued to move the debate about social sin beyond a question of mere human willing to the context of political-economic relations (102) since cultures of ideologies malform human beings' perceptions of good (103). Francis has expanded notions of human dignity by drawing racism and categories around environmental degradation into the discussion being unafraid of a more wholistic vision and moving away from a personalism of conscience – an important widening.

Rowlands outlines the long tradition of of the common good in chapters 5 to 7, honestly reminding us that, "an account of the common good that lacks an overt awareness of the operation of power in history and commitment to struggle with others through forging collective identities fails" (114).

Chapters 8 to 10 deal with the body politic, subsidiarity and solidarity. I enjoyed Rowlands' chapter on the political responsibilities and understandings of Catholicism and particularly bringing the work of French social philosopher and mystic Simone Weil into the equation. Weil made an important contribution to the post-World War 2 debates in helping to counterbalance an over emphasis by Catholic intellectuals towards personalism and modern rights language. "Weil worried that Catholic intellectuals and the church were failing to spot the fundamentally problematic anthropology that undergirds both" (192). I found the synopses of the encyclicals of the Popes from Pius XII to Francis helpful. Rowlands points out that transnational themes of migration, the environment, global inequalities and degradation of democracy are key interlinked social issues for Francis, that have shaped his papacy.

I found chapter 10 on solidarity moving and Rowlands urges us to remember the complex narrative which draws us away from naivety. She remarks that "solidarity enters the modern lexicon on the slipstream of the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, expressing what had been thought of over the centuries in Christian usage as fraternity and friendship" (240). Yet the idea of solidarity, she says, has been largely secularized over the past century. She again very usefully traces the various papal understandings and use of the term in the encyclicals and other documents.

As usual, I found myself asking what the missiological implications of such a book are. Certainly, a more nuanced understanding of the major themes of CST. It helps me analyse prevailing concepts like the common good which can be bandied around with little thought on occasions. It will particularly help me in thinking more deeply about *imago Dei* and theological anthropology from the perspective of my Catholic friends and colleagues in my work with Churches Together in England. This is dense and rich – at times so dense that I found it difficult to wade through – but it presents important insights for those with patience from a distinguished Catholic theologian.

About the author

Benjamin Aldous, Principal Officer for Mission and Evangelism at Churches Together in England, the national ecumenical instrument and an honorary research fellow at the Queens Foundation in Birmingham.
ben.aldous@cte.org.uk

Ecclesial Futures publishes original research and theological reflection on the development and transformation of local Christian communities and the systems that support them as they join in the mission of God in the world.

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We are an international and ecumenical journal with an interdisciplinary understanding of our approach to theological research and reflection; the core disciplines being theology, missiology, and ecclesiology. Other social science and theological disciplines may be helpful in supporting the holistic nature of any research, e.g., anthropology and ethnography, sociology, statistical research, biblical studies, leadership studies, and adult learning.

The journal fills an important reflective space between the academy and on-the-ground practice within the field of mission studies, ecclesiology, and the so-called "missional church." This opportunity for engagement has emerged in the last twenty or so years from a turn to the local (and the local church) and, in the Western world at least, from the demise of Christendom and a rapidly changing world – which also affects the church globally.

The audience for the journal is truly global wherever the local church and the systems that support them exist. We expect to generate interest from readers in church judicatory bodies, theological seminaries, university theology departments, and in local churches from all God's people and the leaders amongst them.