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Sarah Frances Davies

The Holy Spirit and Christian Community: A Case Study in Theology and Practice.

Abstract

Contemporary Christian communities often cite a scriptural basis as the justification for their shape and nature. Despite this foundation, the needs and tendencies of humanity and culture are often institutionalized and prioritized to the detriment of community effectiveness and mission.

Based within the field of practical theology, this project explores the nature and possibility for Christian community when Christian community incorporates a pneumatological core that organically informs individual values, practices and relationships within and beyond the community. This organic constitution is in contrast to the contemporary top-down approach of instituting systems-based ‘one size fits all’ programs and processes. The purpose of this research is to propose enhancements to these systems-based approaches by incorporating the essential elements of the Spirit’s work such that the community becomes increasingly effective.

I follow Fiddes’ integrated method in ecclesiology beginning with a case study of my experience of community formation using the *Activate* Small Group System within my local congregation. These experiences are dialogically challenged by contemporary and biblical community practices in order to propose a pneumatologically-shaped organic community model that serves to identify enhancements to the *Activate* framework. I conclude the study by proposing a series of enhancements to *Activate* that should be tested and evaluated for their capacity to improve community effectiveness.

I argue that community is in reality a composition of numerous unique relationships between the Spirit and each individual community participant. In turn, these Spirit-shaped relationships inform the relational fabric amongst participants and between participants and their neighbours. From this Spirit-shaped organic composition, I then explore the nature and potential for fellowship and mission for participants and for the overall community. Finally, I consider the core leadership dynamics required to effectively support the community, its identity and mission.

At the conclusion of this research, I suggest that if the community is to become truly effective, the role and contribution of the Holy Spirit is not only necessary, but also far more significant than is typically accepted within western Christian community culture. In fact, if there is a single critical responsive behavior within community formation, it is the continual and ongoing yielding by every participant to the direction of the Spirit who creates and sustains a fluid community relational expression that continually presents itself as a symbol of life and truth to its neighbours. Moreover, it is only through, and because of the Spirit’s engagement with these grass-roots layers, that the community can fulfill its potential of becoming an effective witness to the Gospel.

**The Holy Spirit and Christian Community: A Case Study in
Theology and Practice.**

Sarah Frances Davies

Ph.D. Thesis Submission

**Department of Theology & Religion
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INTRODUCTION

One study on the meaning of community identified over 90 distinct definitions and as much as suggested that the word ‘community’ should be discarded given the diversity of interpretation.¹ The only consistent concept for a description of community was its reference to ‘social relations connecting people’. Notwithstanding a deep biblical foundation, voices in the Christian community formation conversation also reflect little alignment regarding community formation such that it is effective in achieving its purpose of Christ-centered fellowship and outreach. As a result, an environment of ‘anything goes’ in terms of community formation with minimal expectations for effectiveness has occurred. And yet despite this environment, if we learn anything from the Malcom Gladwell’s description of life in the village of Roseto, it is that community can bring health and life, the very attributes promised in the Christian gospel.²

The importance of a clear theologically-sourced understanding of community is growing as societal fragmentation increases and the relevance and contribution of organized religion diminishes.³ In a western culture that prizes individuality and achievement over interdependence and reciprocity, ecclesiastical expressions have, intentionally or not, often molded themselves to appear contextually aligned with these western values, even though they are often the very antithesis of Christian faith. Furthermore, in the name of transparency and adoption, Christian community frameworks have embodied structured systems-based approaches that reinforce the human desire for stability, control and convenience. Effectively, the institutional Christian community has largely become ineffective, diluted and invisible to society, the antithesis of the role of the Christian church.⁴ The goal of this project is to propose a framework for forming vibrant and visible Christian community such that its community identifies with and embodies the gospel expression through which God can engage with humanity.

The field of communion ecclesiology has broached the concept of community, albeit in anecdotal and descriptive form. Christoph Schwöbel has claimed that the multitude of nebulous and diverse community interpretations is more often shaped by the pragmatic un-theological considerations of the necessities of day-to-day living and a plurality of religious

¹ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 19.

² Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Hachette Group, 2008), 5-10.

³ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 2.

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001) 214.

and quasi-religious worldviews than by sound theological reflection.⁵ Schwöbel's perspective, taken in conjunction with the absence of a clear understanding of the sources of effectiveness in community, points to a primary reason that contemporary community formation leans toward a systems-based approach that simply satisfies the human desire for convenience and stability.

Traditional approaches for exploring Christian community are often deductive in nature where a generalized model or theology is applied to a particular situation.⁶ For example, Trinitarian theology is often used as a basis for shaping local Christian community.⁷ The challenge to using a solely deductive approach is that it often ignores or negates localized culture and meaning that shape the participant's lived reality.⁸ Recognising this deficiency, Ward et al. propose that theological and social/cultural lenses are simultaneously necessary in order to understand the church. Specifically, the values and interactions of theology, community practices and local culture should be considered simultaneously in order to understand the relation between, and the reality of belief and action.⁹ Consequently, I have applied Fiddes integrated method in ecclesiology from the field of Practical Theology to explore community formation concepts within this project.¹⁰ At its highest level, the project follows a practice to theory to practice arc where theological and social reflections on current practices point to new actions and beliefs that will ultimately prompt further reflection.¹¹

Fiddes' method begins with a detailed description of specific experiences and engagement between God and humankind. Secondly, these present experiences are challenged dialogically with evidence of contemporary Christian communities, near-past traditions and biblical communities of the far-past. The objective of the challenge is to identify revisions to the current practices that will enhance the community experience and effectiveness. This aligns with Fiddes' opening of horizons hermeneutic. Thirdly, from the dialogical approach a proposed model is generated that represents both contemporary

⁵ Christoph Schwöbel, Ch4: The Creature of the Word in *On Being the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 117.

⁶ Paul S. Fiddes, Ch 1: Ecclesiology and Ethnography, Two Disciplines and Two Worlds? In *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 13-18.

⁷ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness, The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

⁸ Fiddes, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 18.

⁹ Pete Ward ed., *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 2-3, 19.

¹⁰ Fiddes, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 25-35.

¹¹ Fiddes, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 15.

experiences and paradigm shifts in practice and belief that are intended to enhance engagement with God. Finally, the model is tested through practical experiment in order to observe whether transformations have occurred. My personal lens for engaging this project is comprised of three elements, a non-denominational charismatic faith background, a career as a corporate leader in the financial service sector building and overseeing organisations of as many as a thousand employees, and finally as a leader and participant of small group ministries for many years in several local congregations. My experience in leading and participating in small group ministry is that despite their potential and position to be an effective witness, small groups invariably become times of convenient social interaction with minimal capacity to fulfill their Christian witness.

The project follows Fiddes' integrated method in ecclesiology. The first step begins with a case study that describes my experience as a participant and ministry leader with the *Activate* Small Group system in my local congregation in NewCastle, Delaware, U.S. from 2012 to 2018.¹² The *Activate* Small Group system is a typical example of these Christian community systems. Its structure and design are uniformly imposed in top-down fashion upon the community participants. Belonging and unity within this community occur through engagement and alignment with the system. Developed with a bias toward cultural relevance, *Activate* promises numerical and spiritual church growth assuming participants adhere to the systems' rules and procedures. Despite these promises, my experiences suggest that the cost to faith and relational experiences for the community participants seems high. In order to satisfy the *Activate* system constraints, core biblical values become secondary or are even dismissed. Given this, it should not be surprising that the experiences with the *Activate* system within my congregation at Cornerstone Christian Fellowship did not yield the promised growth on either numerical or spiritual dimensions. However, it remains unclear whether the disappointing results are a function of the inflexible system structure or the fact that the system allows human dynamics that fundamentally undermine the potential for effective Christian community. Another possible driver of ineffective community is raised by authors of the *Activate*. Whilst discussing their approach for relational development within *Activate*, the authors acknowledge that meaningful relationships only occur through the work of the Holy Spirit¹³ and not through the system guidelines. This acknowledgement raises the question of whether the *Activate* community

¹² Nelson Searcy & Kerrick Thomas, *Activate – Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura: Regal, 2018).

¹³ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Activate – Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura: Regal, 2008, 2018), 25.

could become more effective if the Holy Spirit were integrated as the core of the *Activate* framework and invited to inform and shape all community practices?

In the first chapter of the project, I present a case study that details the experiential journey for both myself and the congregation as we implemented and engaged with the system over a period of seven years. At the outset, my role within *Activate* was as one of the leaders who facilitated the foundational implementation and small group semester cycles. In addition, I led one of the small groups for several years. After three years, I stepped away from the leadership function and engaged in *Activate* simply as a participant within small groups each semester. These case study experiences represent the first step of Fiddes' methodology, namely experiences between God and the community participants. Given the *Activate* author's acknowledgement, my personal faith tradition and analytic lens, I have focused my examination on the ways in which the system structure and the Spirit enable or disable community engagement with God. Through five narratives, I offer descriptions of circumstances and events that demonstrate the ways in which community effectiveness was enhanced or diminished given either *Activate's* system-based approach or when the Holy Spirit shaped community experiences beyond the system constraints. The experiences and consequences of both elements, system and Spirit, raise the question of whether the *Activate* community could become a vibrant and effective expression of life with Christ *if* the Holy Spirit were integrated into its core such that the Spirit were able to inform and shape community practices?

The second step in the Fiddes' method involves dialogical challenges to the current experiences of *Activate* from two perspectives. Firstly, how do the system and Spirit components compare and contrast with other contemporary Christian community frameworks? Secondly, what evidence is there in early biblical communities for systems and Spirit-led community approaches? The purpose of these two analyses is to identify constructive challenges to the *Activate* framework that can enhance its effectiveness. In chapter two I locate the Activity community formation approach within the larger ecosystem of contemporary Christian community trends. Four broad trends are considered: intentional communities, specifically the New Monastics in the United States; the Fresh Expressions initiatives in the United Kingdom; online Christian and finally traditional small group systems that permeate much of the U.K. and U.S. mainline denominations. Each community formation approach is reviewed to understand the contribution that structured systems and the Spirit contribute in shaping the community. Community effectiveness is defined by firstly, the capacity to provide a sense of identity and belonging for the

community participant, secondly the form of engagement with the surrounding culture that shapes the community expression observed by those who do not belong to the community and thirdly, the community focus and capacity for gospel outreach. As with *Activate*, the review of these communities reveals a general propensity by the community authors to leverage a variety of structures and paradigms that shape the community. And, similar to *Activate*, each author inevitably recognises the critical role of the Spirit in enabling the community effectiveness in terms of participant activities, their relational fabric and community leadership.

Given evidence and impact of both system and Spirit in contemporary communities, chapter three expands the challenge horizon further by exploring biblical Christian communities, again seeking evidence and a trajectory of system and Spirit contribution in community formation. I consider James Dunn and Philip Esler's perspectives. In *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, Dunn takes an almost exclusively theological view of community, focusing his observations on organization form, function and mission. He distills the essence of community to be an expression of unity and concludes that community should be understood as the singular acknowledgement of belief in the historical Jesus as the exalted Christ. He considers diversity within a community to be acceptable providing it reinforces this core belief and is expressed as love toward other believers.¹⁴ Philip Esler's *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* represents almost a mirror image of Dunn's insights. Representing a socio-theological focus, Esler presents a model using Buber, Rosenzweig and Zizioulas that pivots on the relational fabric of community which he then validates through 1 Corinthians 10-14¹⁵. Analysis of both perspectives provides important insights regarding the increasing contribution of systems in shaping Christian community over time at the expense of Spirit-shaped or charismatic community. These shifting contributions similarly inform the nature of participant activity, community relations and outreach.

The insights gathered through contemporary and biblical communities in these chapters are now used in step three of Fiddes' method to develop a model that invites God to freely and creatively inhabit the community formation framework. Fiddes' emphasises the importance of seeking the unexpected in the area of theory or theological modeling. He

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 2006), 248, 411, 416.

¹⁵ Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis, London: Fortress; SPCK, 2005), Kindle e-reader book, ch 2:563-980, ch 6:2146-2473.

advises that whereas scientific modeling develops a model to tightly predict a specific, narrowly defined outcome, these theological models should anticipate the promise and scope that divine and human freedom will bring about something entirely new and surprising.¹⁶ To that end, chapters four, five and six explore the nature of an organic community formation framework that incorporates the Holy Spirit as the essential core or spine of the community. This core shapes and informs the practical nature of the community experience for participants and the engagement for those beyond the community. This pneumatological core that guides the organic community practices requires a form of facilitated leadership that similarly yields to the Spirit's leadership. A comparison between the model developed in this step and the *Activate* framework clarifies revisions to *Activate* that can enhance its effectiveness in terms of purpose and mission.

Chapter four considers the explicit contribution and work of the Holy Spirit in community formation. Engaging principally with a theology of the Spirit by Barth, Zizioulas and Moltmann, I propose the principal activities of the Spirit that contribute to the actions, beliefs and experiences for the individual participant in community, to the relational fabric that forms through participants and to the community entity that serve as signs of community unity and identity. Chapter five discusses the community participant responses and possible outcomes in terms of community experiences, outreach expressions and the overall nature of the community entity. This is a community that is shaped by the Spirit organically, in and through the grass-roots of each individual, their relationships with one another and with others beyond the community. Given a theological foundation for the Spirit's presence and activity within each person in the community, I consider how we might understand relations with one another, what a posture of free, creative love toward one another can look like in the reality of day to day community life and the dynamics of our human condition that might impede or impact the Spirit's shaping of relations. Rolling this organic engagement of the Spirit in each participant up to the overall entity, I discuss how the community entity expression might be observed or experienced by non-believers outside the community. Aggregating these perspectives, this organic community entity becomes one of deep relational investment, capable of diversity, fluidity and spontaneity and is recognised by its relational peace, increasing coalescence in Christian belief and values and activities that increasingly co-align in their demonstration of life with Christ.

¹⁶ Fiddes, Ch 1: Ecclesiology and Ethnography, Two Disciplines and Two Worlds? In *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 33.

The organic community expression offers a vibrant, life-giving contrast to the static, structured experiences of *Activate* and other systems-based approaches to community that have been largely ineffective. However, this vibrancy, driven by the community's yieldedness to the Spirit's shaping, requires a unique combination of leadership methods. In chapter six, I evaluate a number of contemporary leadership approaches, transactional, transformational, servant and adaptive leadership to determine which approach is most suitable for facilitating the Spirit's leadership of the organic community. Contrary to the *Activate* community where activity and focus gravitates inward to the centre of the community, organic community activity and focus flows relationally outward to individuals beyond the community. Given this directional flow, servant leadership serves as the primary approach with adaptive leadership providing an intervention capability that can disrupt innate human preference for self, personal comfort and convenience. The chapter concludes with an exegetical study of Paul's leadership to the nascent Corinthian community in 1 Corinthians. In this study, I consider whether Paul is using an adaptive leadership intervention technique to disrupt and shift the Corinthians from the incumbent knowledge-oriented patron-client system to Christ-centered relational community where agape love expressed through a myriad of values and practices is its core currency.

The final step in Fiddes' method involves the specification of revisions to *Activate*'s community practices that can be tested to determine whether the revisions fundamentally shift or transform the lived reality for community participants. Chapter seven proposes enhancements to the *Activate* community by incorporating elements of the organic community, to form a hybrid of the two formation approaches. The intention is for these enhancements is to enable the *Activate* community, and other popular systems-based approaches to community formation in general, to become increasingly effective in their fellowship and outreach intentions. The enhancements represent two themes. Firstly, they are intended to provide the room and flexibility in the system logistics and processes for the Spirit to guide the community on every level by removing or relaxing criteria and constraints such that the Spirit can work more fluidly and creatively. Secondly, the enhancements invest extensively in leader development such that the community is equipped by the leadership to continually discern the Spirit and to uniquely respond to the guidance. The nature of these revisions aligns with the Fiddes' recommendation to allow room for the Holy Spirit to freely and creatively preside throughout the community with no tightly defined expectation of what or how the Spirit will work. The final component within this step is to create a practical experiment or test in order to evaluate these revisions.

Understandably, this component is beyond the scope of this current project. For practitioners who desire to pursue this final component, I recommend a stepwise testing protocol that allows each cluster of revisions to be independently understood. Testing should begin by implementing recommended revisions to the small group ministry leadership team. Enabling and equipping the leadership team to practice Spirit-based leadership provides the necessary freedom for the Spirit to creatively shape the small group relational format, to understand and prioritize the unique equipping needs of each participant. The results in terms of leadership practices and the specific content developed through engagement with the Spirit should be evaluated to determine whether leadership and community practices are becoming increasingly effective. Continued Holy Spirit-based leadership should then confirm the testing configuration and priority for the remaining revisions. With each phase of revision testing, the resultant practices must be empirically evaluated and the learnings generated from the evaluation used to refine the next cycle of revisions. Leadership should be aware that these iterative cycles are likely to require an extended period of time for fully transformed practices to mature and take effect. Patience, perseverance and humility will be essential throughout the process.

The reward for this attentive posture is found by recognising the significant contribution that a Spirit-led organic Christian community can make toward fulfilling the gospel mission. This is a community that prioritizes a relational fabric that is composed of numerous, unique Spirit-enriched relationships amongst and between participants and their neighbours. The focus and mission of the community is continually defined by the Spirit through community leadership and organically through each participant. As such the community is a fluid expression of life and truth with Christ that presents as a visible and powerful contrast to neighbouring communities. This is a community whose very expression and presence is holy, miraculous and essential. This Christian community is far more than simply 'social relations connecting people', it has the potential to be a profound expression of worshipful reverence toward Christ that is a vivid, life-giving contrast to the world around it.

CHAPTER 1

CASE STUDY: EXPERIENCING THE ACTIVATE SMALL GROUP SYSTEM

In this chapter, I describe my experience as a participant and ministry leader in the *Activate* small group system.¹⁷ *Activate* is a structured framework used by hundreds of U.S. churches to establish and cultivate the community dimension of church life. I specifically discuss the strengths and challenges for the community participant, their relational engagement, the community identity and its capacity for outreach when *Activate* was used to shape the community. The case study represents the engagements between God and humankind in the first step of Fiddes' method.

Having provided the context for my engagement with *Activate* and a brief review of the system, I offer five unique descriptions of experiences for the community as they engaged with *Activate*. In the first two I describe how the system shaped the participant experience and the impact upon individuals and families. A third experience describes a specific tipping point for the relational fabric of the community when participants rejected the system definition in order to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. In the fourth, I relate the events of a particular small group who similarly chose to follow the Spirit's guidance for community outreach. Finally, I discuss *Activate* leadership practices that simultaneously enabled the system but also constrained participants from experiencing authentic and impactful community.

The central theme running through these experiences is the contrast between deploying a highly structured system versus following the fluid leadership of the Spirit to shape and enable Christian community. The five experiences exemplify Heifetz's perspective on community development where he observes that community is 'humanity coming together in life', in which participants implicitly and intangibly create a system of structure, culture and language and a suite of norms that condition how they live and relate with one another. This system inevitably facilitates living in a form of harmony where the likelihood of experiencing loss resulting from change, a loss that is always perceived as painful, is minimized. Inherent to this organizational system is a self-reinforcing dynamic that causes it to do whatever it can to sustain its status quo, to resist change.¹⁸ However

¹⁷ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Activate – Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura: Regal, 2008, 2018).

¹⁸ Ronald Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009), 50-54, Kindle.

unintended, this systematization, the interaction of the explicit *Activate* structure with implicit human tendencies and needs, reflects my experiences of the *Activate* community.

At a certain point, the authors of the *Activate* system acknowledge that the system cannot enable meaningful relationships; ‘intimacy cannot be forced, it’s the work of the Holy Spirit’, they claim.¹⁹ Extrapolating this thought, I propose that impactful community occurs most effectively when the Spirit is invited to shape the community organically: in and through each individual, in the relational fabric that they establish that subsequently permeates and shapes the entire community. In essence, the community becomes a result of the interaction between the Spirit’s shaping and the pre-defined community system. This project intends to explore the implications of listening and responding to the Spirit’s direction in order to establish and shape a localised Christian community.

1.1 Context

Small group systems and processes have long been a primary ministry tool for establishing and fostering community within the Christian church. Whilst their shape, substance and focus has varied over time, the majority of local congregations recognise the value of an intentional process that helps sustain community life. I share my personal experiences over a seven-year time frame from a variety of roles and responsibilities within the system. Note that the names of the congregation and all participants have been anonymised to maintain their privacy.

I came to Cornerstone Christian Fellowship (CCF) when the church was exactly two weeks old. Prior to its existence, the majority of the Cornerstone congregation had been dedicated members of the Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC). CCF had been birthed from a painful denominational and congregational split in the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) over the place and role of scripture as the sole authority of Christian faith.

Many of the CCF congregation were still grieving from the split. They had lost much of the fabric of their faith community, long-standing relationships, infrastructure and resources. This new congregation was a somewhat eclectic mix. Of the eighty attendees in those first few weeks, there were at least fifteen people who had been elders and leaders at WPC. Nancy and John were the eldest couple; they’d been part of the prior congregation for over forty years. They had taught most of the other CCF attendees in kindergarten and Sunday school. A few families came in entirety: grandparents, parents and children. A

¹⁹ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 25.

significant constituency came hoping that the fellowship might embrace healing and prophetic outreach ministries and saw the fresh start as an opportunity to establish a more charismatic focus. Mostly, though, the congregation came out of relationship, with decades-long memories of participating in small groups, missions trips and simply doing life together.

After a year at a temporary location, CCF relocated to a nearby town roughly ten miles away from where most of the congregation lived. They rented a large warehouse at the back of an industrial business complex and converted it to a gathering space that could hold 400 people. The warehouse provided sufficient room for a large children's and youth ministry, prayer and meeting rooms and a welcome cafe. CCF leadership had thoroughly reviewed contemporary church planting literature that said that providing these facilities would lead to a growing and successful church.

The incremental ten miles required to travel to church might as well have been a thousand miles in terms of the cultural distance between this congregation and the surrounding neighbourhoods. CCF was a generally greying demographic, well educated, most with a university education, entirely Caucasian and largely suburban middle class in socio-demographics. The local neighbourhoods were largely Hispanic and African American, of a lower socio-economic strata and younger age. More than 10% of the community lived below the poverty level. Crime levels were high, and the local education system was judged an 'F' in terms of proficiency.²⁰

In many aspects, CCF already embodied the necessary DNA of the community participant experience. There was a clear sense of identity and belonging given the decision and journey most people had taken to join CCF. The relational fabric, the participant experience, was tangible even to the newcomer. Conversely, the observed expression of the new church was practically invisible given the physical location and the degree to which the congregation failed to resonate with the new neighbourhood and its culture. Finally, the psychological and emotional condition of the new congregation, given the separation from WPC, meant that people were ill-equipped to engage in outreach.

I became connected with CCF for two reasons: the position that they had taken to hold to scripture as the principal authority of Christianity and their willingness to step away

²⁰"Quick Facts: NewCastle County Delaware", www.census.gov, July 25, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newcastlecountydelaware,newcastlecitydelaware.US/PST045218>; "New Castle, DE Livability," Area Vibes, accessed July 25, 2019, <https://www.areavibes.com/new+castle-de/livability/>.

from the comfort and structure of their original church home. It appeared to me that this was a group who were not looking to recreate the same safe environment and infrastructure that they had left. Rather they hoped to become a contemporary and relevant expression of Christianity for the time and place in which they currently found themselves. I was one of only two new attendees when the fellowship began.

This was not a natural community for me. The majority of my faith walk had been based in charismatic churches; this was a far more evangelical expression. For the last twenty years, I had been actively involved in charismatic fellowships that had originally aligned with the Renewal Movement at the Vineyard Toronto Airport Fellowship in the late 90's. Over time, much of that original passion and sense of anticipation had been lost by those churches as their renewal experiences failed to transition into broader revival. A number of congregations had splintered or simply discontinued as the waves of anticipation and enthusiasm receded. My disappointment and questions as to whether we had missed some critical signal that would have facilitated revival led me to enroll in a local seminary for graduate study with the goal of trying to understand how so much explosive zeal and expectation seemed to have yielded such little fruit for the kingdom. Seminary provided only a few helpful insights, perhaps the most formative of which was that when our faith expression became comfortable and convenient, there was little room for the extraordinary to occur. CCF was also not a convenient community for me. I lived nearly forty-five minutes away from the church. Initially I had no relationships with anyone in the fellowship. Involvement in events and ministries would require at least a ninety-minute commute and often even more at peak times of day. Nevertheless, I was drawn to the church.

1.2 *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*²¹

Nelson Searcy is the lead pastor of The Journey Church, an evangelical church established in New York City in 2002. The church has grown rapidly along the northeast corridor of the United States and Florida. With multiple weekend services, the average attendance is over 1200 people per service. Searcy and his team, including Kerrick Thomas, the teaching pastor, classified church development according to eight systems. The *Activate* system of small group development is one of those systems. Searcy originally served at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church and is recognised as one of the architects of 'The

²¹ Searcy and Thomas.

Purpose Driven Life'. By any measure, Searcy and his team are acknowledged as successful innovators in contemporary Christian church growth. Searcy's and Thomas's goal was to suggest a somewhat contrarian blueprint for small group ministry within the church. Based on the results experienced at The Journey, the authors promised that, provided the key elements of the system were closely followed, both spiritual and numerical growth would occur. By leveraging these contrarian ideas or 'mindsets', CCF could expect 1) almost 100% of attending adults to participate in small groups; 2) a continual outward focus and outreach; and 3) a catalytic environment that would naturally nurture and reproduce leaders, all of which would mobilise and equip participants for evangelism and mission²². In 2018, the book was re-released with only minor revisions that were mostly cosmetic in nature, a testimony perhaps to the authors' perspective that the guidance remained as valid and applicable ten years later as it did originally.

In many ways, CCF was perfectly positioned to receive Searcy's message in *Activate*. Whilst clearly still processing the loss of their former church family, the congregation was adrift and looking for an anchor. The comfort offered by using a logical and transparent system was palpable. Simultaneously, there was also the hope of remarkable results and the promise of a new community and church to replace what had been lost.

1.2.1 *Activate* Mindsets²³

Readers of Searcy's and Thomas's book are warned that they should be willing to substantially shift their entire understanding for effective Christian small group community if they are hoping to realize the numerical and spiritual growth that the Gospel described. The authors present a series of mindsets or paradigm shifts that describe how the Activate system works. I summarise these mindsets prior to discussing the CCF experiences of the Activate System.

- Small groups should be designed to focus and accommodate the non-believer rather than the believer. The small group experience should appeal principally to the non-believing attendee. Consequently, the experience is more likely to resonate with their reality of contemporary life rather than an inward focused christian faith with its esoteric language and practices. The goal of the system should be to achieve 100% participation by the

²² Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 17-18.

²³ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 27-108.

congregation. A critical measure of success of the system and of congregational health will be how close to the 100% participation level CCF can achieve with each small group cycle.

- Small groups require at least 12-15 people in attendance in order to create an environment for healthy, sustainable, social relationships. This level of attendance is intended to offset the challenges of conventional groups, typically with 5-7 regular attendees which may be difficult to lead, may experience relational friction, and can often be uncomfortable for newcomers.
- Expect new friendships to form rather than intimate relationships. The small group environment should not be used for intimate relational development. Rather, the experience should be used to identify and initiate friendships, to lay a basic foundation of connection. The authors recommend holding small groups in social spaces within independent locations such as cafes, libraries, sports clubs and homes rather than church buildings. This will allow relations to develop in a non-threatening and spontaneous manner and without expectations of intimacy.
- Small groups should ideally run on a 10-12 week cycle, following the cultural cadence of simply doing life. This mindset appeals to the value and effectivity of the stress-release concept, often experienced when alternating between periods of work or stress and periods of rest or release. This stress-release dynamic creates opportunities for deeper spiritual and relational growth with others compared with an environment when people live in continual or constant stress or rest. For the United States, this stress-release effect has been modeled on the academic semester or trimester calendar with small groups running through two or three cycles a year. With each new cycle, the small groups should be entirely reconstituted with new leaders, members and focus. Additional engagement with the system occurs given people, especially men, are more likely to engage if there is the promise of a short-term commitment that has a clear beginning and end. A by-product of this cadence is the opportunity for small groups to have more topics, greater diversity in the topics and more opportunities for leadership development experiences.
- In sync with the semester calendar, use proven marketing techniques such as high profile, time bounded, promotion campaigns that leverage creative and diverse engagement techniques for a concentrated timeframe prior to the beginning of the semester. Place a heavy emphasis on encouraging promotion and enrollment in order to

maximise participation. Finally set quantifiable metrics and goals for each phase of the process such as engagement, participation etc. in order to measure performance and provide a basis for improvement initiatives.

- Be a church OF small groups rather than a church WITH small groups. Enable, encourage and allow the congregation to fully engage with small groups. Accomplish this by removing the temptation from competing events, programs and ministries. There should be no mid-week service, prayer meetings or worship practice etc. All outreach, service, ministry activity should occur as a function of a small group experience. This facilitates the goal of achieving 100% participation in small groups.
- Appealing to the culture that makes engagement as frictionless as possible, small group commitment should be similarly frictionless. To the greatest extent possible, deploy a one-step sign up process such as online sign-up, catalogs, small group table etc. in order to maximise participation and engagement.
- Implement a systematic approach that begins a 3-4 month cycle of planning, logistics and organization prior to the beginning of each small group semester. Envision implementing the system as a ‘flywheel’. (This is an image from Jim Collins’ *Good To Great* book on leadership.²⁴) that enables easy, efficient repeatability. This should allow the planning team to focus on future system enhancements at least several cycles in advance. Implicit within the flywheel implementation, is the expectation that results are initially slow to materialize but then proceed with increasing momentum. When the flywheel is operating at maximum pace and efficiency, there should be full participation and continually deepening spiritual growth.
- The entire team of church staff should be immersed and involved at all times rather than assigning the small group ministry to a single staff member who executes the ministry as a component of the greater church environment. Additionally, the Lead Pastor must be the greatest evangelist and advocate for the system, continually referencing and promoting participation through the pulpit, in their teaching and through in their conversations with attendees.
- Become comfortable with leaders who are apprentices rather than experts. Given such a highly structured system with processes, frequent coaching and facilitation of small group leaders, allow and invite individuals who have little to no experience to become leader-facilitators of the small groups. Following Paul’s approach of inviting young

²⁴ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

leaders to develop by following him as a role-model. After a few hours of basic training, help novices to develop as leaders through highly structured small group experiences. Essentially these young leaders follow instructions instead of requiring deep experiential learning in order to navigate their role. Secondly provide coaches who regularly interact with these young leaders on a weekly/bi-weekly basis. Finally, trust God to provide the leaders, allow them to select the topics and types of groups.

- The cumulative effect of this apprenticing process and the semester-defined time-frames for each small group cycle is that leaders will naturally multiply themselves, which in turn will multiply small groups thereby spurring growth in the overall church as a result.

The second half of *Activate* offers, quite literally, a step by step guide for implementing the system including charts, ratios, numeric targets and anticipated experiences. Four processes are described (Focus-Form-Fill-Facilitate). Firstly, shaping and *focusing* the small group calendar. Secondly, *forming* small groups using invitational techniques, leader identification and building candidate participant lists. Thirdly promotional and marketing techniques for *filling* the groups and ensuring maximum participation. And finally, ongoing *facilitation* beginning with leadership training, the structure and timing of the first small group meeting, coaching and check-ins. The goals, expectations and activities are laid out for each week from beginning to end. All so that the system is transparent, can be readily repeated and requires minimal re-invention.

1.3 The *Activate* Narratives

1.3.1 Installing *Activate* Small Groups: Shaping the Participant Experience to Fit the System

The planning process for *Activate* was somewhat overwhelming. There were numerous criteria, quotas and metrics, timelines and conditions that required completion in order for the system to succeed. Without the guidance of the former Journey Church lay minister, I'm not sure that we would have put all the cogs and levers of the *Activate* flywheel, (an image borrowed from Collins' *Good to Great* book on business leadership²⁵), in place. And yet the complexity and apparent sophistication of the process offered

²⁵ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 14, 164-178.

confidence and comfort as it appealed to our cognitive appreciation for how and why we would succeed.

As a team we were seduced by the promise of extraordinarily high participation and the growth that would ensue. The idea of using marketing campaigns and processes to promote and engage people in the system seemed logical, intuitive, and was accepted without challenge. We implicitly assumed that our small groups would naturally be appealing to everybody regardless of whether they were believers or not.

For me, the idea that CCF should be a church *of* small groups rather than a church *with* small groups was especially intriguing. Despite the cognitive dissonance I was having with the idea that small groups should not become a forum for meaningful relationships, the idea that small groups represented the community units through which faith, life and outreach should solely occur seemed far closer to the Acts 2:42 ‘church’ model that was so often presented as the pathway to renewal and revival.

In truth, we spent little time considering the warning to embrace the essential mindset shifts. Rather, we chose to be followers, executing the steps placed before us with little consideration for their consequences or impact on the congregation. I think it's reasonable to ask whether we ever really embodied the essential tenets of the system. We chose instead to simply conform to the system.

1.3.2 *Activate* Small Groups: A Challenging Honeymoon!

During the first sign-up month, we leveraged every kind of promotional tool available to encourage people to enroll in a group: videos, testimonies, entire sermons from the pastor, even competitions to see which group would have the most participants. We promoted the fact that the groups were designed to be highly convenient to facilitate attendance given busy schedules. Groups would last no more than ninety minutes and would end after ten weeks. There would be minimal Bible study expectations and maximum social time. If people weren't responding to the message at church, we reached out and personally contacted them.

During that first cycle, 85% of the congregation signed up with an average of ten people per small group. Our first small group cycle consisted of eight group meetings, occurring throughout the week. We had decided that every group would follow Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*²⁶ in order to further reinforce the idea that we were all

²⁶ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

starting this journey together, from the same place. This would foster the sense and evidence of belonging and unity that we were hoping to establish.

In reality, I think we understood that the first cycle was far more about learning the system than seeing the growth for which we hoped. There were only a few new attendees at the church. The Blackaby study was familiar to everyone. The group facilitators were proven leaders, and even then, leadership requirements were light, being more about logistics and administration than spiritual and relational guidance. Essentially the only new component was the *Activate* flywheel machinery to plan, launch and manage the system.

I co-led a group along with one of the church elders. Our attendees were former members of the prior church, so relationships were familiar and easy. Even then, despite this soft landing for our first *Activate* experience, small cracks began to appear within a few weeks of the semester. Attendance quickly dropped to 5-6 people despite the convenient group design. We struggled with the guidance that we should not derail the meeting format by trying to address the concerns and challenges of participants. This became almost impossible when one of the young adults in our group shared some news that would change the direction of her life. There was a difficult meeting where she shared her situation whilst the entire group listened, wanting to comfort and support yet were conflicted by the fear of violating the system and rules. Even we, as leaders, were unsure whether we could or should interrupt the meeting format.

Whilst the actual meeting process seemed to be straightforward, some of the implicit system criteria began to further widen the cracks. *Activate's* perspective, that we were to be a church of small groups, implied that every person who wanted to become a member of the church would need to commit to regularly attending a group. This particular mindset soon raised two difficult situations. The youth pastor and his wife, both of whom had been part of the prior church, felt that they could not find the additional time required to participate in a small group whilst also fulfilling their ministry commitments and taking care of their new baby. Secondly, a group of individuals who had been in a closed small group for many years at the prior church objected to the idea of opening the group up to others (in order to satisfy the twelve or more participant attendance level) and to the idea of reconstituting their group every semester. They simply wanted to stay as they had been, a small group of lifelong intimate relationships.

CCF leadership clearly had the option to allow some flexibility but determined in both situations to hold to the *Activate* design, concluding that small group participation, as it was designed, was required for church membership. In essence, it would be the hill we should die on. Sadly, neither situation resolved well. Within a month, the youth pastor and his wife decided that they would leave; they resigned their ministry commitments and moved to another fellowship. The small group of lifelong friends participated in the system for one semester but then slowly reduced their engagement over the next year until it became evident that they had quietly left the church.

These were certainly costly losses for CCF. The church was without a youth and kids' ministry for more than a year. It's difficult to argue that this would have been the hill that the early church would have died on. Certainly though, the message and understanding that we were a church *of* small groups and that we were trying to reach 100% participation in *Activate* every semester was clearly understood, if not universally embraced.

1.3.3 *Activate* Relationships: Courage to Break the Rules

The church had maintained an attendance of eighty to ninety individuals, most of whom had been in attendance from the beginning. Newer members were generally not from the local neighbourhoods; rather, they were friends or members of the original congregation looking for a new church home. After two years of *Activate*, we had become accustomed to the semester cadence, promotional sign-up month, the 90-minute structured meetings and the larger group attendance. The data consistently showed 80% participation levels at sign-up, although actual attendance on a weekly basis was substantially lower. I, like most others, had participated in two to three small groups a year, as a participant or leader. We had established the social friendship network that *Activate* suggested was the level of relational depth that we should aim for. Our behavioral patterns and expectations were becoming quite consistent. People were happy to move from one group to another, forming cursory social relationships. Meetings typically included a brief fellowship time, a book or video study and a time for prayer. If the meetings ran over, it was often because the prayer requests ran long, given it was the only time people could really express what was on their hearts.

For me, small groups were becoming increasingly perfunctory. My goal became to satisfy the criteria whilst not inconveniencing life. My latest group was relatively small: eight people had signed up to attend, but most weeks there were just six of us. The Sunday time slot was a significant attendance driver for all of us, especially Nancy and John. Nancy

and John were in their 80s, at an age when you might be ready for life to slow down a little and to stay with a familiar community, yet they had willingly stepped away from the previous church family in order to embark on this new journey with CCF.

As we became comfortable with one another, Nancy began to share more of the challenges that the couple were experiencing. Without ever naming it, it was clear that John was suffering from dementia and that he was rapidly deteriorating. Almost casually, she disclosed that she had found John wandering on the street in the early morning not quite knowing where he was. Sadly, he was losing his capacity to communicate, often struggling to find even the simplest words. For several weeks we listened, becoming increasingly concerned as Nancy shared more and more, whilst John appeared less and less present.

The final straw that broke us free from our passive obedience to the system that dictated that we shouldn't develop meaningful relationships or try to help others with their problems occurred when Nancy spoke of the challenges that she and John had experienced traveling home from church the prior week. John, who continued to insist on driving, had forgotten where they lived and had driven more than eighty kilometres past their home. Nancy, who could not drive, had no idea how to navigate back to their house, nor did she have access to a phone in order to call for help. Eventually, they had pulled into a petrol station and asked for help. Having worked out where they lived, a good Samaritan drove back to their house with John following closely behind.

The group finally realised Nancy wasn't just sharing about life; she was asking for help without exposing John to the indignity of what was happening to him. Within a few days, we connected with their children to offer our help and to care and love them in whatever ways we could. The CCF congregation began to intentionally visit them at home for fellowship and also to check that the house systems were in good working order. Clearly, none of this is out of the norm. It's simply what so much of the Christian faith is about. Once this facet of faith kicked in, in many ways countermending the *Activate* programming, we recognised and experienced a sense of true community, the innate desire to genuinely care for one another even when it was not convenient. The opportunity to support Nancy and John had reconnected us to the core relational essence of the Christian faith.

It's valid to ask whether the *Activate* system was responsible for inhibiting this type of relational connection or whether the system and its framework of cultural convenience simply legitimized our innate human tendency for comfort and inertia. How do we, as group participants and leaders, discern if we are simply conforming to the system, implicitly

allowing it to define our relational experience? Conversely, how do we discern the moments when we should step beyond the system in pursuit of relational support and depth?

1.3.4 The Seed-Slingers Experiment: *Activate* or Simply Humanity?

Given CCF leadership had intentionally shaped much of the church as a seeker-sensitive expression of the Christian faith, *Activate* and its mindset that small groups should be located at the margins of congregational life was a natural fit.

Despite this perspective, it seemed that the journey that so much of the congregation had experienced when they separated from WPC had undermined the desire for outreach. Or perhaps again, human desire for personal comfort and stability was prioritized over the Gospel message to reach beyond our comfortable relational spheres. Consequently, there was a clear reluctance within the groups to engage in outreach or service activities. This resulted in participation from obligation rather than a genuine heart response to our own gift of salvation. When we did come together for outreach, it was often the Operation Christmas Child initiative where we filled shoe boxes with supplies that were sent to the developing world. The project enabled the groups to remain within the safety and comfort of the church building and did little to connect us with the surrounding neighbourhood.

After three years at the warehouse location, the CCF congregation had yet to make any meaningful relationships with neighbours, nor had we found any way to serve the local community. There were many intuitively logical reasons for that. None of the congregation actually lived in the area. We were a profoundly different demographic based on socio-economics, ethnicity and age. The church location was not readily visible to the community. These were all reasonable reasons that inhibited the desire for outreach, but no reason that actually prevented it. With a sense of frustration and conviction, a few of us finally acknowledged that we were walking a very comfortable and convenient form of outreach. We couldn't help wondering whether the absence of growth in the church was entirely due to our own reticence to walk out the gospel message that seemed to be characterized by personal risk and inconvenience.

This perspective prompted the idea of the Seed-Slingers group, a group whose explicit purpose was to embark on outreach initiatives into the surrounding neighbourhood. As importantly, Seed-Slingers' implicit focus was to explore, identify and overcome our innate reluctance to risk ourselves in outreach experiences. The small group name essentially captured the essence of the group. Appealing to the parable of the sower, we would attempt to 'sling' the seeds of the Gospel across our neighbourhood in order to see

where and which seeds might take root. Within the group, we encouraged a posture of being willing to fail. We were willing to try anything with little concern for success, reputation or comfort. Our goal was simply to participate in a journey of outreach, recognising that along the way we would learn far more about our own reluctance and inhibitions and, in doing so, we would hopefully learn how to overcome those dynamics that undermined our willingness to engage in outreach.

Surprisingly, the promise of a clear end point, minimal relational expectations, plus a common purpose or mission brought together an interesting and diverse group of participants, each of whom seemed genuinely interested in exploring their personal reluctance for outreach whilst seeing where the Lord might lead us.

We had no guide for the group, and we dispensed with much of the *Activate* infrastructure other than the commitment to try to keep the meeting to ninety minutes. As the group leaders, we felt that the togetherness of explicit, shared and spontaneous learning through the journey was more valuable than automatically following the steps of a structured process. In the first few meetings we explored how we understood outreach, especially to these neighbourhoods, and why we were reluctant. With that small foundation for understanding our reticence, it was time to sling some seed.

It was quickly evident that we knew nothing of the community in which our church had located itself. And this community knew nothing of us. We found a sponsored walk event through the neighbourhood that intended to raise funds for a local shelter and food ministry. It seemed like this could be a good first step, to meet our neighbours where they lived, to introduce ourselves, and to literally walk with them. We were under no illusions that we were going to raise huge sums of money for the shelter or to instantly become bonded with those who walked with us. What it did do was allow us to meet those who lived next door in a public space, to recognise one another and to begin to develop the social relations that Searcy and Thomas suggested were critical. The walk was also a small and safe step for us. We were participating as a group and we wore CCF T-shirts in order to identify where we belonged. It was an admittedly small step that reflected a transformative heart experience that was perhaps much more significant than the outward expression of a sponsored walk.

The walk was straightforward and uneventful despite well-intentioned prayer before, during and after. There was, however, a tangible impact within the group participants. It gave courage and, importantly, a sense of anticipation for the possibility of what could happen. Along with this sense of forward progress, the group also shared their experiences

during the event. Some felt awkward wearing a t-shirt that identified them as part of a community of Christians and feared being challenged for their faith. Others felt joy in being identified with Christ. We did not attempt to resolve or sanitize any of these experiences; rather, we trusted the Holy Spirit to work with each experience within each individual. The goal was simply for each of us to hear how similar our experiences were and for each person to process their internal path to resolving blockages.

Clearly, we still had no relational connection to the community. This reality motivated the group to conduct a rudimentary survey of the community, its demographic composition, its interests and needs. We attempted to gather an understanding of what it was like to live here in comparison to the safe and comfortable neighbourhoods that we came from. Eventually, we converged on the idea of approaching the local elementary school to ask how we might be able to serve them. It certainly helped that the school guidance counsellor was also a committed Christian. Within a few weeks, he had provided us with a list of needs for a number of school children, many of whom lived in dysfunctional or abusive family structures, often at or below the poverty level. Given regulatory constraints, we could neither know who these children were nor identify ourselves as those who would help. We could, however, provide supplies and funds that the school could use to help the children. Having become empowered by the walk, this was not the result the group was looking for. We had hoped to step outside of the shadows, ready to speak and act in the name of the Gospel. Instead, the opportunity looked very similar to previous outreach engagements: raise money, purchase supplies and send them to needy individuals. Nevertheless, this step seemed right, and the group engaged the entire church to collect donations and supplies that could be given through the school counsellor.

Even the mixed feelings about the outcome proved insightful for the group as we spoke of the shift in expectations and willingness to engage. At the beginning of Seed-Slingers, this result would have been deemed a success; now it was a step of faith, a single seed of relationship planted with the counsellor that would hopefully grow into something more. In many ways we were humbled by the realisation that even when we had confronted our own inhibitions regarding outreach, the capacity to engage in a project and to achieve a desired outcome was far beyond our control.

Gratefully, the relationship with the guidance counsellor has blossomed into many fruitful opportunities to serve the school over the last several years. Numerous other groups have served the pupils and teachers at the school with meals, school supplies and Christmas gifts for families in need. Most recently we have served as teacher's aides during the after-

school homework clubs. Over time the teachers have reached out for help in a variety of areas, many of which have resulted in public engagements where our Christian motivation is transparent. Significantly, over the last several years, the relationship with the school, its leaders and teachers has served as a tremendous springboard for introduction and welcome into the community where we have offered support, resources and even holiday celebrations for the children and their parents.

The experience for the Seed-Slinger participants was equally meaningful in that many grew personally as they developed an understanding of their reticence and then their personal outreach style as the Spirit helped them to overcome their inhibitions. Finally, relations within the group deepened given the alignment (or perhaps distraction) of a common purpose and mission.

1.3.5 *Activate* Leaders

The final narrative considers the leadership development process within the *Activate* system. Searcy and Thomas emphasise that small group leaders need only be willing apprentices to satisfy the leadership function, and that as they grow in experience and maturity, they will themselves develop others as leaders. The authors' perspective, that developing and multiplying leaders is the critical element that drives the growth of the church, is predicated on the understanding that all other mindsets are already embraced in order for congregational expansion to occur. Their point is that if leaders and groups are not positioned and postured toward the margins of congregational life, they are unlikely to capture the interest and engagement of new attendees and non-believers. Nor are they likely to draw individuals into deeper relationship with Christ and with the community.

Even these observations reflect a simple but core assumption, that there is a flow of newcomers to the church. Without that flow, the system will simply re-constitute the same set of participants led by the same leaders every semester, potentially yielding only minimal growth with each cycle. Whilst over 50% of CCF attendees have led small groups, CCF attendance has remained between eighty to ninety people each week, in part due to our obscure location, minimal interaction with the local community, and the failure to embrace these mindsets. Despite the promised success, CCF leaders and participants have not established an attractational capacity to draw others to the church.

Two primary leadership roles are described within the system: the group facilitator and the coach who supports a number of small group facilitators with check-ins and visits to each group.

The group facilitator role is oriented toward group administration and logistics, such as study facilitation, meeting logistics and calendar management. Facilitators are neither encouraged nor trained to help others grow spiritually. Nor are they equipped to deal with relational complexities or individuals in crisis. The basic training consists of instruction on meeting logistics, group communications, and how to keep the group dialogue within the guardrails of social relationships. For those facilitators who had not had leadership experiences before, the system has provided a good basic experience of administrative management. Unfortunately, at CCF, there has been minimal leadership development beyond that necessary basic function.

Considering the role of the facilitator in the narratives that I have described, there were arguably necessary opportunities to model and express empathy and support to the young adult whose life direction had changed and to intervene in the increasingly dangerous living situation for Nancy and John. As facilitators, we experienced the inner conflict of only knowing how to navigate the small group system and of not having the skills to guide the group in loving compassion through the situation. All the while we were aware of a deeper sense that we were called to do far more than administratively manage social relationships.

The system also relies on the role of the coach to offer one-on-one support to each small group facilitator. Their responsibility is to meet several times a semester with each facilitator to discuss the health of the small group, leadership challenges and, if necessary, attend the small group to address extreme challenges. For CCF, the effectiveness of the coach role has been complicated by the fact that the coach is not, and cannot be, familiar with the nuances of a particular dynamic or confidential situation within the small group and consequently may not be able to provide appropriate counsel. Situational examples included a participant who monopolized the meeting for many weeks when unable to move past a painful experience. Another participant frequently created a toxic environment by bringing up denominational hurts. Both situations caused group participation to diminish. The coach was unable to adequately advise the facilitator and so intervened by attending the meetings. Whilst the group dynamic improved for a while, the intervention disempowered the facilitator, who became discouraged with the leadership opportunity and the capacity to develop as a leader.

Beyond the lack of growth in attendance that CCF has experienced over the seven years of its existence, there is an increasing sense of fatigue by the congregation when invited to serve as group facilitators. It has become challenging to find new facilitators in

order to help existing facilitators rest. In many ways there is real stagnation within this layer of the ministry, which, given the pivotal contribution of facilitators, prompts the question of whether the entire small group function is also stagnating.

1.4 Finding Value in the *Activate* Experiences

I conclude this chapter with several observations on the overall health of the small group ministry and the resulting community that has developed. From this chapter and these final observations, I pose a series of questions that I will pursue in the remainder of this project.

It's important at the outset to recognise that almost everything the authors identify in terms of our human condition that informs the *Activate* mindsets has been experienced at CCF. There has been increased receptivity to participation given the semester begin-end cadence and the ninety-minute time frame. The opportunity to join multiple and diverse study experiences throughout the year has also been appreciated. The system has become a core part of congregational life. We execute the calendar, promotional process and group format according to its exact prescription. As the authors required, this is a protocol that has entirely shaped the church and its focus. We have experienced both the benefits and the downside of that shaping.

The benefits include the clarity that the entire congregation has for how and where we can plug in to community life. There is a singular location, language and mechanism for participation. *Activate*'s simple structure and format conveys a posture of receptivity and belonging that does not require the newcomer to be fully immersed in and knowledgeable of Christian beliefs. Finally, the opportunity for individuals to explore their leadership capabilities, albeit at an apprentice level, has become a meaningful avenue of personal and faith development. And we have certainly become a church *of* small groups, with no other ministry activity occurring in addition to the small group ministry during the semester.

We continue to have a clear focus on the system metrics, most significantly the semester sign-ups and participation percentages. Each semester, we strive for, encourage and sometimes cajole sign-ups in order to reach eighty percent registration. In reality, weekly attendance is substantially lower, roughly fifty percent. The system provides a strong framework for small group ministry. It is a transparent mechanism for all to follow and through which all may come into alignment and experience a form of community. However, given the relational, outreach and leadership challenges that I describe throughout the five narratives, the question remains as to whether this is all that Christian community

could or should be. Whilst system and structure was a powerful enabler for the *Activate* community, it was also a powerful disabler when it influenced participants' desire or capacity to discern and follow the Spirit's work. Clearly Christian community can benefit from a structured formation approach; however, for it to be fully effective in its expression and mission, I suggest that there must also be an explicit capacity to discern and follow the Spirit throughout all dimensions of the community, regardless of how that may impact the community and its participants. Recalling the authors' observation when clarifying the expectations for *Activate* small group relationships, that 'intimacy can't be forced, it's the work of the Holy Spirit', this project explores the nature and potential impact of Christian community when the Holy Spirit 'works' or shapes the community through its participants, their relations and activity. I explore this idea using Fiddes' integrated method of ecclesiology. The following questions serve to focus the analysis. Questions one and two, reflect Fiddes' second step, dialogical challenge, by examining contemporary and biblical communities. Questions three, four and five represent Fiddes' third step of developing a theologically-based challenge model of organic community. A final question asks how these two community expressions, *Activate* and organic, can converge in order to form a hybrid such that the community is increasingly effective in fellowship and mission. From this question, representing Fiddes' final step, I recommend essential values and practices to achieve effective community.

1. Considering contemporary Christian community trends, do prescriptive systems and structure significantly shape community formation? Conversely, is there evidence for effective pneumatologically-shaped community in today's communities?
2. What evidence and support is there for systems-based and Spirit-shaped community formation in early Christian community expressions?
3. Given this context of community formation from a biblical and contemporary perspective, what activities of the Spirit most relevantly engage participants and the community such that Christ-centred, life-giving expressions can occur?
4. Based on this pneumatological engagement, what is the range of human response to the Spirit in the organic community context? What is the community experience for each participant, the relational fabric within the community, and the nature of its outreach to surrounding neighbours?
5. What are the essential leadership and oversight protocols for this Spirit-directed organic community?

6. In conclusion, what are the implications for the *Activate* small group system from incorporating the pneumatological core in order to form a hybrid of the two approaches to community formation such that this hybrid community becomes relationally and missionally effective?

CHAPTER 2 CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Chapters two and three represent Fiddes' second step, the dialogical challenge. By reviewing contemporary and biblical communities, beliefs, values and practices are identified as candidates for inclusion in a theoretical model of community that challenge the *Activate* community. In this specific chapter I explore four distinct trends that shape Christian community formation: 1) New Monasticism, an intentional community; 2) Fresh Expressions, contemporary community innovations in the UK; 3) online and digital communities; and 4) small group systems, including the *Activate* system, that are largely popular within many mainstream denominations.

The nature of the community that I am considering substantially guides the type and relevance of the contemporary communities that I have selected for survey in this chapter. My specific focus is Christian community that forms and thrives as an expression of participants living vibrantly, day to day as an expression of Christian life in the midst of diverse neighbourhoods and cultures. As such, comparative community models must have a capacity to enable this daily life expression. Each of the above models has the capacity to kick-start or seed the formative components of the organic community that I am considering. Given this gating criteria, the four models represent diverse and contrasting community forms. Digital and New Monastic communities reflect communities that appeal to the margins of society whereas Fresh Expressions and Small Group Systems have mainstream cultural appeal. Fresh Expressions and Digital communities enable participant individuality, fluidity and choice, whilst Small Groups and New Monastics are generally static, structured group expressions.

Considering each community model through the lens of the individual participant experiences, the observed expression and mission capacity, I develop insights that contribute to the challenge model, a Spirit-led organic community. I begin the chapter by establishing the parameters for understanding effective community as a local Christian entity within the context of the broad range of Christian community frameworks and the even broader understanding of generalized community.

As with *Activate*, these contemporary communities utilise a variety of structures and processes to facilitate community. However this review shows that there is no definitive system or framework that delivers an authentic and impactful community. Similar to *Activate*, authors of these community approaches inevitably acknowledge the essential

presence and role of the Holy Spirit for shaping community impact. However, despite agreement with this last observation, little clarity or consistency is offered regarding specifically where or how the Spirit directs the community.

For participants, community is primarily and personally understood through the fabric of their immediate, close relationships within the community and less so by the overall identity and attributes of the overall community entity. For example, the relational quality that individuals have with those they sit next to during community events such as the Sunday morning service contributes more to their community experience than a specific attribute of denominational doctrine. This relational fabric inevitably requires face-to-face engagement to sustain and strengthen it. *Activate's* weekly meeting cadence can certainly facilitate this relational fabric but simultaneously also diminishes it given the directive that discourages relational development. The tendency to foster community relationships and to avoid mission and outreach is evident in all models, suggesting a need for intentional awareness and calibration between the individual's inward versus outward focus and attention to building relationships with those they do not know.

There are no clear culturally-informed criteria or practices that identify how the community can provide an experience of belonging and identity or be observed by those beyond the community as a life-giving contrast to its surroundings. The absence of definitive, empirically observed effective practices points to a need for its shaping by the Spirit. Whilst *Activate* communities borrow cultural paradigms in order to create appeal and transparency, they ultimately fall short of providing an authentic sense of belonging and identity.

Little insight is offered by community practitioners regarding specific leadership skills and capabilities, suggesting no clear formulation for effective leadership. Accordingly, I suggest that the presence of the Holy Spirit in community should also include shaping community leaders as facilitators of the Spirit's direction to the community. Where *Activate's* structured apprentice approach to leadership administration may play an initial role in leadership development, the review points to needing a deeper investment in leadership capabilities. This investment will be discussed in chapter six.

2.1 Establishing The Parameters Of Community

Community is a broad term that represents a diverse set of meanings and intentions depending on the author and the reader. To facilitate the project path, I begin by locating

Activate, in addition to the organic community that I will develop, within the broader context of general community and secondly within the local Christian community context.

Grace Davie's chapter on 'Believing without Belonging' demonstrates the challenge of too tightly defining the meaning of community given the complex interactions implicit within British society that contribute to and shape the community expression.²⁷ Her discussion essentially correlates declining active religious participation through institutional structures with the interactions of economic, political and religious or denominational affiliation in various geographic locations, leading to the conclusion that there is an increasing trend toward individuals professing some degree of alignment with Christianity without any formal affiliation with the institutional church. For these individuals, church, with a lower-case 'c', seems almost synonymous with Christian community. This perspective reinforces the need for community systems such as *Activate* to embody elements that transcend institutional structure whilst continually representing life with Christ. Davie's analysis was conducted in the early nineties. Her question seems all the more relevant today in 2020 given the intentional incorporation of a liquid modern culture within new models of Christian community and church, such as those expressed in Fresh Expressions churches.

Community studies by Walton²⁸ and Wuthnow²⁹ reflect a diverse range of descriptions for community, ranging from Trinitarian emulation, ecclesiastical organisation to simple koinonia in a post-modern context. There is little agreement regarding a concise definition of Christian community. It is these diverse perspectives that reinforce the importance of separating Christian community from its institutional overhead.

For the purposes of this project, I propose to consider a form of community that, whilst it may be facilitated or resourced by the institutional church as the *Activate* system is, it is not contingent upon permission, affiliation or ongoing engagement with a local, regional or national institution. Rather it is simply a group of individuals living day to day in relation according to the beliefs, values, practices and vocations of the Christian faith. This is the very same community that Schwöbel believes occurs as the 'pragmatic un-theological considerations of the necessities of day-to-day living' but that I contend can

²⁷ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 93-116.

²⁸ Walton, *Disciples Together*, Kindle e-reader book, ch9:2529.

²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community*, (New York: Free Press, 1996) in Walton, *Disciples Together*, Kindle e-reader book, ch9:2535.

manifest as a powerful and practical expression of the Gospel when it incorporates a pneumatological core.

Differentiation between Christian and secular community arises from recognizing that the source of the community attributes, identity, belonging and other, is not simply a function of the human condition but rather the God-determined design for human life. Acknowledging this Source critically allows the Spirit to define each attribute. As an example, identity is *identity in Christ* with all of the associated beliefs and values rather than a simple factual or cognitive identity found in a sports team affiliation. Secondly, the Spirit is able to establish and then continually revise the relative importance and nature of interaction that each attribute brings to the individual's experience of community. As individuals are increasingly transformed into the image of Christ, their willingness to embrace the Christian metanarrative expands, which in turn diminishes the desire to express their individuality simply for the sake of autonomy. Initially, the *Activate* community appears to satisfy a number of these criteria, however the rigid structure, diluted emphasis on relational investment and Christian content ultimately undermines its capacity to offer Christo-centric identity and belonging. Instead, belonging and identity develop as a result of engagement with the system.

A conceptual parallel for this community is the nuclear family where there are a finite number of intimate and near-intimate relationships that are active and dynamic in nature. The nuclear community is simply a group of individuals, largely but not necessarily of Christian belief, who conduct daily life in relation with Christ, with one another and with others in their neighbourhood who do not yet belong to the community. Daily life involves both the practical and spiritual, the insignificant transactions and the momentous events, the immediate, the urgent and the planned. It exists without excessive institutional infrastructure to support it or authorize it. In many ways this community develops organically. It is a type of community that appears fully integrated within the neighbourhood around it but that is, in reality, profoundly differentiated from it given the experience within and its mission. This is the contemporary equivalent of the first century alternative family community that N.T. Wright describes as having a symbolic, practical and theological role, that speaks of both the fulfillment of Israel's hope and of a new role vis-à-vis the world. This is a community that has a definitive identity in terms of its Christ-oriented values and socio-political orientation. Belonging to this community means that you may no longer be fully accepted by your original family or community. Furthermore, this

community may even be perceived as a threat given its propensity to challenge or undermine the cultural and social fabric of surrounding society.³⁰

2.1.1 Community Lenses: the participant experience, the observed expression and mission capacity.

The diverse array of community expressions results in an equally diverse array of dimensions and facets by which to understand any single community. To focus the project, I consider community through three principal lenses, the community experience for the *participant*, the *observed* expression of the community as it determines how to align and engage with the non-believer in their host culture. And thirdly, the community's capacity to enable and fulfill an *outreach mission*, both individually and corporately. These lenses are not intended to be an exhaustive description for community, rather they serve to provide a focused, common language for exploring community through the project. Each dimension is described below:

2.1.1.1 The Participant Experience

Community offers a sense of *identity* through a state of commonality with others. If I can see in others identity-related attributes that are also in me, I am able to see who I am.³¹ Christian identity can be found in many forms, for example, expressed belief in Christ, attendance at a specific church, affiliation to a particular denomination, or an aligned evangelical and service mission.

Belonging, an equally important human need, develops from an affiliation and alignment with those with whom we identify.³² Belonging is experienced when the affiliation engages the will of the individual in unions beyond convenience or rational assent. Belonging to a community provides emotional resonance, moral commitment and social cohesion. The experience of belonging becomes even more formative when it centres around deeply-held Christian beliefs and values rather than simple cognitive facts. Harvey enhances the notion of belonging in his work on the church's vocation to essentially *not belong*, in a normative sense, to natural systems such as family, socio-economic, or race, but

³⁰ Wright, N.T., *The New Testament And The People Of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 447-8.

³¹ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 112.

³² Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies*, 19.

rather to belong to those whom are joined in faith and shared expression of this faith.³³ However, *Activate*'s design contradicts this perspective given its intentional adoption of cultural dynamics in order to create a sense of appeal for non-believers.

Community implicitly and explicitly conveys a sense of exclusivity. To the extent that the above concepts serve to enable and reinforce community, they similarly identify those who are not part of the community, the 'other' or 'them'.³⁴ Between the 'us' and the 'other' are boundaries and conditions for marking a community. Most obviously, boundaries can exist in the form of belief, mission or denominational format. Implicitly, boundaries exist with the use of Christian language and terminology. *Activate*'s culturally relevant design is intended to overcome this concern by restraining relations to a shallow level of engagement and by positioning small groups at the boundaries of the church experience.

2.1.1.2 The Community Observed Expression

Today's society is built on individuality and the freedom to continually choose. We are a consumer-based society that reflects a perpetually fluid form, incapable of retaining reliable structure and consistency.³⁵ Bauman characterizes this society as 'liquid modern'. Liquid modernity rejects a metanarrative such as Christianity, given it conveys a sense of direction or non-random course to life which conflicts with the individual's desire for freedom and choice.³⁶

Rejecting metanarratives has significant consequences for Christian community formation. The desire for individuality and choice motivates people to develop multiple identities rather than just one. Multiple identities enable alignment with multiple communities and varying levels of belonging and commitment. The ability to join and leave community now requires relatively little investment and risk. In many practical forms, liquid moderns resist the traditional understanding of belonging to a single community and are, in reality, searching for community on their own unique configuration, that is, 'individually wrapped consumption'. The *Activate* system has readily embraced these

³³ Barry Harvey, "Into lands as yet unknown: the church's vocation of not belonging." *Perspectives In Religious Studies* 41, no. 3 (September 2014): 297-309

³⁴ Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies*, 151.

³⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 197.

³⁶ Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies*, 42.

themes in its use of a semester cadence, managed weekly meetings and shallow relational fabric that offer opportunities for the participant to leave community.

Given the postmodern culture, Christian community as conventionally understood may appear as a translucent entity within the culture. This is certainly the case for *Activate* given its cultural wrapper. In an attempt to find community without sacrificing individual choice, community for liquid moderns often appears as affiliations with multiple open-ended networks instead of sole membership with a single closed community. These ‘neo-tribes’ form based on micro-heterogenization of small fragments of society.³⁷

2.1.1.3 Mission Capacity: Enabling outreach

According to Hirsch, in order to effectively support the gospel outreach mission, Christian community must live as *communitas*. *Communitas* represents the passion, urgency and motivation to move beyond the comfort of a church-in-equilibrium in order to live in a condition of liminality with those outside the community.

For Christian community, the state of being in the world but not of it is often reflected by its logistics and visible expression. The accessibility and transparency of community demonstrated through where, when and how outsiders are received can speak volumes to the world-at-large. The logistics that form these community boundaries can implicitly communicate Hirsch’s notion of *communitas*. Whilst *Activate* has attempted to structure itself to be accessible and transparent, in reality this has become a cosmetic checklist rather than a genuine intent to live in *communitas*.

2.2 The Christian Community Ecosystem

It is helpful to consider where *Activate*, and small group systems in general, are located within the overall ecosystem of Christian community trends. Their location can point to the roles that these systems have played in shaping the experience, understanding and expectation that the Christian church has of community.

Each model represents the amplification of particular aspects of the Christian-culture interaction based on their interpretation of how a New Testament community should represent itself in contemporary culture. New Monasticism shapes community based on the paradigm that Jesus and the disciples challenged societal norms and culture and, therefore, locates itself at the margins of the society. Fresh Expressions shapes their community based

³⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 32.

on a paradigm that the Gospel community established itself within convenient experiences of daily life rather than within institutional programming. Digital communities combine the uniqueness of a personal faith journey and the postmodern desire for individuality and freedom within their expressions by creating an environment where members do not have self-identify and have no explicit responsibility to the community. *Activate* and other small group systems have heeded the desire for convenience and minimal commitment by removing many of the traditional faith markers of Acts 2:42 community whilst still maintaining an emphasis on structured gatherings. Placing the four models against two axes, cultural alignment and structure of engagement, demonstrates the diversity in formation (Figure 1).

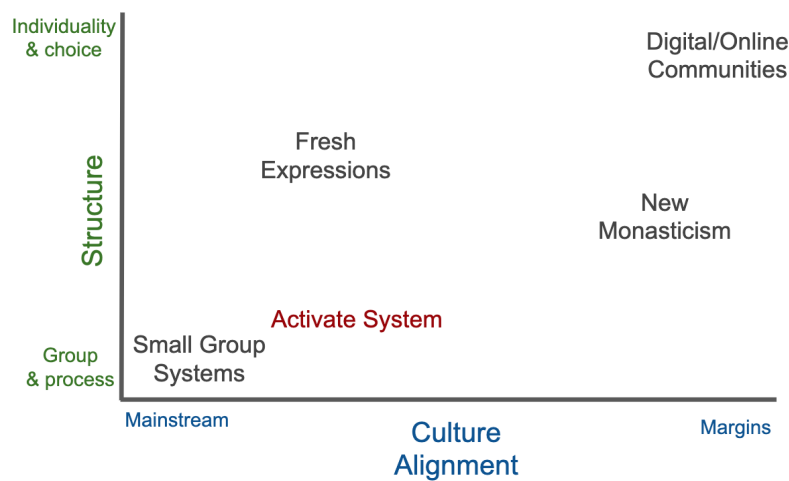


Figure 1: Community paradigms

For each model, I describe its primary elements and then evaluate it against three dimensions: community experience, observed expression, and mission capacity. My consideration is whether these models have effectively facilitated Christian community. I conclude the review by identifying insights that inform Fiddes’ theological challenge model.

2.3 New Monastics, an Intentional Christian Community

David Jantzen suggests that intentional communities have developed from a growing desire by ‘young people (and older folks) who want to create a courageous experiment with their lives by moving into the “abandoned places of the empire” and trying to live by the words and example of Jesus’ in response to the toxicity of a culture that “worships self, money and

power, and scorns the poor”³⁸. The intentional community reaction to culture is the complete opposite of *Activate*'s cultural embrace. Notwithstanding the current heightened reaction to a toxic culture, intentional Christian communities have, in reality, existed in one form or another for decades. The UK Boiler Rooms for 24-7 prayer; Taize, France; Iona, Scotland; the Bruderhof, Germany; and Reba Place Fellowship and Sojourners in the U.S. are among a few of the more mature intentional communities.³⁹

Invariably the decision to establish an intentional community is driven from a peaking reaction to societal conditions and to the church's apparent failure to respond to those conditions. A younger generation, full of enthusiasm and energy, sets out to show the world what life with Jesus looks like. A manifesto of sorts is created that embodies the revolutionary language of the day and represents a set of scriptural principles, usually with the intent to directly mirror Christian life as presented in Luke/Acts.

Intentional Christian communities follow two principles: firstly, a commitment to living as Christ did and learning the one-another skills of community by intentionally sharing life; and secondly, a commitment to reject the surrounding culture when it impedes a Christ-centered expression of life. The demonstration of such sharing is intended as a living testimony of Christ and God's promises. In reality, intentional community is typically represented as people living in close proximity, loving each other in Christ, sharing possessions and resources, serving one another, even sometimes with common work and ministry engagements.⁴⁰

New Monasticism can be interpreted as simply the latest expression of intentional community. Sourced from the cultural frustrations of the late 90s and early 2000s and an insufficient church response, New Monastic founders Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove and Shane Claiborne aligned with Bonhoeffer's prayer that 'the restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old, only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the sermon on the mount, in the following of Christ'.⁴¹ Twelve characteristics or marks of New Monastic communities are identified, a manifesto of mission, so to speak⁴²:

- Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.

³⁸ David Janzen, *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: For Idealists, Hypocrites, and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2013), 3.

³⁹ Eric A. Carter, "The New Monasticism: A Literary Introduction," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, 5, no. 2 (2012): 268-284.

⁴⁰ Janzen, *Intentional Christian Community*, 12.

⁴¹ Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 25.

⁴² Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 38-42.

- Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
- Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.
- Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
- Hospitality to the stranger.
- Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.
- Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.
- Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.
- Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with the support of our local economies.
- Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.
- Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.
- Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

A primary emphasis throughout the marks is the call to share life and resources.

Community members are encouraged to live in close proximity and to share finances, work and day-to-day life activities. The marks are intended to bring multiple benefits, such as an ability to release resources into the surrounding community, the diminishment of individual power, the experiential blessing of giving sacrificially, and, finally, to live in the dependency of trusting God for their daily bread. The specific level of commitment to shared life and resources varies among New Monastic communities. There is typically a minimum criterion of sharing common financial responsibilities. Additional commitment can take the form of individual discretionary allowances or a common purse where no individual has material control or ownership of their resources.

New Monastics point to the growing divisions within the church as a demonstration that the gospel is ineffectual in those specific places and times of division. They hold those responsible for the division as accountable for not embodying the 'grace and truth of Christ's glory when we love one another as God has loved us'.⁴³ Consequently, people from various denominational streams are encouraged to live in community together, to acknowledge their

⁴³ Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 128-129.

diversity in terms of doctrine, and to develop new common disciplines that, in an integrated fashion, honour all of their traditions. In doing so, this form of grassroots ecumenism often brings each community member to the lowest common denominators of their tradition: the essentials, so to speak.

2.3.1 Participant Experience and Observed Expression

On the surface, intentional communities appear to have a capacity to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. In purposefully living in conflict with the surrounding culture, the community must develop clear boundaries and operating conditions for its survival and mission; in other words, it lives in *communitas*.

However, a cursory survey of the history of intentional communities quickly reveals that the shiny naïve glow of generational enthusiasm diminishes as the realities of sin and dysfunction surface within the community. Jantzen, himself a participant in Reba Place Fellowship community, offers a reality check on the blessings and challenges of life in these communities. Whilst acknowledging the essential ‘perichoretic-pull’ of community, he recognises that effective community life must address and overcome a range of potentially destructive tendencies from family-of-origin dynamics, tendencies to flee rather than persevere, a tendency to become a home for delayed adulthood, avoidance of healthy leadership, structure and disciplines, and sentiments of superiority.

Successful community life must grasp and practice mutual submission rather than tolerance and embrace the ordinariness of life in community rather than insist on adrenalin-filled extremes. Often, many of these communities are unable to overcome these dynamics and disband. In reality, the day-to-day life of New Monastic communities looks remarkably similar to intentional communities of prior eras. Whilst the language and identity are contemporary and resonate culturally, especially for millennials, New Monastic communities experience many of the same challenges experienced by earlier generations of intentional communities.⁴⁴

These comments remove the illusion that authentic community occurs simply by people living in close proximity. Close physical proximity can *enable* community, but it is definitely not a guarantee. Human wiring and family-of-origin dynamics can, in fact, make intentional communities a high-risk environment that displays no true sense of identity or belonging. For communities that are successful in developing a strong sense of identity and belonging, additional caution must be taken to avoid an *us vs. them* effect by representing that theirs is the

⁴⁴ Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 38-56.

only authentic form of community. Francis Hall comments that intentional communities are essentially unstable, exhibit constant change and are generally short lived. Often intentional communities can become an inflammatory magnifying glass for the norms of a society that promotes individualism, privatization and superiority.⁴⁵

New Monastics take a somewhat adversarial position toward the culture, considering it to be principally one of fear, the antithesis of a culture of God the Spirit who is love and truth. Their strategy appears to be to avoid the mainstream culture by relocating and engaging at the margin of society where a culture of poverty prevails. According to their leaders, the mission mark '*relocation to the margins of society*' is not only a visible statement of mission and support to the poor and oppressed, but also provides a pathway for an individual's inner transformation to diminish the influence from 'cultural toxicity'. Community members can no longer rely on personal expressions of power such as affluence and possessions. Rather they 'should receive a desert wilderness vision' and see the world and the oppressed through God's eyes.⁴⁶

2.3.2 Mission: Enabling Outreach

The transformational journey for community participants requires intentional service to the surrounding neighbourhood. Additionally, intentional communities believe they represent a message for the larger church as a prophetic expression of kingdom purpose. Wilson-Hartgrove believes that delivering this message to the church is essential for its renewal.

Despite initial appearances, New Monasticism is not a perfect or universal solution for effective community. Community formation based upon a rejection of today's culture raises the question of its appeal, validity and viability to a society that is moving away from a Luke/Acts culture at light speed. Even its core premise or marks to serve those on the margins of society leads to a community form that may have little resonance to those within societal mainstream where systems such as *Activate* have wide appeal. Similar to the *Activate* experiences, whilst New Monasticism's missional focus has high potential for a kingdom result, it requires strong leadership to continually prioritize this focus over an autonomic tendency to prioritize community self-care.

Finally, the stability and longevity of New Monastic communities becomes challenged as its members establish nuclear families that require more time and energy than is readily available within the model. In the end, perhaps only a few will be prepared or called to commit

⁴⁵ Carter, "The New Monasticism," 268-284.

⁴⁶ Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism*, 78.

to this form of community.⁴⁷ Whilst there is clearly a place for the intentional community model, it has not uniquely captured the *essential* drivers of effective Christian community, given that it fails to provide a universally applicable form.

2.4 Fresh Expressions

The report, *Mission-Shaped Church*, was released by the Church of England in 2004.⁴⁸ Its central concern was how and whether inherited (traditional) church models were adequately equipped to engage the unchurched and de-churched given a contemporary culture that had evolved significantly from the culture that had originally shaped these inherited church models, principally the local parish. The phrase ‘Fresh Expressions’ became the buzz word for those that embraced the report findings and hailed a new era in forming church models that were intended to resonate with a postmodern culture and more effectively reach those that found no value in, or worse, had been alienated by the inherited church.

A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, contextual mission and making disciples. It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.⁴⁹

Fresh Expressions appear to build on a central hypothesis: that traditional inherited church models are structurally bound or constrained within a modern culture. Traditional church is identifiable by language, practice and location, such that the inherited church expression is overwhelmed by an insular identity that undermines its effectiveness to achieve the gospel mission. By contrast, the primary purpose shaping Fresh Expressions, FX, is to achieve its gospel mission. FX achieves this purpose by creating church models that are familiar to today’s cultural practices, principally by stepping into the lives of the people they are called to serve, primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.⁵⁰ Fourteen general categories of FX have been identified, ranging from churches that meet in a pub or café to fair trade businesses and Messy Church for young

⁴⁷ Carter, “The New Monasticism,” 268-284.

⁴⁸ Church of England, “Mission-Shaped Church Working Party,” in *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House, 2004).

⁴⁹ “What is a Fresh Expression?” Fresh Expressions, accessed Aug 29, 2017, <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>.

⁵⁰ Anglican-Methodist Working Party, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2012), chap. 1:121, Kindle.

children. FX's overt message or branding is similarly broad.⁵¹ Some clearly identify as a Christian group, some present as a service to the neighbourhood, and some intentionally remove any Christian reference, choosing to simply build relationships.

Given such a diverse sandbox of form, how does FX relate to the function and purpose of Christian community? FX leaders understand that community and mission are symbiotic in nature. As FX participants increasingly form in Christ's image, the expectation is that they reach out, love and serve others both individually and corporately. The more they extend beyond themselves, the more they are transformed into His image. Community is therefore building relationships, practical offers of love and service, prayer, encouragement and support toward and along a Christian faith journey. Implicit within this description is the understanding that FX attempts to minimize any qualifying boundary condition between those who express no interest in developing a Christian faith and those who do.

In a postmodern environment where community might predominantly be a nostalgia-based or imagined experience, FX attempts to shape a community experience that resonates with this culture but simultaneously attempts to 'recapture a sense of real community'.⁵² As of 2012, more than 50% of Anglican and Methodist parishes and churches were already supporting or expecting to support some form of FX initiative in the next two years.⁵³ FX recognizes a more implicit desire for authentic belonging and identity and intentionally structures its experiences to facilitate relationship development through informal times of fellowship and hospitality, often involving a meal! Worship and outreach are woven through these informal times. What does this really look like? Culturally relevant language, terms and logic convey a sense that new designs for community have been uncovered. In my review of many of the FX success stories, a familiar pattern of community reveals itself.⁵⁴ Invariably community begins by moving beyond conventional organizational forms shaped by the building or location, to offering relationship and help on the other person's terms. The expectation is that a natural and spiritual dialogue then occurs in the daily life of journeying together.

In the end, does this expression of community appear any different than Christian community through the ages? Certainly, FX acknowledges the challenges of their

⁵¹ Church of England, *Mission-Shaped Church*, 44.

⁵² "What is a Fresh Expression?" Fresh Expressions, accessed Aug 29, 2017, <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/>.

⁵³ Anglican-Methodist Working Party, *Fresh Expressions*, chap. 2:1038.

⁵⁴ "Stories," Fresh Expressions, accessed Jan 2, 2018, <http://freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/>.

endeavours. In a culture that embraces the absence of hierarchy and organizational fluidity, leadership and structure are required within the FX to maintain a missional focus. In a culture that embraces diversity, FX must find the essential unity that allows them to authentically communicate the same gospel of the inherited church whilst sustaining a representation that is culturally-centric and not one that orients itself toward an inherited church format.⁵⁵ In a culture that prizes individuality and choice, FX must demonstrate the appeal of conforming in discipleship. The complexity and risk in these challenges cannot be underestimated. For the gospel mission to be achieved, the non-Christian elements of the cultural wrapper of FX must at some point, in some fashion, be discarded for the desired unity and alignment that is only to be found in a holy expression of community. Notwithstanding this final point, Fresh Expressions communities seem to provide a more authentic expression of Christian community than those using the *Activate* system. FX attempts to be culturally relevant whilst placing no restrictions on the relational fabric, group longevity and ultimate intention of representing life with Christ.

2.4.1 Participant Experience and Observed Expression

Fresh Expressions is courageously attempting to be a culturally aligned Christian community. Their approach is to *begin* as a wholly culturally aligned community that *over time* matures into a Christian community that *selectively* aligns with the culture but now prioritizes alignment with Christian beliefs and values.

Consequently, in Fresh Expressions *community* is easily accomplished. FX has intentionally minimized any resemblance that their identity may have to traditional Christian community models. Meetings and gatherings are often located and scheduled to maximise access and acceptance, leveraging third space locations such as coffee shops, pubs or community centres.⁵⁶ Traditional membership criteria are waived, conveying a message that everyone belongs. The intention is to convey that there is no other and that everyone can experience support for their *personal* faith journey on their unique terms. The intention invites the concerning question of whether the Christian faith is ever intended to be a solely *personal* journey and unaided by others. Critics further suggest that a symptom of ascribed membership is that the community self-selects only those who choose not to belong to

⁵⁵ Anglican-Methodist Working Party, *Fresh Expressions*, chap. 5:2612.

⁵⁶ Martyn Percy, "Old Tricks for New Dogs? A Critique of Fresh Expressions," in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (Norwich: Canterbury, 2008), 30.

conventional Christian community. As a result, over time there can be a loss of identity, belonging, stability and commitment to the Christian mission.⁵⁷

Whilst *community* may be easily achievable in FX, *Christian* community seems much harder to accomplish. Given that Christian and secular community are radically different, it is simply a matter of time before the postmodern experience of identity and belonging is challenged, as the individual must choose whether and how to transition to Christian community. Hull rightly amplifies the challenge for the individual in his critique of *Mission-Shaped Church's* discussion on inculturation when he points out that it fails to explore whether there are constants of the Christian faith that transcend the cultural context and whether these constants can provide a pathway of continuity that eases the journey from secular to Christian community.⁵⁸ Notwithstanding Hull's critical theological analysis, Fresh Expressions is relying on a far more basic reality. At the moment that a transition to Christian community paradigm becomes clear to the participants, they are already heavily invested in their personal spiritual journey; their journey is as much intertwined in the lives of others as it is personal. In all likelihood, the participants will therefore choose to remain in the FX community, as is their postmodern right to do. It's not an unreasonable answer, although the magnitude of the transition should not be underestimated.

2.4.2 Mission: Enabling Outreach

Leading others along the path toward faith in Christ requires substantial maturity and commitment to the mission from those who have already traversed it, perhaps far more maturity than many FX participants have. Indeed, missional effectiveness hinges on FX capacity to introduce the community they serve to an authentic relationship with Christ in the midst of their personal relationships. Such personal relational equity between believers and non-believers will likely be significant and may prove too costly to be risked with unsolicited introductions to Christianity. Martyn Percy builds further on the risks of immature FX leadership that does not hold the community to the fullness of the gospel, suggesting that the fascination with new and alternative church could easily result in a group rooted in postmodern individualism and inward fulfillment with minimal accountability and connection to the broader church; in short, Lone Ranger churches.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Percy, "Old Tricks," in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 32-55.

⁵⁸ John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 26.

⁵⁹ Martyn Percy, "Fresh Expressions: A Journey into Implicit Theology," *Implicit Religion* 12, no. 3 (2009): 27-39.

Fresh Expression communities are indeed complex entities. In choosing not to identify with traditional markers of Christianity, they must sensitively and effectively navigate the tensions of being both ‘friend of sinner’ and ‘follower of Christ’. Mark Mason reflects this tension by challenging each FX community to live in the *distance* between Hauerwas’s ‘community of character’, a community that lives as a visible prophetic and priestly ministry following Christ, and Derrida’s ‘community of question’, a community living in humility, openness and willingness to dialogue over the very beliefs by which they are defined.⁶⁰

For those who have grown up in denominational church, FX may seem radical and creative and appear to have developed solutions to overcome the challenges that impede the inherited church. Little is written on the reasons for FX failures. Might we see the same organizational forms and intentions failing as often as succeeding?

Through the lens of non-denominational Christianity, much of the FX theory and practice is logical and familiar, suggesting a perspective that it is the overhead and structure of denominationalism that has inhibited the gospel fulfillment directive. If there is any truth to this perspective, we must ask whether the inherited church is simply a little stale rather than requiring an entirely fresh expression for church. If the former is actually a truer statement, then perhaps much can still be redeemed from inherited church models.

Davison and Milbank’s *For the Parish* harshly rejects the entire notion of Fresh Expressions, given a theological perspective that the form and content of Christianity are inextricably linked.⁶¹ Therefore, only the parish church model can reflect the full Christian expression and serve as an essential resource for mission in the future. They further claim that a culturally aligned FX is so tailored to a specific moment that when the situation changes, the FX will be ill-equipped as a resource, whereas the parish church has a depth of history and experience to adapt to changes. Finally, the notion of a specialized, homogenous group undermines the understanding of the church as presented by Paul. Despite a spirited defense of the incumbent parish church model, its rich experience, resources and expertise in crafting expressions embodying both form and content, the critique fails to convincingly address the elephant in the living room of why the incumbent

⁶⁰ Mark Mason, “Living in the Distance Between a ‘Community of Character’ and a ‘Community of the Question,’” in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 87-103.

⁶¹ Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 90, chap.1:295; chap. 4:1840, Kindle.

model is failing if Grace Davie's views on the increasing trend toward Christian alignment without formal affiliation are to be believed.⁶²

To a reasonable degree, the concerns raised in *For the Parish* are valid. Their concern seems to reflect a perspective that the FX has no capacity or willingness to discern the Spirit's guidance and that this equipping would motivate an evolving form and function as the FX learned from engaging in its mission. These concerns are equally as valid, however, for traditional church models. To the extent that either a traditional church model or a FX rejects the ongoing direction of the Spirit, then both expressions risk becoming stale, irrelevant and yield no fruit. In yielding to the Spirit, both expressions can evolve and be equally effective. In hindsight, this yielded posture contributes to the traditional church's experience, tradition and expertise.

I do not believe that these concerns are so substantial that meaningful opportunity cannot be found through exploring and learning from the FX initiative. As with most human systems, it is often necessary to propose a dramatic shift away from it in order to motivate constructive enhancement to the incumbent. If, in fact, the inherited church is just a little stale, then FX might be the necessary shock to redeem the parish model system. In many cases, I suspect that FX is delivering exactly this shock and that Fancourt's assessment in *Brand New Church?* that FX has simply re-organized and rebranded what the church has always done, is accurate. 'Like the first disciples, faithfully speaking and practicing their flawed understanding of faith in public for the flourishing of all God's people, FX are simply doing what every church is doing.'⁶³

2.4.3 Contemporary Community Formation Concepts

Within the Fresh Expressions movement, three formation concepts are frequently incorporated: first, liquid church, maintaining a fluid community form; second, core DNA that is missional in nature; and finally, maintaining a physical location, a third place, for relating beyond the four walls of the church building. Each attribute is briefly reviewed and its contribution to shaping Christian community is explored.

2.4.3.1 Liquid Church

In 2002, Pete Ward published *Liquid Church* (LC), a theoretical discussion of church configured for the postmodern context. Ward re-cast missiology, ecclesiology, Christology and

⁶² Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 93-116.

⁶³ Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church: The Church and The Postmodern Condition* (London: SPCK, 2013), chap. 6:1847, Kindle.

the Trinity through the lens of liquid postmodernism. The net result was a hypothetical form and definition for church where church occurs every time Christ is *communicated*. Church does not happen in buildings or gatherings, but rather through open-ended informal networks of communication. Rather than going to church, the emphasis is on living as Christ's body in the world. Here, more than any other model, church and community are synonymous.

Worship is decentralized and reworked in ways that are designed to connect to the growing spiritual hunger in society rather than being a place for the committed to belong. Citing Dunn's work on unity, Ward claims that the church should be based on visible allegiance to Christ through the presence and gift of the Holy Spirit rather than from a geographic or political allegiance. The Christian meta-narrative must be creatively and contextually re-defined as commodities, such that the Christ-event can be easily digested and communicated from one individual to another. LC is effective in its gospel mission by communicating these 'commodified' Christian products through the open-ended informal networks.⁶⁴ The concepts of liquid church, especially of fluidity and flow, strongly support the concept of Spirit-shaped organic community that requires a capacity to remain flexible and responsive to the Spirit's leading. Here again, *Activate* fails to provide this community capability given its static structure and approach. Even its appeal to cultural relevance is appropriate only for current conditions and risks becoming stale and outdated within a short time.

2.4.3.2 Missional in Entirety

Alan Hirsch wholeheartedly agrees with many of the Fresh Expressions practices. He contends that contemporary church expressions must form around a missional ecclesiology, shaped by the model of Christ incarnate and His followers living under the oppression of the institutional religion and authorities of the day.⁶⁵

Hirsch's model hypothesizes that there is a loss in missional effectiveness from an inwardly-focused community-in-equilibrium when compared with a *communitas* expression. Hirsch's point directly undermines the *Activate* paradigm that attempts to form and maintain community with minimal relational intensity. He claims that whilst church must certainly live in the third spaces of society and retain a liquid structure, more importantly the church must live in constant liminality in order to maintain the appropriate urgency and motivation

⁶⁴ Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 34-47.

⁶⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 43,133.

to continually extend beyond itself into society. Hirsch eloquently states, ‘Living as such an incarnational community will result in us expressing that strange kind of holiness that was so profoundly attractive to the nonreligious, and yet offensive to religious ones.’⁶⁶

The practicality of expecting a state of *communitas* to continually exist is unrealistic given the potential for fatigue, burnout and a resultant need for community self-care. The insistence on *communitas* also fails to recognise the attraction of a community-in-equilibrium for the individuals who are themselves constantly in liminality and seeking a place of rest and refuge. I suggest that Effa’s view of missional church movement and architecture that recognises and acknowledges the importance of the work of the Spirit within the institutional church body as much as the work of the Spirit in and through those that reside within the margins of societal structures is more realistic.⁶⁷ Essentially, a more fruitful understanding of community life is to acknowledge the ebb and flow, that is, the contrast between *communitas* and rest for each individual and, consequently, for the community as a whole.

2.4.3.3 Third Place

Least controversial in Fresh Expressions practices is the concept of holding church in third places. Oldenburg suggests that society has implicitly established locations that act as anchors for community life and enable broad and creative interaction.⁶⁸ Such third places, essentially the third location where time is spent after home and work, might include the local tea or coffee shop, the mall, the gym, a bar or restaurant. Third places are increasingly acknowledged as valid and useful locations for Christian community. *Activate* has certainly endorsed the use of third places as safe, comfortable spaces for non-believers to engage with the small group.

Myers connects the role of third places, which he further divides into social and personal space, to community formation and development through the communication theory work of Edward Hall.⁶⁹ *Social space* characterizes the small talk of fellowship that might occur before and after the Sunday service. Whilst appearing superficial in nature, these frequent interactions allow people to live as neighbours, doing life alongside one another without the invitation or

⁶⁶ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 143.

⁶⁷ Allan Effa, "Pub Congregations, Coffee House Communities, Tall-Steeple Churches, and Sacred Space: The Missional Church Movement and Architecture," *Missiology* 43, no. 4 (October 2015): 373-384.

⁶⁸ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 20-42.

⁶⁹ Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 41-73.

responsibility of expecting anything more. People are able to authentically self-identify, building self-esteem and confidence, and to evaluate others for acceptance into their personal space. *Personal space* is the space of close friendships, sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences. Often personal space is presented as necessary for Christian community. More often than not, personal space relationships are also misunderstood to be, or encouraged to become, intimate relationships. Bookending these two spaces are public space, one-time or episodic interactions, and intimate space, where relational depth and intimacy exist with just a few individuals.

2.5 Digital or Online Community

That online Christian community exists and is expanding needs no proof.⁷⁰ Many churches, ministries, charities and all forms in between have incorporated the internet, webcasts, email, text messaging, and other digital formats into their core platform for relating with their membership and to those beyond. Technology solutions generally fall into one of two categories: content communicators, where predefined content is simply transmitted electronically, and content creators, where content is dynamically created appropriate to the context of the interaction. Note that this material was developed prior to the Covid-19 lockdown and therefore does not incorporate more recent perspectives and experiences of online communities.

2.5.1 Content Communicators

Content communicators have enabled Christian online communities since the 1980s. Despite this longevity, the question remains as to whether these online communities can truly provide the same religious and relational experience that occurs in an offline setting.⁷¹

A review of technology deployment amongst U.S. mega-church institutions shows no shortage of content communication applications. Many of these applications attempt to mirror the brick and mortar forms within their institution. Websites, emails and blogs, and offering and donation applications have almost uniformly replaced the church bulletin, pastor's newsletter, and tithe and offering mechanisms. It's now possible to remain current on congregational life, dialogue with the pastor, experience the Sunday morning gathering, worship through the

⁷⁰ Rachel Wagner, *Godwired: Religion, Ritual and Virtual Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 126-161.

⁷¹ Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59.

offering and relate with a small group of congregants entirely via email and blogs, all without ever physically engaging with another human being. Multi-campus churches such as Saddleback Church and LifeChurch.tv coordinate their Sunday gatherings through a simulcast of the message, broadcast from the main site to all other locations.⁷² Each campus service follows a predetermined musical worship time which concludes with the broadcast of the message on large projection screens. For those that are unable to attend the service in person, the message is live-streamed and made available for later viewing from the church website. Small group ministries are organized, coordinated and led through websites with access to training materials and blogs. LifeChurch.tv, a forerunner in leveraging third space, encourages its membership to celebrate the value of the global community that technology has allowed them to establish! For each of these institutions, the physical expression continues to be maintained in addition to these online applications that originate from it. Clearly, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need and validity of online community experiences.

Online Christian communities also operate as virtual missionary teams. In 2010, Internet Evangelism Day encouraged Christians to engage in many of the social media networks to witness, dialogue and develop relationships with non-Christians. The multi-player online gaming environment includes any number of games that allow players to form teams who then challenge others in competition. Guild Wars is one such game where a guild of Christians formed to play and simultaneously evangelise members of other guilds;⁷³ their guild name is Mark Sixteen Fifteen, ‘go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every living thing’.

I-Church was launched by the Church of England, in Oxford, UK in 2004. Seven hundred people applied to become community members. At its launch, the Bishop of Dorchester had the foresight to emphasize the importance of bringing a Benedictine spirituality to the community in order to foster its stability by remaining committed, regardless of irritation or disagreement.⁷⁴ I-Church leadership was clearly all too aware of the ease with which the community could dissolve given its postmodern membership DNA. I-Church was developed to provide a Christian community for people who are not able to belong to congregation physically, additional support for those who do not find all that they need within their own worshipping community and a supportive community for those who travel and cannot maintain relationships within a geographically based community.

⁷² For further information, see RiverCross Fellowship, www.rcfde.org; Saddleback Church, www.saddleback.com; Lifechurch, www.lifechurch.tv.

⁷³ Wagner, *Godwired*, 137.

⁷⁴ Ailsa Wright, “I-Church,” in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 124.

I-Church is generally modeled on a traditional brick and mortar church and community experience. Blogs, chat rooms, prayer support, music and visual arts, and live daily worship experiences for both UK and U.S. participants are all available on the website. Dialogue and interaction on the site are widely encouraged. A pastor and team of volunteers lead various pages (aka ministries) of the site and moderate primary venues for compliance with the church guidelines. Similar to a brick and mortar form, I-Church provides a sanctuary and a place for discipleship, refreshment, and support. Members of I-Church testify to the substance and authenticity of their Christian experience.

I-Church demographic and membership data empirically show the contribution that online community brings to the offline church. As of 2008, 300 people had become members with roughly half of the membership visiting the site each month. Fifty-eight percent of the members were UK-based and 19% U.S., with the remainder from across the world. Forty-four percent looked to I-Church for additional support beyond their brick and mortar church. The majority of the membership attend or have regularly attended a brick and mortar church in the past. Only 16% suggested that I-Church could become their primary church home. For those I-Church members who did not currently attend a brick and mortar church, health concerns were cited as their primary reason.⁷⁵

2.5.2 Content Creators

Whilst content communication technology is fairly widely deployed, a more concerning trend is the advent of content creators, where technology creates contextually relevant interactions. These applications emulate personal relationships in and *with* the online realm. Chat-bot applications are software programs that dialogue with a person and simultaneously learn how to appear increasingly human in the nature and content of their response. These applications are designed to represent a sentient and caring other with whom to dialogue. Whilst still rare, religious chat-bots such as the ‘Divinator’, ‘ZenCat’ and ‘Brother Jerome’ (Christian monasticism) are available to discuss their brand of religion with you. Sylvie, a chat-bot developed by the Jesus Army in the UK can lead you through the process of salvation.⁷⁶

Still other virtual applications are designed around a specific element of Christian faith. ‘Penance’ is an application that helps Roman Catholics understand and repent for their sins,

⁷⁵ Wright, “I-Church,” in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 124-128.

⁷⁶ Wagner, *Godwired*, 143-147, 150.

while, ‘Note to God’ invites people to type and send their prayers to God.⁷⁷ Surprisingly, the application was endorsed by a Roman Catholic bishop. The theological dissonance of needing to hit *send* to the omnipresent God seems to have been lost on the application creators and participants.

With each of these applications, there is a clear shift from, and many would say deterioration in, the personal experience and value of interaction with God and human community.

2.5.3 Participant Experience and Observed Expression

The experiences of I-Church and Lifechurch.tv demonstrate that community does not necessarily require a structured physical form and time in order to exist. Participants certainly appear willing to invest in each other’s lives in a relational fashion, signaling a desire to experience some level of community.

Rachel Wagner suggests that the heart of the issue regarding the validity of online community is determined by what the definition of community actually is to the participant. If the primary dimensions of community are a feeling of membership and influence, an integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection, then these dimensions do not necessarily require physical proximity. They suggest that if the experience of belonging is legitimate and people choose to commit to it, then the community *is* genuine.

Lifechurch.tv continues to position the online community as an extension of the offline community. Only a small percentage of I-Church membership is willing to consider the online community as their primary church home. This is consistent with research findings that while people may join online communities for a specific need, the experience does not fully satisfy their desire for face-to face interaction and a shared, embodied worship experience.⁷⁸ This highlights an important insight for shaping community that the authors of *Activate* have recognised: whilst the online channel may expand access to community and frequency of interaction, it does not necessarily offer the same relational quality as offline, face-to-face experiences.

2.5.4 Mission: Enabling Outreach

Online community proponents suggest that physical proximity may actually inhibit community effectiveness, especially for those seeking to join the community. They reason that

⁷⁷ Note To God, notetogod.com, Mar 21, 2020.

⁷⁸ Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 63.

anonymity may encourage some to share more openly in that they are able to choose how and what to self-disclose without the vulnerability of proximity.⁷⁹ This is a similar parallel to *Activate's* shallow relationship directive. Individuals can function in a variety of technology-enabled social networks with varying levels of commitment based on their unique need or preference. The conventional understanding of identity and belonging is weak and unstable in an online setting and clearly aligns with the postmodern liquid culture. For the individual, online and offline relationships often blur with minimal distinction between their online or offline context. Thus far, there seems to be no valid response to the issues of integrity and authenticity in identity misrepresentation or to the desire for evolving alignment and transparency of the Christian faith.

Whilst online communities may result in new, culturally appealing, experiential designs, the essential DNA of community, that is, the desire for quality social relations, remains unchanged and unsatisfied by these new designs. Ultimately, Christian community requires a level of relational depth that can only be found in real-life engagement. Is there ever a place for online community in the Christian faith? Yes; just as phone communication can maintain relational continuity, online communities provide a similar supplemental benefit.

As for content creator applications, clearly this is uncharted territory! In their paper, 'The Third Spaces of Digital Religion', Hoover & Echichaibi rather enthusiastically offer that third space does not simply facilitate compromise and re-shaping of religious form, but overwhelmingly enables a re-imagining of form and expression!⁸⁰ I can only hope that this re-imagining will be reoriented to develop deeper expressions of corporate Christ worship rather than enabling us to avoid meaningful and transformative engagement with one another.

2.6 Small Group Systems

The use of small group systems is widespread and, arguably, the most prolific tool for community formation in the contemporary Christian church. John Wesley's system of societies, classes and bands empirically demonstrated the value of small group systems for developing effective community and mission. From the early 1900s, small groups were used as the platform for Bible studies to socialize the ethics and values of the church. As small groups became a familiar organizational model, they began to serve as a platform for pastoral care and community where richer and deeper relationships could develop and

⁷⁹ Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 128-136.

⁸⁰ Stewart M. Hoover and Nabil Echichaibi, "The 'Third Spaces' of Digital Religion – Draft," Center for Media, Religion and Culture, University of Colorado, Boulder, 2012, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.colorado.edu/cmrc/2016/09/01/third-spaces-digital-religion-draft>.

people could receive support. More recently, the small group infrastructure has been appropriated as a simple relational foundation for people with common interests or locality to meet. Perhaps the most successful application of small groups occurred through Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea, where over 40,000 small groups were maintained for their 750,000-member congregation.⁸¹

Churches frequently leverage small groups to build alignment around their beliefs, values and social justice initiatives. As the church has re-discovered its call to mission and discipleship over the last several decades, small group systems have attempted to similarly re-align their content and context. The *Activate* system is a contemporary expression of this form.

Small group systems have become firmly embedded within church organizational models, with 35-40% of British church-goers indicating that they participate in a small group.⁸² Small groups have played a role in the successful growth of the Alpha course, Restoration, and Network church movements. Similar participation levels are observed in U.S. churches. Rick Warren's Saddleback Church saw the number of people engaged in small groups increase from 10,000 to 20,000 in just two years.⁸³

2.6.1 Cell UK

Developed by Laurence Singlehurst in 1995, Cell UK is a highly effective small group system used widely throughout the UK. The formational principle is that each small group should express the full DNA of the Christian faith, just as a human cell holds the entire DNA of the human body. Meetings follow a simple structure of welcome, worship, Bible study, prayer, and finally mission. The small groups, or cells, are structured toward application, witness and outreach guided by five key values:⁸⁴

- Jesus is at the centre of the gathered believers and the individual's life.
- Community is fostered through relationship.
- Members can grow in their Christian walk and knowledge of God.
- Members can be released to minister to others in the Body of Christ.
- Members can seek to bring others to Christ.

⁸¹ Roger Walton, *Disciples Together* (London: SCM Press, 2014), chap. 6:1652-1725, Kindle.

⁸² Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 6:1785.

⁸³ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 42.

⁸⁴ Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 6:1673-1688.

The model has been effective in that it encourages the members of each cell to take some leadership responsibility during the meeting. This type of engagement, along with its more informal setting, motivates members to engage their faith on a daily basis rather than only at scheduled or programmed events such as the Sunday service. Cell UK has certainly identified and developed some valuable infrastructure that facilitates effective community.

2.6.2 The *Activate* System in the U.S.

In this section, I briefly summarize the structural paradigms that differentiate the *Activate* system from conventional small group formats. Practically speaking, *Activate* attempts to embody not just a cultural dynamic but also components of our human wiring. The system follows the academic calendar. Groups meet weekly for ten to twelve weeks and then rest for four to six weeks. Meetings last for no more than ninety minutes. The authors suggest that time-bound meetings and semesters reflect the natural rhythm of maximum human growth through the stress of meeting for a semester and then release during rest periods. A simultaneous benefit is that the structure offers an escape route if there are challenging relationships or individuals within a group. At the end of the semester, the group dissolves with an opportunity to reconstitute for the next semester.⁸⁵

The authors suggest that small groups are solely a platform for forming friendships; there should be no intention or expectation for intimate or lasting relationships. They claim that ‘intimacy cannot be forced, it’s the work of the Holy Spirit’.⁸⁶ Groups are structured to intentionally minimize relational intimacy by requiring at least ten to twelve people to attend, physically reducing the time and opportunity available for deeper dialogue. Activities and discussion are shaped to foster conversation and fun rather than personal sharing. The only expectation is that these systems provide constructive *pathways* toward meaningful community.

Criteria for joining, participating and leading a small group are intentionally simplified and minimized. The focus of a group can range from the traditional Bible study to entirely social activities such as playing basketball with a prayer at the end of the game. Leaders are qualified simply by indicating a willingness to host and facilitate rather than having a mature walk in faith.

⁸⁵ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 30.

⁸⁶ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 25.

Churches are encouraged to reinforce the importance of the system and the resultant community by configuring the church as a *system* of small groups rather than a church with small groups as a corollary. Ministry activity can only occur through a small group, so that people are not pressured to choose how to allocate their limited time between ministries and small group participation.

2.6.3 Participant Experience and Observed Expression

Despite well-intentioned attempts to reconfigure small groups with a missional emphasis, small groups have become primarily successful in fostering community and spiritual growth in participants.⁸⁷ Researchers found that small group participation has meaningfully enhanced individuals' faith experience, with more than 80% of participants feeling closer to God and expressing a deeper love toward others. Disappointingly, however, spiritual growth has not necessarily translated into greater Bible knowledge or sustained behavioural changes reflecting Christian values of outreach and social justice.⁸⁸ This has certainly been the case for *Activate* at CCF.

Additionally, the diminished criteria for mature Christian leadership often results in individual and corporate growth that is random and only minimally centered on Christ. Bunton's analysis of small group evolution highlights the implications of diminishing the role of developing and maintaining qualified leadership over small groups. He observes that without effective leadership, small groups lose their sense of identity, awareness of key values, discipleship path and mission. Ineffective leadership also reduces the capacity for leadership modeling that critically provides the vital training platform for small group participants to develop their own leadership gifts and missional call.⁸⁹ Again, *Activate*'s approach to leadership development aligns with Bunton's conclusions.

Contemporary small group community typically reflects postmodern culture, fluidity and individuality. Participants no longer conform to group norms of Christian value; rather, they seek to highlight their individuality in the presence of others, looking for support and affirmation as opposed to challenge and transformation. Even more concerning is the tendency to avoid reinforcement of core Christian attributes, especially those that seem unpalatable to our personal comfort. Walton concludes that 'small groups can be seen as

⁸⁷ Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 6:1767.

⁸⁸ Bill Donahue and Charles Gowder, "Small Groups: The Same, Yesterday, Today and Forever," *Christian Education Journal* Series 3, 11, no. 1 (2014): 118-133.

⁸⁹ Peter Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups – The European Church from Luther To Wesley," *Christian Education Journal* Series 3, 11, no. 1 (2014): 88-106.

both glue and social solvent'.⁹⁰ I suggest that Walton's observation could be just as readily applied to the *Activate* community.

2.6.4 Mission: Enabling Outreach

Mission engagement often becomes an obligatory and programmed visit, for example, to a local food kitchen, rather than an essential component of community life. In fact, research has shown that the few occurrences when small groups voluntarily acted *missionally* were when groups were loosely structured with minimal oversight, emulating the culture rather than fulfilling effective Christian outreach.⁹¹

In conclusion, if community is entirely defined in the eye of the beholder, then contemporary small group systems such as *Activate* are an effective model. For those who want a basketball game once a week, community is available. For those who desire lasting relationship in Christ and with others, the system leaves much to be desired. For most small group systems, revisions driven from the pressure to culturally align have thoroughly undermined the original intent to be both Christian community and missional to their surrounding neighbours. *Activate* is no exception to this situation.

This inadequacy is concerning given that many new or fresh expressions of church are often birthed from these small groups. All is not lost, however. The proven success of Wesley's original model suggests that the core infrastructure is not at fault, but rather the culturally driven enhancements. Two relatively simple steps may be all that is necessary to redeem the potential for small groups to be both authentic community and missional: firstly, by addressing leadership deficiencies and secondly, by exercising greater discernment regarding which aspects of the culture are embedded within the system.

⁹⁰ Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 7:2052, 2070.

⁹¹ Donahue and Gowder, "Small Groups," 118-133.

2.7 Observations Relevant to Questions Raised by the Activate Case Study

Features and observations of the community models (Figure 2) are presented below.

	Small Group Systems	New Monastics	Fresh Expressions	Online
Source	Wesley's Societies/Class/Bands system	Twelve marks of New Monasticism - to share life and resources	Mission-Shaped Church, Church of England, 2004. 14 categories	Replication of 'brick and mortar' onto a digital platform, often as an adjunct rather than stand-alone.
Unity/alignment expressed as	Explicitly - through programmed participation. Implicitly primary beliefs and values shaped by attending institution	Life together and purposeful engagement with the community	Minimal explicit Christian form, 'alignment' exists through coming together for relationship development with non-believers	No explicit or tangible form. Implicitly, common beliefs/values
Participant				
Unit of community	Facilitated small group	Intentional community within local neighbourhood or single household	Intentionally nebulous	Virtual and fluid - possibly chat-rooms or virtual group dialogue.
Markers				
Internal identity, Belonging, Membership	Programmed meeting and content format. Minimal participation criteria to facilitate individual choice	Common values/shared practices given the twelve marks.	initially participation through informal hospitality and fellowship that theoretically yields growth toward commitment Christ	Self-determined therefore individual and anonymously
Behavioural	Primarily friendship, secondarily faith development platform within the institution. Engagement level determined by the individual	Twelve marks. Relational proximity and mutual submission - often extremely challenging	Relationship, care and service to non-believers	Facilitates communication/shallow interactions but minimal opportunity for relational depth
Christian	Institutionally shaped beliefs. Fosters individual spiritual growth, but often fails to bring substantive transformation.	Theological underpinnings for the 12 marks. Theology often undermined by relational complexity	No or minimal Christian embodiment	Represent Christian platform, language and practices that assumes common understanding
Observed				
Leadership	Minimally qualified resulting in diminished capacity to influence spiritual growth or shape community as contrast	Strong leadership required to navigate the relational dynamics within community and to overcome an increasing inward focus	Emphasis on mission/outreach, retaining cultural relevance. Requires strong leadership to maintain Christian core within secular framework	leadership provides only facilities and context. Individuals self-select and direct their experience
Mission	Programmed/institutionally shaped rather than Spirit-led	To be the contrast representing Christian truth in an amoral deteriorating society	Requires extensive relational equity by all within community. Outreach approach is to facilitate transformation through relationship, love, prayer, service	Shallow relational vehicles invite minimal engagement with weak response capability. Enables anonymity and distance
Identity	Relatively invisible, often experienced as insular	Potential to perceive themselves as only true community	Minimal qualifying boundaries, including possibly minimal Christian identity	No access boundaries but high hurdles to develop meaningful relationships.
Interaction with				
Culture	Structured for cultural convenience, fluidity, logistics for participants. Dominates influences from tradition and theology	Contemporary engagement and language but expressing cultural rejection. Locating explicitly within the marginalized aspect of society.	Begins as wholly culturally aligned, hoping to grow into Christian expression. Promotes the individual journey of faith over a communal expression	Pioneering and therefore appealing to certain generations. Embraces the culture but fails to transcend it in order to confirm gospel Truth
Tradition	Secondary and institutionally influenced	Participants individually connect with their own tradition	Largely rejected in order to facilitate secular community expression	Often incorporated as an option, with minimal engagement structure
Theology	Relatively minimal given weak leadership. Institutional in nature.	Practical interpretation of theology within the twelve marks	Ideally, individuals identify the Christian truths (and theology) that transcend culture and facilitate the journey from secular to christian life	Self-determined and directed.

Figure 2: Major facets of contemporary Christian community models

2.7.1 Evidence of systems and the Spirit in contemporary community formation

The review considered a spectrum of deterministic frameworks, from familiar and conventional small groups such as *Activate*, to Fresh Expressions models that blur the distinction between church and community, to models that are theoretical and prophetic in nature. Successes and failures in terms of effective community are observed in every model including *Activate*. Consequently, despite the value that an organisational framework can bring to facilitating community formation, it cannot be the sole determinant of authentic or

effective community. Experiences with the *Activate* system, discussed in chapter one, certainly reinforce this perspective as participants embraced the framework that quickly and easily introduced us into a community experience but then also established a ceiling for that experience as limits were prescribed for values and activity.

There is similarly no one size fits all in terms of Christian constituencies. The intentional community model appeals to the marginalized but offers little to the mainstream western seeker. Conversely, *Activate* and other small group systems can meet the mainstream need but are unlikely to reach the marginalized. Fresh Expressions, which in the end are nothing new wrapped in cultural attire, may at first be appealing to the seeker but are ultimately challenged to reflect core Christian essence. Advocates of each organizational framework often cite a historic expression to validate their conviction that theirs is the optimal approach. Ironically, each cites the same scriptural basis. The New Monastics formation is based upon a *replication* of the Gospels/Acts community. Small group systems formation is based upon the *cultural resonance* of the Gospel/Acts community. Fresh Expressions highlight the *rejection* of the institutional church by the Gospel/Acts community!

If organizational form or structure does not cause effective Christian community, then the relevant drivers likely originate in the human dimension and interaction with the Holy Spirit. This conclusion is reinforced by Pohl's recent work on sustainable community that emphasises four core practices as elemental to community: embracing gratitude, making and keeping promises, living truthfully and practicing hospitality.⁹² Greenwood reflects a similar position in his discussion on practicing a virtue ecclesiology.⁹³

Notwithstanding their advocacy of certain values, processes and practices in Christian community, Pohl, Greenwood and Searcy and Thomas each acknowledge the inevitable necessity of the Spirit's role in effective community formation. Greenwood warns of the danger of continuing a 'blueprint mentality'⁹⁴ for church community formation and recognises the critical challenge role of 'Christian pioneers who have lived on the frontiers, recalling people to what has been lost, opening themselves again to the Holy Spirit, discovering new practices, reforming old ones, discerning what of the past to keep and what to reject.'⁹⁵ Pohl discounts the likely risks of relying solely upon human determination and grit to fulfill the four core practices

⁹² Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), chap. 1:36-152, Kindle.

⁹³ Robin Greenwood, *Being Church: The Formation of Christian Community* (London: SPCK, 2013), chap. 10:2042, Kindle.

⁹⁴ Greenwood, *Being Church*, chap. 10:2105.

⁹⁵ Greenwood, *Being Church*, chap. 10:2130.

by acknowledging that it is only by the power of the Spirit, God's grace and Jesus promises that we are able to truly fulfill them.⁹⁶ Searcy and Thomas similarly acknowledge that 'you cannot engineer deep relationships in your groups, it's the work of the Holy Spirit'.⁹⁷ Less directly, Fancourt's interviews with Christian community leaders that explore the interaction between postmodern culture and Christian institutions, describe experiences of replacing structure and group process with creative, free, spontaneous, individual expressions of engagement with the Spirit.⁹⁸

For Christian communities, I suggest that recognising this inevitable necessity of the Spirit's role is a key theological driver for the sociological phenomenon described in deviance theory where experiences of daily life reinforce the beliefs and values that in turn uniquely shape and orient community life. Therefore, guided by the Spirit, day-to-day life, values and belief symbiotically shape one another, ultimately driving to such alignment that the Spirit's presence is vividly recognized. This is a stark contrast to the *Activate* experience that is largely driven by rigidly defined rules and process.

Rather than attempt to formulaically and absolutely (and in all likelihood incorrectly) define community, it seems more useful to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the community and seek to understand where and what that could look like.⁹⁹ A corollary to this conclusion is that any allegiance to a particular form or shape for community, no matter how well it aligns with scripture or tradition, must be continually discerned in order to allow the creativity of the Holy Spirit to shape it. Again, *Activate* and any systems-based approach to community undermines this corollary.

2.7.2 The nature and fabric of the community experience for participants, for outreach and for community leadership.

The experience for participants is shaped by three attributes: a sense of identity, a sense of belonging (real-life, imagined or nostalgic), and a boundary condition (membership) to qualify those who belong and those who do not. The Participant Community represents the community experience of the members, those who identify with and belong to the community. These community participants have a sense of the other when

⁹⁶ Pohl, *Living into Community*, chap 7: 2552

⁹⁷ Searcy et al, *Activate*, 46.

⁹⁸ Graeme Fancourt, *Brand New Church* (London: SPCK, 2013), chap. 4:1130-1200, Kindle,

⁹⁹ Robert Sherman, *Covenant, Community, and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), chap. 3:71, Kindle.

they consider other communities such as another local fellowship or a surrounding neighbourhood.

Postmodern community reflects identity, belonging and membership in a more nuanced fashion. Whereas identity and belonging in the modern era were found in a single, real-life, closed community, postmodern identity and belonging occur more typically through a composition of imagined or nostalgic forms occurring from participation in multiple open-network communities. Identity, belonging and membership are increasingly defined by the individual participants and guided by their specific and unique desires for participation, most often relationally with certain other members of the community. These are Hirsch's 'neo-tribes'. Consequently, these attributes, and therefore the resulting community, become conceptually blurred and less visible to the observer. Christian postmodern community further refines the interaction between identity, belonging and membership. Membership qualification is defined less by the members and more by the individuals' qualification in Christ. Identity and belonging increase in relevance and visibility as the participant increasingly aligns with Christ in image and in mission. Disappointingly, the *Activate* experience at CCF established identity and belonging in the meeting experiences rather than inviting participants to develop deeper relationship with Christ.

For participants, the concept of the overall community entity is substantially less relevant than the nature and quality of the primary relationships that the participant has within the community that supports daily life experiences. Put more simply, the people in the community that we engage with most frequently principally shape the nature of our community experience. Given this perspective, I suggest that the community experience does not substantially change for the participant while those relationships remain intact, regardless of the cultural or organizational form that the community takes.¹⁰⁰ *Activate*'s weekly meeting structure could provide this face to face forum for participants. However its semester structure where participation in a small group lasts for ten to twelve weeks, along with the shallow relational fabric, somewhat undermines this experience as participants can participate in a variety of groups throughout the year, making opportunity for meaningful relationships almost an impossibility.

Finally, from the discussion of online communities, it's evident that the absence of real-life engagement diminishes the quality of community in some intangible fashion that leaves

¹⁰⁰ Sherman, *Covenant, Community*, chap. 4:133, 138-139.

people continuing to yearn for physical connection. Bex Lewis suggests that the role of online community is as a platform that simply amplifies human nature.¹⁰¹ For those whose innate desire is to engage with others, online community simply facilitates that desire but cannot replace physical connectivity. It continues to require intentionality and provides choice as to what, how and when to reveal, but is, at its very best, an augmentation to offline community. The *Activate* system clearly recognised the importance of this relational layer by establishing the size and interactive style for each small group. However, its failure to account for the possibility that participants would simply rely on the systems structure as a default for a community experience ultimately diminished the possibility for meaningful, Spirit-enabled relations.

Lewis's 'human nature amplified' observation regarding the role of online community, along with the dynamics experienced by small group systems and Fresh Expressions where the missional or evangelistic purpose often becomes secondary to the immediate and necessary engagement in relational development, highlights a core conflict for effective Christian community: namely, the desire of human nature to find and experience familiar fellowship and personal, immediate, relational connections at the expense of mission, which is inviting the other to find and experience even greater relationship with their Saviour.

In part, this originates from a sense of identity and belonging that drives humankind to find connection and fellowship, but that, when achieved, no longer motivates us to introduce new participants to the community given the risk of destabilizing the incumbent relational fabric. The relative strength of this desire is driven by two additional factors: firstly, how easily the organizing framework enables and encourages relational development, and, secondly, the desire to avoid the unknown and uncomfortable, that which does not appear to be like us. *Activate* appears as a paradox in this context, its structure and process create opportunity for relationships but its directive to pursue only basic friendships inhibits the opportunity to meaningfully connect with others.

Note, however, that even the intentional pursuit of an outreach mission, as prescribed in *Activate*, may not be effective. Allowances made to enable the community to blend into the fabric of a liquid modern culture in order to enable acceptance can result in a less than authentic effort to draw people through the veil of individuality and consumerism toward the path of discipleship in Christ.

¹⁰¹ Dr. Bex Lewis, in discussion with the author, October 1, 2014.

On many levels, the apparent tensions between ‘friend of sinner’ and ‘follower of Christ’ seem insurmountable and impossible to hold within the frailty of our earthen vessels. If there can be no blending of the Light with the darkness, our challenge then is to rediscover the authentic relational elements that transcend these seemingly intractable dimensions of life in Christ. Moynagh presents a compelling description of ‘community in mission’ when he states that creating a community of love is one of the purposes of our mission, along with the acts of evangelism, service and prayer.¹⁰² Living in this tension and interaction requires us to move away from the black and white absolutes of understanding so often inherent in our human nature that desires safe and comfortable rules and structures within which to live. These are the very rules that are embodied within *Activate* and other systems-based approaches to community. Rather, we must humbly learn to value and trust in the Spirit-informed steps and sequence of living ‘along the way’ and ‘toward’ that so often brings uncertainty and change.¹⁰³

Tradition and culture seem to encourage an interpretation of mission, discipleship and fellowship as independent optional streams rather than the essence and sum total of Christ-centred life. Certainly this was the experience of *Activate* at CCF, where mission occurred as sporadic programmed outreach. Recognising the being and doing of community, not just as symbiotic but as synonymous, is an important enhancement for our understanding of community. Certainly, these transcendent elements are found in the activities of Fresh Expressions, for example, where, despite their highly creative wrappers, many of their stories reveal the age-old themes of just a few key behaviors: hospitality, service, loving and giving. As a result, this is a community whose very identity is the highly visible existence that emanates as Hirsch’s ‘strange and holy attraction’.

2.7.3 Experiences of Belonging, Identity and Invitation

Fancourt provides a helpful review of the polarized perspectives of whether and how the church should engage with postmodern culture.¹⁰⁴ One end of the spectrum advocates *against* engaging with the culture, given Christianity is based on absolute truths that are constant regardless of cultural context. The constituency at the opposite end of the spectrum advocates an ongoing dialogue with postmodernism, given Christianity should always evolve based on the interpretation of the Christ event within the cultural context. The

¹⁰² Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 105.

¹⁰³ Greenwood, *Being Church*, chap. 5:1267.

¹⁰⁴ Fancourt, *Brand New Church*, chap. 4:1130-1200, Kindle.

Activate authors would align themselves with this constituency. Somewhere between these two poles, a third perspective (radical orthodoxy) suggests that culture should be evaluated or translated by Christianity.

The review is useful in that it becomes clear that these tensions have been exerted upon Christian community throughout all time, given an understanding that postmodern culture is simply today's label for the ongoing influence of society's interpretation of beliefs, values and behaviors. A community must ultimately choose how to relate to the culture based on its unique configuration of beliefs, values and demographics. Invariably the form of a community's cultural wrapper is driven not by theory or theology but by the day-to-day experiences of living. *Activate's* perspective that meetings should be limited to ninety minutes per week and that no other ministry activities should occur in parallel with the *Activate* semester in order to ensure participants can attend meetings given their busy schedules aligns with this view. This reality appears clearly in Fancourt's interviews with leaders of emerging churches where some directly acknowledge the role of the culture and others seem to pay lip service to accommodating it.¹⁰⁵ In the end, however, each leader expressed meaningful divergence from absolute allegiance to any single position on the cultural engagement spectrum. It's apparent that in the reality of the day-to-day, these churches are far less anchored to a particular position on the cultural engagement spectrum but, if willing, will be Spirit-led according to their unique demographic.

Is there a place for contextualizing at least the outer form of Christian community, the wrapper, so to speak? Yes, I believe so. Small group systems, such as *Activate*, that adopt culture-centric logistics and accessibility, third-place-located Fresh Expressions, and even online communities can offer compelling gateways for engagement. Fancourt insightfully recognizes that 'faith exists in dialogue, not only with history but also with the world beyond the church'.¹⁰⁶ Savage advises, 'Listening to culture needs to be prophetic. It is possible and *necessary* to take on cultural clothing and change it as we put it on in service of the gospel.'¹⁰⁷ This is an excellent perspective and one that *Activate* misses given its lens to remain in full alignment with the culture. I suggest that Christian community formation should never perfectly coincide with the culture, but rather discern whether to remain one step behind, acting as a moderator to slow societal deterioration, or move one step ahead to

¹⁰⁵ Fancourt, *Brand New Church*, chap. 3:715-1100.

¹⁰⁶ Fancourt, *Brand New Church*, chap. 4:1407.

¹⁰⁷ Sara Savage, "The Psychological Gains and Risks," in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 58.

encourage cultural formation toward a Christ formation. In essence, Christian community must exist as a fluid expression that continually presents itself as a highly attractational Christian community and that is also a vivid contrast to the surrounding environment. Hauerwas' image of church as a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another constructively recognises that they should differ in their reality whilst still co-existing.¹⁰⁸ Whilst there is value in making room for culture to inform the outer expressions of faith, we must carefully navigate a journey to the centre of faith where only Christ should inform our faith. We are called and required to live and express Christ in the both/and tensions of worshipful mission.¹⁰⁹ The ultimate key, therefore, is to find a contextual interpretation that leads toward Christ rather than toward self.

2.7.4 Leadership and Oversight Practices

The nature of community leadership is often overlooked. Would small group systems have become so paralyzed and ineffective if the criteria for leadership had not been so diluted as is the case with *Activate's* leadership approach? Would more intentional communities have survived if leadership had the capacity to address shifts in mission, values or undermining family of origin dynamics? Would Fresh Expressions realize greater impact if the complexities of moving from postmodern to kingdom were more effectively navigated? These questions point to at least three leadership foci: a capacity and propensity for the community to fulfill its missional outreach; the experience within community through relationships and activities to help individuals mature in their faith and toward healthy relations; and, finally, the shaping and identity of the community as a symbol of hope within its surrounding world.

Leadership should be understood not as an autocratic or autonomous voice that independently directs the community, but rather as the responsibility of one or several people who are called to discern the wisdom and direction of the Spirit and to facilitate that guidance in the relevant aspect of community. This discernment-sourced facilitation in no way obviates the ability and responsibility of each community member to hear and follow the Spirit themselves. Rather, it serves to enable and equip each member whilst simultaneously shaping a harmonised expression of the overall experience and outward expression.

¹⁰⁸ Hauerwas, Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*. (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 1989.),12.

¹⁰⁹ Mason, "Living in the Distance," in Nelstrop and Percy, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions*, 90.

Certainly, Spirit-inspired facilitation does not solve all of the challenges that Christian communities must overcome, but to intentionally discount or diminish its role leads to obvious failure. Here again there is a conflict with our postmodern culture that espouses leaderless, hierarchy-free organization where individual freedom is the primary lens for the community participant. The appropriate response is not to dismiss the role of facilitated leadership but to appropriately translate it through the lens of Christianity for this postmodern culture.

2.8 Concluding Thoughts

The observations from this broader review correlate strongly with my experiences of the *Activate* system. Despite a persistent human desire to build community using transparent structure and systems, a willingness by all participants to yield to and embrace the Spirit's guidance appears to be the principal criteria for *effective* community. For individual community participants, the depth of their relational fabric significantly informs the authenticity of their community experience whilst the breadth of the relational fabric informs their capacity and willingness for outreach beyond the community. These factors will be considered as elements of the challenge model (to be developed in later chapters). As participants increasingly engage with the community, there is a tendency to prefer depth over breadth that ultimately diminishes the visibility of the community to its surrounding neighbours. This certainly points to one of the reasons why *Activate* at CCF failed to deliver the promised results of numerical and spiritual growth.

Given that these observations are based on contemporary models, it's helpful to understand whether these observations are also found in the biblical communities that arguably represent the first principles of Christian community. Observing a possible trajectory for these insights in New Testament communities can reinforce their validity. With that intent in mind, chapter three focuses on the second component of Fiddes' dialogical challenge, a review of James G. Dunn's and Philip Esler's perspectives on New Testament community.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

This chapter continues with the second step in Fiddes' method, a dialogical challenge to the *Activate* system by considering the nature and shape of biblical communities. Given the shortcomings discussed in contemporary Christian communities in the prior chapter, it's helpful to reorient my examination of community from the contemporary era to its source, New Testament community. Through a review of Paul's communities, my intention is to identify aspects of early Christian community that correlate (negatively or positively) with the experiences I describe in the *Activate* case study in chapter one and the observations of contemporary community models. Where these early communities reveal factors that enhance the *Activate* community experience, these factors will be considered for inclusion within Fiddes' step three, the theological challenge model.

James Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* and Philip Esler's *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* offer a broad range of insights on early Christian community, largely from analysis of Paul's epistles. The authors approach their understanding of community through very different lenses. Dunn applies a primarily theological lens whilst Esler generally applies a sociological focus. I explore each author's understanding of community by filtering their discussions firstly for New Testament community themes (Dunn 3.1.2, Esler 3.2.2). From these New Testament themes, I then develop insights that can be appropriated to contemporary Christian community formation, specifically the *Activate* system(3.3).

The analysis shows that neither author identifies a robust and comprehensive expression of effective New Testament Christian community. Dunn takes a largely organizational and missional focus whilst Esler focuses almost exclusively on the participant experience within the community. Synthesising the results from both authors, key observations are:

It appears that early Christian communities were originated and shaped entirely by the Holy Spirit. These were physically co-located communities that generally transcended the culture as opposed to being for or against it. As the community matured, driven by inertia and a desire for convenience, participants began to ritualize or institutionalize their experiences, thought forms and practices that in turn became codified as structure and process; in other words, a system was established. As participants increasingly relied upon

the system, the community was increasingly identified by the visible work and activity of the participants rather than by the fluid, supernatural direction of the Spirit. Recognising this trajectory of increasing institutionalization and decreasing Spirit influence explains the point of arrival that the *Activate* system represents. Just as the *Activate* authors acknowledged in their design, these early communities clearly showed evidence and effectiveness from the Spirit's engagement. This perspective further motivates the case for considering how to re-engage the Spirit in greater measure in community systems such as *Activate*.

Contrary to *Activate*'s design, inferences from these early communities suggest that the participant experience in contemporary community is principally shaped by ekstasis-based, one-another relationship. These relationships determine the essential fabric of the community. This fabric is the dominant experience that shapes both the participants' awareness of community and also serves as the core outreach mechanism for those in surrounding neighbourhoods to enter relationship with Christ and the community. Whilst there may be overt outreach expressions such as serving those in need with food and help, the fundamental and sustaining engagement occurs through relational development. Unity, when constituted by the Spirit, seems to provide a profound sense of identity and belonging for participants. Similarly, a unique and differentiating unity observed by those beyond the community is also a powerful, attracting element. Spirit-constituted unity has both an implicit and explicit quality: implicit as it represents the increasing alignment of participants' belief in and worship of Jesus Christ, and explicit through the observable expression of participants' relational love and action toward their neighbours. Finally, community leadership, if it is to be effective, is less about creating a visible, unified community expression with a static identity and far more about enabling the Spirit-led fluidity and responsiveness of a network of individuals in relations. Comparing these perspectives on effective community with *Activate*'s profile reveals a stark and yet explainable contrast that again motivates the question of how to revise *Activate* in order to allow the Spirit to guide and shape the community.

These observations, along with those based on the *Activate* case study and the contemporary community formation insights, provide both the fundamentals and guardrails for a pneumatologically shaped community. These insights serve as the basis for Fiddes' third step, that of creating a theological model that challenges the *Activate* system.

3.1 James D. G. Dunn's Insights on Christian Community¹¹⁰

The nature, function and relationship of unity within even a local community is complex. Unity can be a tangible marker of identity that fosters belonging and alignment through common practices. Or, equally valid, unity can be an implicit set of values, manifesting in a diversity of actions, that provides no visible evidence of a common identity but that creates a sense of belonging and attraction to others who maintain similar values. From a different angle, is unity an essential foundation for creating community or does the practice of community produce evidence of unity? Clearly, the topic is worthy of far greater consideration than this specific study focus permits.

Sufficient for this discussion on biblical community insights in James Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (U&D) is the simple position that local Christian community and unity exist in an evolving, symbiotic and accretive relationship; as community strengthens, so does the expression of unity. Dunn bases his understanding of unity and diversity on Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ. In the New Testament, Dunn observes a unique kind of unity:

A unity that consists and is possible only because the members of the body are all different and have different functions; that is a unity that is not a unity of sameness, not a unity threatened by difference but a unity that can only function as such by reason of such differences; a unity that involves recognition of and a living out of a mutual interdependence by each on the other, a unity that can only thrive by integrated and coordinated diversity. (p.xxviii)

In this section, I review Dunn's work for his understanding of Christian community, how his survey of early Christianity engages with community expression, and finally, whether his conclusions on unity and acceptable diversity helpfully shape the community expression. I begin with an overview of U&D. I then analyse Dunn's work using observations gathered through the prior review of contemporary community in addition to historical and sociological considerations. My review of U&D falls into two categories: firstly, I explore how Dunn's method and approach inform his concept of community, and secondly, I isolate insights relevant to early Christian community. I conclude by commenting on the applicability of Dunn's work for contemporary Christian community.

¹¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 2006). All quotations and references from this work in this section will be cited within the text.

Dunn broadly reviews the New Testament for expressions of unity and diversity within the ideas, beliefs and practices of early Christianity. His goal is to identify a unifying core that defines Christianity and then to explore the range of diversity within the New Testament, valid or otherwise, that surrounds this unifying core. He principally leverages a historical-critical method enhanced with Robinson and Koester's 'trajectories' model to clarify the direction of movement in terms of unity and diversity.¹¹¹ The book consists of two sections. Part I considers cross-sections of the New Testament while searching for unity within the broad diversity of expressions. Dunn examines oral and written formulations within Christian preaching and teaching, organization and worship forms and concludes with discussions on the experience of the Spirit and faith in Christ. Part II reverses the analysis and searches for acceptable diversity within unity. Dunn considers four streams of early Christian faith: Jewish, Hellenistic, Apocalyptic and Early Catholicism. He reviews each for the evolution of Christian faith within its context. In each stream, he identifies boundary conditions where interpretations of faith cross from acceptable diversity to unacceptable heresy.

At the end of this review, Dunn's primary conclusions are:

- First-century Christian unity existed solely through recognising the identity of the '*historical Jesus as the exalted Christ*' (p.245). Dunn refers to this belief as 'the integrating centre'.
 - However, this core unity never exists in isolation within the New Testament. Throughout, this core is enhanced with overlays relevant to culture and the individual (p.248).
- Diversity exists extensively in many dimensions throughout early Christianity.
 - However, acceptable diversity continually reinforces the unifying core of the '*historical Jesus as the exalted Christ*' as a 'canon within the canon', so to speak (p.411).
 - Additionally, acceptable diversity represents expressions of love for fellow believers (p.416).
- Finally, the New Testament canon itself functions as the boundary condition for delineating between acceptable and heretical diversity (p.416).

¹¹¹ James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 9.

3.1.1 Dunn's Analysis Method and Concept of Community

I discuss Dunn's perspectives on community through two primary lenses: firstly, through the *participant lens* of the member who has a sense of belonging and identity with the community, and, secondly, through the *observer lens* of the non-member who primarily engages with only the outer form and function of community.

Dunn did not intend for U&D to be an authority on first-century Christian community. He believes that the Christian faith is found in creed, ministry and liturgy rather than in the full expression of Christian daily life (p.189). His bias on where and how faith is found undermines the value of discussion on community and arguably diminishes the quality of his insights regarding Christian faith, given that so much of Christianity forms and is exhibited in the context of daily life with one another. His observations are made from the context of how ideas and beliefs exert influence upon the community structure. For example, when reflecting on worship patterns in early communities, he acknowledges a severe strain on their unity given the diversity in attitudes and practices, but he fails to explore how such strain may be resolved in the light of his unity hypothesis (p.140). Whilst his consideration does offer value, its incompleteness and bias are also reflected in my conclusions.

Of the relatively few critical comments in reviews of U&D, the most consistent theme is Dunn's bias with which he approaches the analysis.¹¹² Dunn seems predisposed to ascribe expressions of faith to the acceptable diversity category rather than empirically finding unity or unacceptable diversity within them. The net effect is an over-correction toward the belief that early Christianity was essentially unified. Dunn's definition of a diversity-shaped unity (referenced at the beginning of this chapter) similarly reveals his bias. By contrast, Christian sociologist Meeks's definition of unity is firmly built around concepts of agreement and alignment: 'Unity is a shared sense of identity mediated through the religious symbols of monotheism and salvation as election'.¹¹³ Meeks appeals to a common identity whilst Dunn appeals to an identity of embracing differences. Whilst theoretically, Dunn's approach has appeal for diversity advocates, his unifying core insufficiently captures the offsetting unity markers of love, gift, other, and so forth that manifest in the context of diversity.

¹¹² Gary D. Collier, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (January 1, 1980): 121-126.

¹¹³ Pheme Perkins, "Theological Implications of New Testament Pluralism," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 5-23.

Does this bias toward diversity skew his analysis? For example, are the differences in the kerygma associated with the *act* of preaching far more nuanced than Dunn describes, such that there was actually a high degree of unity (p.12)? Would the dominant oral tradition of the first century impact how these teachings were understood, given a spoken emphasis that is not easily captured in written form?¹¹⁴ Conversely, Dunn seems easily willing to ‘forgive’ ultimately heretical expressions such as the Gnostics at the church in Corinth in order to endorse his hypothesis of acceptable diversity in the early communities (p.302).

Here again, integrating robust sociological and anthropological dimensions could shed important clarity on what was experienced as genuine diversity rather than simply a contextual or nuanced element. Elements that in first-century culture were essentially transparent to the lived experience of first-century Christians could, to Christians two millennia later, appear as diversity. For example, the strength of Jewish tradition and the collectivistic nature of Mediterranean society resulted in first-generation Jewish Christians continuing to fully live out their Jewish faith.¹¹⁵ Their primary identity continued to be based on ethnicity.¹¹⁶ Their belief in Christ was expressed as ‘an eccentricity’ and was generally invisible to those they interacted with on a daily basis (p.255). I doubt that if Dunn had approached the analysis with a view to finding evidence of unity in the New Testament, he would have arrived at the same conclusions of what was acceptable diversity.

Further criticism of Dunn’s work is that his understanding of Christian community embodies a dated, western perspective of community. Dunn initially draws on Lohfink’s discussion in *Jesus and Community* to develop his definition for community. Whilst Dunn acknowledges that Lohfink’s definition is unsatisfactory in that it fails to capture community experience beyond mutual acceptance, forgiveness and service, he disappointingly fails to develop his own workable definition for community (p.113). Consequently, Dunn uses Lohfink’s early comments to refute the idea that Jesus and the disciples were a community; rather, they were a ‘movement’.¹¹⁷ His logic is that, firstly, the disciples were simply passive followers of Jesus and had no missional role in their own right, and, secondly, that

¹¹⁴ Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis, London: Fortress, SPCK, 2005), chap. 7:2541, Kindle.

¹¹⁵ Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century* (Minneapolis/Edinburgh: Fortress Press; T & T Clark, 1999), 207-11.

¹¹⁶ William S. Campbell, *Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 104.

¹¹⁷ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus And Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), chap. 2:556, Kindle.

Jesus intentionally rejected the idea of a closed community with membership structure. Rather, Jesus invited all to belong to an open community (p.114-5). Ironically, if Dunn had read further in Lohfink's book, he'd have come upon the author's conclusion that 'Jesus constantly established community'!¹¹⁸

Many terms are offered in an attempt to define groups of people—community, sect, movement, cult, church, missionizing, and network, to name just a few.¹¹⁹ What becomes clear through all these many terms is that, more often than not, attempts to define the group are made according to the *observed* lens, the leader or the function and ignore the *participant* experience of the group. Dunn falls into this trap with his rejection that Jesus and his disciples were a community. If, rather than defining a group solely on the observed, we begin with a determination of whether the group participants experience a unique sense of belonging and identity and then overlay the group's function, context or mission, all of these groups would primarily classify as a form of community. I agree with Lohfink that Jesus is constantly establishing community, but, more importantly, it is a new form of community, one that is radically open to all and that intends to remove any form of membership requirement.

Dunn becomes fully transparent regarding his understanding of community in his discussion on 'Concepts of Ministry', suggesting that community is defined almost entirely by leadership, organisation and mission. Almost 70% of his references to community are reflected within this chapter, signaling that for him mission (ministry) and community are essentially synonymous (p.117-20). Dunn uses the body of Christ metaphor, readily accepted as an image for Christian community, and identifies unity and diversity solely through terms such as *working* and *functioning* together. Most transparently, Dunn declares that 'Christian community *exists only* in the living interplay of charismatic *ministry*' (p.120) (emphasis mine).

For Dunn, 1 Cor. 12 demonstrates his hypothesis of unity and diversity and his understanding of community based on each member of community *functioning* according to their gifting. A more useful discussion of community and 1 Cor. 12 is found in Esler's 'theology of persons in communion', developed on 1 Cor. 10-14, albeit Esler also reflects a particular bias to community that I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.¹²⁰ The value of Esler's work is that it is an example of the engagement between the theological and

¹¹⁸ Lohfink, *Jesus And Community*, chap. 3:1096.

¹¹⁹ Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 110-114.

¹²⁰ Esler, *New Testament Theology*, chap. 6:2249-2424.

sociological dimensions that contribute to community. Esler identifies the disunity within the church as those who excessively spoke publicly in tongues in order to elevate their status. Understanding the dominance of the oral tradition, Paul challenges the Corinthians to use intelligible, spoken word gifts over unintelligible glossolalia to reach out beyond themselves to other Christ followers and encourage and build faith in one another, thereby developing unity. Paul then underlines his message of unity by following this passage with his direction in 1 Cor. 13 to prefer love over any of these spiritual gifts.¹²¹

Dunn's only meaningful reference to the community participant experience occurs with comments on the ministry of the congregation and Matthew's community rule (p.127).

In the chapter, 'Patterns of Worship', Dunn identifies a difference between the eastern and western Christian worship experience, where eastern Orthodoxy finds its emphasis in worship rather than doctrine. To be an Orthodox Christian in the east is to 'belong to that community which praises and glorifies God in the right spirit' (p.135). The comparison exposes Dunn's bias for understanding community from the western observed view that emphasizes function and activity rather than the experience of participating in worshipful community. If correct, this certainly explains the omissions in his understanding of and observations on community. It also highlights the substantial influence or bias by the context, cultural or otherwise, that the author experiences as he approaches the topic. The implicit nature of context means that it is almost impossible to remove its effect. Instead, the best that can be expected is an explicit acknowledgement of its presence and consideration of impact on the analysis. Dunn fails to consider both of these elements.

3.1.2 Dunn on New Testament Community

Clearly, Dunn's insights on community are lacking in key sociological dimensions. Notwithstanding this, his theological insights usefully engage the Christian community expression in three areas relevant to the case study in chapter one.

3.1.2.1 Cultural Innovation in Early Christian Community

Christianity introduced a new community expression that simultaneously offered a level of continuity with cultural norms whilst embracing radical new features such as intimacy with Christ, relationship conditioned on love and service, and accessibility to all. In reality, the impact of the embryonic Christian faith was substantially understood *only* by contrasting this new form of participant community against the cultural norms of first-

¹²¹ Esler, *New Testament Theology*, chap. 6:2327-2345.

century society. This perspective challenges one of *Activate*'s fundamental design principals, that of fully engaging the culture in order to appeal to non-believers. *Activate*'s approach is to incorporate popular cultural markers in order to provide a seamless entry into the community. As I've discussed, my experience was that this approach comes at a high cost in terms of core Christian values. In many ways, the *Activate* community appears as a social club or simply a coming together of well-intentioned individuals.

These early Christian communities appear all the more remarkable given the backdrop of a group-oriented culture. Jesus explicitly rejected restrictive membership criteria, instead providing the Lord's Prayer as the invitation for *anyone* to belong (p.114). This pivotal characteristic of Christian community likely allowed people to engage with Christianity without having to forgo their identity and association with their primary communities.

Gatherings occurred, often informally, in private homes along with new forms of worship and no requirement for priestly intermediary (p.138). Participants were encouraged to use their gifts for the benefit of the entire community, despite the cultural concern of reciprocity and honour (p.208).¹²² Over time, Christian community began to develop a distinct identity based on these practices, its charismatic and eschatological beliefs, and a membership that principally lived in poverty. This deviation in beliefs and practice from the norms of Mediterranean society helped to strengthen its identity such that eventually these communities stood independently from the dominant community culture.¹²³

Specific practices that reinforce community identity were baptism, table fellowship and the Lord's Supper, and koinonia fellowship. Dunn states that baptism was an expression of membership in Christian faith. He attempts to reconcile the transition in the role of baptism, where Jesus appears not to baptize in order to avoid creating a barrier, with the fact that over time baptism increasingly became a 'rite of entry' into local community by suggesting that baptism served as a tangible way of expressing faith toward Jesus when He was no longer visibly present (p.168-70). However, Stegemann's suggestion that baptism served as an expression of identification and belonging rather than a rite of entry is more appropriate in that it allows Christian community post-Easter to retain the integrity of being open to all as initially defined by Jesus.¹²⁴

¹²² Esler, *New Testament Theology*, chap. 6:2257.

¹²³ Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 202-211.

¹²⁴ Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement*, 207.

It is difficult to miss the profound sense of community experience when reading Dunn's observations on fellowship meals and the Lord's Supper. Table fellowship offered a guarantee of 'peace, trust and brotherhood. In a very real sense, a sharing of one's life' (p. 176). Meals were experienced as ceremonies, representing stability and continuity for the group, and strengthened its identity and boundaries. As such, every aspect of the meal was precisely determined: who attended, the seating order, their roles, specific clean foods, location, and time of the meal.¹²⁵ For newly formed groups, the meal affirmed their commensality.

Early Christian communities simultaneously continued to leverage this meaningful experience and also enhance it for their newly developing faith (Acts 2). The meals were open to all, regardless of status. In Luke 22, Jesus models role reversal by becoming the one who serves rather than the one served. Meals were taken in the most unclean and chaotic locations, such as the countryside near Bethsaida for the feeding of the 5,000. Even the food could now be unclean. As a result, every time the Christian community participated in a meal of this new form, they cemented the identity and experience of unity in Christian community.¹²⁶ This degree of informality, meals and meetings in local homes all point to a community presence that is far more accessible than the *Activate* community with its structured meeting time and format. Whilst *Activate* at CCF has attempted to overcome this concern by using third place locations, meals, and outreach programming, the intent often fails to be truly authentic.

If a simple meal could contribute so significantly to community, how much more unified does the community become when the meal is imbued with the eschatological context of anticipating the messianic banquet or the *communitas* experience of the last supper before Jesus' crucifixion (p.177)? Post-Easter fellowship meals incorporated the memory of Christ's death and consequently created a strong nostalgia dynamic within the community. Clearly, celebrating the Lord's Supper strongly enhanced Christian community identity and participants' sense of belonging (p.179-180).

Dunn's bias to find acceptable diversity and narrow understanding of community converges in his analysis of concepts of ministry in John's gospel text. He concludes that *individualism* is one of its most striking features, and in doing so diminishes the horizontal responsibility to love the brethren in favour of the vertical relationship with God the Spirit.

¹²⁵ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, 3d ed. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 363-5.

¹²⁶ Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, 381.

Dunn dismisses the idea of community in John, claiming instead that the gospel is written to a ‘sequence of individuals’ (p.128). He emphasizes the leadership dynamics of the remaining disciples after the sifting of faith and loyalty without acknowledging the *communitas* that likely occurred as a result of the sifting trauma (p.129).

By contrast, Matera, in *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity*, recognizes the multi-layered presentation of community experience in, with and through Christ as profoundly relational. Matera observes that unity ‘horizontally’ is anchored through each person having a ‘mystical union’ with Christ.¹²⁷ I suggest that this anchoring is all the more powerful in establishing a sense of belonging given the open access nature of Christ-following communities. Matera proposes that the ‘communion, or *koinonia* of the church, is rooted in the church’s indwelling in the Son and, through the Son in the Father’.¹²⁸ In other words, this new community uniquely incorporates a profoundly intimate relationship with Christ in addition to the *de facto* relationships with one another. This prioritization of relationship with Christ as the context for all other relationships is essential for effective community. It ultimately became a prioritization that was compromised in the *Activate* experiences at CCF as we negotiated the guidance to avoid meaningful relationships. Only when the group heard of Nancy and John’s severe challenges, did we break away from the *Activate* mold and truly invest in caring for them.

Dunn’s dismissal of these innovations in community might not have occurred if he had not primarily restricted his analysis to Pauline communities. Had he given equal consideration to the community of Jesus and the disciples and a receptivity to sociological considerations, he would have perhaps recognized the significance of these innovations and the radical position of Christian community in society.

3.1.2.2 The Nature of Unity and Diversity in Christian Community

Dunn’s unity and diversity of belief conclusions are insufficient to establish and maintain Christian community. The practicalities and necessities of daily life in community superseded the primary unifying belief of the Hellenist Christians. The tradition and orthopraxy of the Jewish community diluted the identity of the Jewish-Christian community. Wright’s perspective that first-century community was primarily identified through its practices speaks to the role and importance of daily community life.

¹²⁷ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville; London: Alban Books, 2007), part 3:4950-4959, Kindle.

¹²⁸ Matera, *New Testament Theology*, part 3:4950-4959.

Wright's view on the pluriformity that existed within first-century Christianity readily acknowledges a familiarity and acceptance of diversity in form, secondary beliefs and expression. This perspective again undermines the strength of Dunn's opinion that the breakdown between Greek and Hebrew Jewish Christians was due to a fundamental difference in their understanding of Jesus' teaching on the temple (p.293), which resulted in the Hellenist widows being missed out in the daily distribution from the common fund (p.290).

Despite a common belief in one true God, the Hellenist community, due to the practicalities of daily life, was actually two distinct groups. The groups lived in different areas of the city and spoke different languages. The Hebrews exhibited a sense of religious superiority over the Greeks. In a very real sense, these two communities knew each other as *other*, not from a threatening posture but simply those who did not belong to their immediate community. Daily life context took priority over secondary beliefs in shaping the community sense of identity and belonging and, consequently, its actions.

Allowing for Wright's softening of first-century Christian communities, Dunn's essential unity definition insufficiently supports an expression of unity that demonstrates the truth and hope of the Gospel, given that community activities still allowed for dissonance between the two groups.

First-century embryonic Christian communities represented a wide interpretive array of expressions. Were it not for their apocalyptic eschatology and its influence on community activity, these communities might have disappeared entirely (p.343). Over time, as belief in an imminent end to the present 'evil' world and the return of their Saviour deepened, it created sufficient alignment and *communitas* to motivate these communities to missional action and to withstand the pressures of the surrounding culture. Here again, Dunn's unity and diversity conclusion inadequately captures these powerful dynamics that compelled early Christians to continue in their life of faith.

As successive generations became increasingly immersed in the Christian faith, there was a reciprocal diminishment in engagement with other traditions and their practices (p.305). Christian faith and life finally became the primary context for their community. Dunn attributes the recognition by early communities that the *parousia* was delayed as the moment that triggers institutionalization, ultimately leading to Early Catholicism and a unity expression (p.383).

I suggest that an equally likely contributor is that as the community matured and stabilized, it simply implemented an infrastructure that facilitated its daily existence. From

a faith perspective, early Catholicism carved out a middle path between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity (p.398). In practice, it seems to have taken on a conservative Judeo-Christian form and, in doing so, reduced much of the enthusiasm and spiritual fervor evident in first-generation Christianity. Extrapolating from this, the formalization and repetition of ritual, ministry, worship patterns, teaching and sacraments provided a structured platform that would have deepened community identity and definition in alignment with more conservative expressions.

The net effect was a visible and increasingly unified Christian community expression that tolerated a diminishing range of diversity. While the idea of a broader unity within the Christian community is appealing, the risk is that this community tends toward a participant experience that is defined by external controls and rules rather than the Holy Spirit inspiration that more uniquely shaped individual earlier communities. The result, as clearly experienced in the *Activate* community, is a structure and form of community that inhibits the life-giving attracting power evident when Christ and the Spirit inhabit the community expression.

3.1.2.3 Early Christian Communities Only Weakly Self-Identified.

Fundamental to understanding the development of Christianity is its context of first-century Mediterranean culture. The individualistic lens that we experience today in the western world was entirely alien. Rather, people existed with one-another or group-oriented personalities. At the most basic level, people's identities were based on their relationship and interaction with others.¹²⁹ First-century Mediterranean identity was expressed almost exclusively in terms of their group, or community. In terms of values, people subordinated themselves and their individual needs to the well-being of the group.

In his discussion of the Jewish Christians living amongst the Jews (p.256-7), Dunn argues that Jewish Christians' continued adherence to the law and their honouring of James over Paul was acceptable diversity within the developing Christian faith (p.272-82). They were simply continuing to practice much of their Judaism, recognizing James for his exemplary adherence to the law. In contrast, views that rejected the central unifying belief and implications of 'historical Jesus, Christ exalted' as expressed by the Ebionites were unacceptable forms of diversity. In this case, the Ebionites believed that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary and that He became the adopted Son of God only when the

¹²⁹ Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, 73-81.

Spirit descended upon Him at Jordan and because He kept the law (p.260-1). Consequently, the Ebionites were deemed heretical according to early Christian development.

More recently, New Testament scholarship has significantly softened this extreme position by recognising the weaknesses of a methodology that seeks to establish black and white boundaries and structures using an information base that is largely incomplete. Consequently, N.T. Wright has proposed that first-century Christian community might be best understood as Jewish Christians living as a 'community seeking definition'.¹³⁰ Whilst finding community with those who believed in the one true God, there was a spectrum of differing viewpoints, all of which, given the data that is presently available, were acceptable expressions of Christian faith. Such viewpoints might represent the degree of resistance toward Rome, attitudes toward the Jerusalem Temple, the choice of Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek for reading and studying scripture and so on. Therefore, Jewish Christianity began as pluriform expressions that might easily have included the Ebionites as simply a particular expression of Christian faith given an adoptionist position. Campbell's perspective that early Christians underwent a process of secondary socialization where Christian identity was superimposed on pre-existing Jewish identity supports Wright's perspective.¹³¹ Asking how first-century Christian community might then be experienced and identified, Wright points to community practices such as mission to share the truth of Jesus Christ, sacrament, worship, caring for one-another and non-racial fellowship.

Given this lens of first-century Christian community formation, Jewish Christians were hardly a primary community. In reality, Judeo-Christian groups were likely minor, non-threatening sects within the Jewish community with recognizable Christ-oriented variations on a Jewish worldview that provided some level of identity and sense of belonging.¹³²

3.1.2.4 Organic and Institutional Community

Whilst somewhat obscure in U&D, I observe a developmental trajectory for Christian community. It begins with an embryonic form established amongst Jesus and His followers. The highly fluid post-Easter communities were often initially subsumed under more primary tradition-based communities. However, over time a stronger identity emerged

¹³⁰ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament And The People Of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 368, 453-456.

¹³¹ Campbell, *Unity and Diversity in Christ*, 104.

¹³² Wright, *The New Testament And The People Of God*, 456

that contributed to coalescing formations that then attracted successive generations.^{133,134} Whereas identity was initially driven organically through marginalization, oppression and persecution, as successive generations engaged in the community, its need for a stable and secure environment resulted in an identity that became self-perpetuating. At a critical inflexion point, communities became mature and stable enough to benefit from a level of infrastructure, evidenced as institutionalization and conformance to new behavioral routines built around their Christian beliefs. This institutional approach, rather than the original charismatic expression, has become the blueprint that shapes contemporary communities such as *Activate*.

3.2 Esler's Insights on Christian Community¹³⁵

Philip Esler's *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* is less a conventional survey of the New Testament than a theoretical model for interpreting scripture.¹³⁶ Even then, some reviews have challenged the idea that the book presents a model, describing it instead as 'an exercise in interpersonal hermeneutics... presenting the philosophical, psychological, sociological and theological foundations for a hermeneutical approach'.¹³⁷ Clearly, there is confusion regarding Esler's model. He motivates his work by stating that his intention for developing the model was to overcome the deficiencies of systematic, theology-driven, biblical interpretation that seeks to remove the particulars of the context in order to identify the universal truths that can then be systematically applied.¹³⁸ Instead he believes that a consideration of the diverse contextual elements that surround scripture provide a powerful capacity to increase comprehension and applicability for contemporary Christians (p.1).

Notwithstanding his complex interpretive slant, in this work I observe that Esler is attempting to offer a context-driven method for interpreting New Testament models of

¹³³ Nicholas H. Taylor, "Caligula, the Church of Antioch and the Gentile Mission," *Religion & Theology* 7, no. 1 (2000): 1-23.

¹³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "A Visible Reality," in *Called to Community: The Life Jesus Wants for His People*, ed. Charles E. Moore (Walden: Plough Publishing House, 2016), chap. 8:42, Kindle.

¹³⁵ Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis; London: Fortress; SPCK, 2005), Kindle. All quotations and references from this work in this section will be cited within the text.

¹³⁶ Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Biblical Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (2008): 92-93.

¹³⁷ Paul T. Penley, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 1 (2006): 185-187.

¹³⁸ Eric Clark Stewart, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36, no. 3 (2006): 135-136.

community such that they provide insights relevant for contemporary community formation. I begin by describing Esler's model of community, which he describes as 'a socio-theological model for persons in communion', and then discuss its validity for describing Christian community. I document the primary components of Esler's model and critique, firstly, the validity of his model and development process and, secondly, what the model reveals about Christian community. I conclude with a discussion of Esler's observations on community as they relate to the questions raised surrounding the *Activate* community.

3.2.1 Overview of Esler's *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community*

In chapter one, Esler critiques the strengths and weaknesses of the historical criticism field as the context for his model. Chapter two presents the foundation for the socio-theological model for persons-in-communion. Esler argues for his model in chapters three through five. He claims in chapter three that reliable knowledge of the New Testament era is available and in chapter four that biblical interpretation on non-literary text requires a consideration of the communicative intentions of the New Testament author. In chapter five, he engages with Schleiermacher's method for the oral, interpersonal nature and origin of the text. In chapter six, Esler presents a validation of his model on 1 Corinthians 10-14.

Having 'proven' the core model, he shifts his focus in chapters seven to ten to how contemporary Christians can continue to have valid communion and communication with New Testament authors through the 'communion of the saints' principle. As a minimum proof for his theory, he proposes that the authors' intentions and ideas live on in their texts and that therefore we can dialogically engage with an author. Esler discusses how the canon aligns with this perspective in chapter eleven. Finally, in chapter twelve, Esler offers a further abbreviated case study to demonstrate the validity of his interpretive model by applying the book of Romans to modern-day ethnic conflicts.

Given the project focus of community formation, I have focused my analysis on chapters two and six, the model of persons-in-communion and his principal case study application on 1 Cor. 10-14.

3.2.1.1 The Socio-Theological Model For 'Persons in Communion'

Esler's presentation of his socio-theological model is substantially and unnecessarily obscured by, as Greene-McCreight states, his perceived need to wear Saul's armour in the defense of his model.¹³⁹ He makes repeated attempts to defend and justify the model, its

¹³⁹ Greene-McCreight, "New Testament Theology," 92-93.

components and their authors.¹⁴⁰ As a result of these extensive efforts, it becomes difficult to see ‘the forest for the trees’ when trying to understand it. Typical of this style is his discussion of Zizioulas’s trinitarian theology (p.61-62). Esler offers Zizioulas’s theology of personhood as a component within the model of ‘persons in communion’ but then redundantly proceeds to explore Barth’s and Rahner’s trinitarian theologies, their deficiencies and possible ways to resolve them. It’s unclear whether his intention was to justify the selection of Zizioulas over Barth and Rahner by invalidating them. Having dismissed Barth and Rahner, Esler proceeds to identify three weaknesses of Zizioulas’s approach but offers no meaningful resolution to them. In order to usefully engage with Esler’s material, I have attempted to separate the model from his unconstructive wanderings.

Esler actually presents two models of community. The ‘local’ community is more easily understood as that which exists within a single instance of space and time, such as the community of the Corinthian church. A second model, a universal community that incorporates all local communities, represents a biblical interpretive model of Christian community unconstrained by space and time, relevantly a community between ourselves and the New Testament authors.¹⁴¹

Two core themes permeate the models: the role of spoken dialogue that establishes communion relationship through ideation engagement and the posture of ‘ekstasis’, defined as ‘a generous openness of being toward the other-in-communion that transcends the boundaries of self’ (p.60).

The local community model consists of three components: communion relationships based on Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ model; Rosenzweig’s common life applied to the ‘mechanics’ of communion relationship; and, finally, the interaction between God and humanity described by Zizioulas’s theology of personhood (Ch. 2) and its resultant shaping of human community.

From Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ model, relationships are foundational for our humanity. Only in the context of others (Buber’s ‘Thou’), do ‘I’ become myself. These relationships are developed through genuine dialogue where each person freely and fully engages with and invests in the other, regardless of the other’s condition or response. True understanding and love can only arise from this experience of genuine dialogue. Without genuine dialogue,

¹⁴⁰ A. K. M. Adam, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 1 (2007): 150-152.

¹⁴¹ Timothy B. Cargal, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Interpretation* 60, no. 4 (2006): 477.

there can be no love. These relationships reflect a high level of investment in the other's welfare and affirmation of and responsiveness to their needs.¹⁴² Within these relationships, each person experiences togetherness, reciprocity and a sense of mutual presence. Love exists in the mutual presence between 'I and Thou'. Such relationships are unconstrained by space and time. These are communion relationships.

'True' community comes from each person living in such communion relationships with one another and with a Living Centre. The Living Centre can be God but could also be, for example, the bonds and sense of belonging within a family or community.

Friedman suggests that genuine community is one of 'otherness' where people are not necessarily alike, but that they have a common concern and share a common situation that they may approach and respond to in different ways. These 'different ways' mean that we retain a *critical attitude* in relation to the views and attitudes of others. A posture of 'otherness' motivates us to understand the sources of such variances, especially those driven from our cultural context. Understanding the variances enables us to retain our individuality. Communion therefore represents a balance between similarity and difference (p.54). Developed from these communal relationships, community therefore shares a distinctive and collective identity based on cultural traits and life-ways, e.g. a church fellowship (p.53).

Rosenzweig's belief that 'speech is truly mankind's morning gift from the Creator' (p.56) leads him to propose that dialogue, language, and its absence, silence, are the vehicles by which we understand each other and our reality, our common life. Therefore, communion relationships can only form through genuine dialogue where genuine dialogue is the spoken exchange of ideas and where each participant is fully present, attentive to the other's voice and willing to be nonjudgmental in their response.¹⁴³ Esler refines his model by incorporating Rosenzweig's beliefs on language and common life as follows. Through temporal, face-to-face interactions of silent listening and responsive speaking, we enter into communion with others.¹⁴⁴ Communion deepens when renewal and rebirth of the body occurs through a common meal where meaningful dialogue can continue, and the shared nourishment of the body occurs. Finally, the deepest communion is achieved when common silence occurs, signifying 'a unity where everyone knows everyone else and greets him wordlessly – face to face' (p.58).

¹⁴² Paul Kenneth Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 24.

¹⁴³ Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 310.

In the third and final component of the local model, Esler introduces Zizioulas's theology of personhood to describe how God exists, the expression of His existence in relation to others. His intention is to establish the Trinity as a model for how we as human beings are called to exist with one another. Zizioulas describes the being of God as relational, ontologically 'in communion', i.e. in continual openness toward others. The Holy Trinity represents divine communion (p.62). God expresses His personhood as communion with others by freely loving the members of the Trinity and humanity. LaCugna describes that 'God's way of being in relationship with us, His personhood, is a perfect expression of God's being as God' (p.65). Consequently, the 'being of God' can only be known through personal relationships and love in the experience of ecclesial community, especially as embodied in eucharistic practices (p.61).

Given that human beings are made in the image of God, our human personhood can therefore only be found in communion with others. Living in communion represents the meaning of salvation and faith. We are increasingly perfected in this image of 'being' (p.276) through the 'animating force' of the Holy Spirit who alone enables us to achieve experiences of communion.

The universal community model essentially envelopes the local community model by extension through Esler's application of the communion of saints principle. Esler claims that, given that contemporary Christians are connected through identity and belonging to the same faith group as the deceased New Testament authors, specifically Paul, we exist in an interpersonal relationship with Paul in which communication and understanding occurs. In other words, Paul is now the 'Thou' to our 'I' (p.276), where the freedom to engage with Paul represents the essential 'genuine dialogue' that fosters communion relationship. Esler justifies his reasoning by arguing that we may anticipate Paul's responses because we belong to the same faith, understand the context, and have read and studied his previous writing. Therefore, Paul's model of socio-theological communion remains applicable and relevant. Accordingly, Esler believes that the New Testament authors provide a communal and interpersonal dialogue, over distance and across time, between God and humanity (p.229).¹⁴⁵

Despite the obfuscation and complexity, Esler's full model can be distilled as follows.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel J. Harrington, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community." *America* 194, no. 9 (2006): 32-36; Walter F. Taylor, Jr., "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Trinity Seminary Review* 30, no. 1 (2009): 50-52.

Originating from the Holy Trinity and their divine communion (Zizioulas), two community expressions develop. These are the

- Local community:
 - Formed ‘in the image of the Trinity’; example - the Corinthian Church
 - Communion relationships are based on Buber’s model and form through:
 - Genuine dialogue
 - Rosenzweig’s common life: listen/speak – meal – silence
- Universal community:
 - Formed ‘in the image of the Trinity’ and through the communion of the saints; example - the community of ‘Us and Paul’
 - Communion relationships are based on Buber’s model and form through:
 - Genuine dialogue
 - Rosenzweig’s common life: listen/speak – meal - silence

3.2.1.2 Model Validation

Esler applies the model framework to just one case study, 1 Corinthians 10--14, in order to validate its design. Prior to considering his analysis in the case study, I first address deficiencies in his development approach.

Firstly, Esler’s model assumes that the dynamics of a Jewish community are representative of all communities. Whilst the Jewish foundations of Buber’s and Rosenzweig’s models should not necessarily exclude them from consideration in a model for Christian community, their suitability should be more thoroughly demonstrated than Esler has shown.

Buber’s cited context for his community experience is the Hasidic community, a highly homogenous religious community of men and an early 1900s academic community that he was engaged with as he developed the ‘I-Thou’ framework.¹⁴⁶ Rosenzweig similarly developed his insights on common life within his Jewish and academic culture in the early 1900s.¹⁴⁷ Neither of these communities reflect the representative diversity of

¹⁴⁶ Kramer, *Martin Buber’s I and Thou*, 88-92.

¹⁴⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, xiii.

behaviors with which to develop a model for the Christian communities that frequently took root within diverse New Testament marginalized and unschooled constituencies.

Buber himself acknowledges that communion relationships are rare and are sustainable for only limited periods of time, and that, understandably, genuine community is even more rare.¹⁴⁸ Given the rarity of such instances, Esler's conviction that Buber's model is the sole viable platform for describing the community praxis is unproven.

Esler recognises other deficiencies in these component models when he acknowledges the one-another, patron-client, relationship dynamic in the New Testament culture (p.63) and the inability to prove the occurrence of Rosenzweig's 'common silence' (Ch. 6). Disappointingly, he does nothing to overcome these deficiencies.

Secondly, Esler's model emphasises dialogue within the participant community as the sole criterion of effective community. Esler considers only a subset of relevant relational behaviors, which consequently skews the community expression and experience. He uses Zizioulas's Trinity as the model for the nature of relations within the New Testament community, omitting any discussion of its missional activities (p.61-62). Additionally, incorporating Buber's perspective that the Living Centre of genuine community may be God or may just as readily be the 'love that family members share for one another' fails to acknowledge the significant eschatological and missiological implications in community from a Living Centre who is Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁹

Thirdly, Esler fails to sufficiently clarify how the three models, Buber, Rosenzweig and Zizioulas, engage and inform one another. Esler does little to explain how these components models interact or engage with one another (ch.2). Buber appears to sit at the centre of the overall model, within the context of Rosenzweig's common life conditioned by the critical role of speech. Awkwardly, Esler appends Zizoulas's trinitarian concepts as the theological dimension, explaining it as, 'because God intervened' (p.54). The three components, as presented, appear to exist almost in parallel, with redundancy observed through the emphasis on speech and otherness (ekstasis). Whilst this may have been Esler's intention in order to reinforce their importance, from a model development perspective, the redundancy introduces undue emphasis and bias. For example, the emphasis on the role of speech in forming communion relationship suggests that serving one another in relationship has no relevance or value.

¹⁴⁸ Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 49, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 83.

Turning now to a validation of Esler's insights on 1 Corinthians 10-14. As Esler states, the value of his model is demonstrated by its capacity to enhance the interpretation of the New Testament scripture and, as he puts it, 'to maximize the impact that the New Testament will have on contemporary Christian existence under God' (p.1). He demonstrates the value of the model using 1 Corinthians 10-14. I summarize the model insights based on the passage and compare them with Witherington's socio-rhetorical analysis and Keener's analysis drawn from narrative, sociological and rhetorical sources to highlight whether and how Esler's model has enhanced the interpretation.¹⁵⁰

As context, Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning the issues of divisiveness within the church. Two topics are presented within this specific passage: the use of glossolalia, unintelligible language, in order to magnify a person's status (p.151) and the role of the Lord's Supper as an embodiment of communion (p.164). Central to Paul's vision of what it means to be a Christian is meaningful relationship expressed through the dynamics of intelligible speaking and through participation in common meals. Esler proposes that this passage highlights Paul's key message on interpersonal communion in Christ.

Before beginning with the passage, Esler provides yet another opportunity for cognitive dissonance. He re-sequences the chapters in order to 'fit' them within his model. Specifically, Rosenzweig describes the sequence for communion as beginning with speaking and listening, moving to participation in a common meal, and ending with common silence. Accordingly, Esler builds his argument beginning with 1 Cor. 12-14, a discussion on the spoken word. He then moves to 1 Cor. 10 and 11 to discuss the common meal. Finally, he concedes there is no indication of common silence in the passage but is unwilling to consider its implication to model validation given its absence.

Despite this re-ordering, how does Esler's model enhance the understanding of New Testament community formation? At the outset, it's clear that Esler approaches the text principally through an experiential and relational lens, as compared with Witherington's and Keener's interpretation that could be described as a cognitive content lens. Where Esler amplifies the importance that words are spoken and intelligible, Witherington amplifies the importance of the authority and meaning of the words, implicitly recognising the necessity

¹⁵⁰ Ben Witherington, "New Testament Theology: Communion and Community," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2008): 146-147; Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 3:1428, Kindle; Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: a Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids; Carlisle, England: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1995), argument 7:6119, Kindle.

of spoken word. For Esler, the relational experience of speaking into another's life is life-giving (p155); for Witherington, the voice of God in the prophetic message has life.¹⁵¹

Excerpts from the passage demonstrate the respective interpretive streams:

1 Cor. 12:1-11 - Communion between God and Christ-followers

Esler:

Esler recognises Zizioulas's model of communion between persons and God. Saying that 'Jesus is Lord' not only establishes the appropriate relationship between a person and God, but simultaneously validates the importance of intelligible speech as a communication and communion medium. Speaking 'Jesus is Lord' or 'Jesus is cursed' demonstrates the positive and negative power of speech. In addition, the economic Trinitarian description reflects God's openness (ekstasis) toward humanity.

The majority of the nine spiritual gifts require the use of speech. The remaining gifts likely require an oral dimension, e.g. gifts of healing require the use of words of power, etc. (p.155). Therefore, speech is the embodiment of an ekstasis outpouring from one person to others. Finally, these spoken gifts vary in their capacity to build community, with tongues at the end of the list in order to diminish its importance given its lack of intelligibility.

Keener and Witherington:

Both remain silent on the role and importance of speech as a vehicle for communication and communion, focusing instead on the rhetorical style of communication that was prominent in Corinthian culture. Both reinforce the importance of the content or substance of the spoken word that by default naturally satisfies Esler's 'intelligibility' criteria. Keener and Witherington note that the gifts are likely a representative list and should not be understood as a superset of ranked spiritual gifts. Both agree with Esler's conclusion on the relative position of tongues in the list of gifts.

1 Cor. 13 – Love is greater than the gifts

Esler:

Love is a virtue, produced by the Spirit. It uniformly builds unity whereas speech can either build up or tear down. Paul describes practical expressions of love intended to overcome the honour-bound constraints of ancient Mediterranean relationships and create ekstasis toward one another.

Keener and Witherington:

Witherington suggests that v. 9-13 invoke the eschatological nature of Christianity that brings an added depth to the message in that the passage points to a context beyond an insular community expression.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, chap. 3:1468; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, argument 7:6208.

¹⁵² Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, argument 7:6440.

1 Cor. 14 – ‘the superiority of intelligible discourse’

Esler:

Speech, as in prophecy, must be intelligible in order to build community. Therefore, we should desire gifts that build community. Non-believers will not be won over by unintelligible words but will be persuaded by the truth in the intelligible message. Tongues should not be used if there is no interpretation.

Keener and Witherington:

Both align with Esler’s interpretation. However, Witherington’s emphasis that prophecy is important because of its content and capacity to build up others, as opposed to the importance of ‘the vessel and instrument’, challenges Esler’s perspective regarding the contribution of speech.¹⁵³

Esler’s conclusion regarding the value that the model brings to the passage interpretation is that it shows the importance of table fellowship and positive intelligible word gifts for building relational and experiential unity in the community and for creating an inclusive environment that welcomes non-members and non-believers. In both cases Esler suggests that the vehicle, speech and meals, is a powerful driver of unity in addition to the context and content of each interaction.

Whilst the vehicle of speech and meals may enhance the interaction, I agree with Witherington and Keener that the specifics of the message and the symbolic content of the Lord’s Supper are the overwhelming drivers of unity whilst the spoken word is understood as a particularly effective vehicle for enabling the message. Esler would do well to differentiate between that which enables relationship through intelligibility, the tools of speech and table fellowship, and that which spiritually transforms, the substance and context of words and meals. In the end, Adam’s sentiment that Esler was willing ‘to treat weighty topics without the pretense of comprehensive analysis’ is a valid conclusion.¹⁵⁴

3.2.2 Esler on New Testament Community

How does Esler’s model framework and application represent or perhaps misrepresent New Testament community?

¹⁵³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, argument 7:6681.

¹⁵⁴ Adam, “New Testament Theology,” 150-152.

3.2.2.1 Patron-Client Relations vs. Persons as Communion

Embedded within the core of Esler's framework and application to 1 Corinthians is a remarkable scenario where Spirit-enabled ekstasis relations were introduced into the Corinthian patron-client relational system. Esler briefly identifies the situation but disappointingly does not develop the potential dynamics and interactions.

Esler's community framework leverages Zizioulas's theology of *Being as Communion*, a relational theology of the immanent Trinity that is appropriated to the believing church as its source.¹⁵⁵ Zizioulas's theology describes a profound relational foundation for the Christian community based on his understanding of 'person as otherness in communion'. The divine person (hypostasis) exists entirely within the context of communion with the other. The person is unique, irreplaceable and also 'other'. Whilst retaining a particularity or otherness, person is simultaneously only understood in terms of constituting the other. As humanity, we have the capacity to exist as persons through salvation and the resultant hypostatic union in Christ in the Spirit. True personhood can therefore only be constituted through union with the divine persons. An essential characteristic of our personhood is ekstasis, movement beyond our ontological particularity toward the other in order to overcome the distance of individualization. This movement occurs in the freedom that constitutes love.¹⁵⁶

These concepts and the resulting relational form describe a participant community experience that would be a vivid contrast to the dominating and oppressive patron-client relational system where higher-status patron coerced those of lesser status, the financially challenged clients, to promote or boast of the patron's accomplishments in order to enhance the patron's honour.¹⁵⁷

Whilst Esler fails to explore the consequences of the interactions between the new relational expression and the dominant relational system, it is a worthy question to explore how this Spirit-enabled relational fabric might challenge and dismantle the oppressive relational dynamics. Initially, one might imagine a deep conflict within the community participants as they connect with others in Spirit-enabled ekstasis relations whilst also needing to conform to the controlling patron-client system that provided their financial support. As the community matured and gained an appreciation of one another, this new relational dynamic deepened. How did the uniqueness of this freedom in relationship shape

¹⁵⁵ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

¹⁵⁶ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 44-55.

¹⁵⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, argument 1:2732.

community engagement, engagement with the surrounding culture and contribute to the overall growth of Christianity?

The picture presented here is one of radical, meaningful and loving investment in one another within the context of oppressive controlling patron-client relationships. Today, contrary to *Activate's* approach, I contend that the same meaningful investment in one another is similarly powerfully effective against the context of individuality and weak social connections.

3.2.2.2 Community Leadership

Esler presents a singular relational model, Buber's 'I-Thou', for communion in community but omits to incorporate Buber's leadership component. At a minimum, he might have additionally considered Buber's discussion on Zaddik leadership within the Hasidic community. Buber identified the Zaddik in the role of 'Living Centre', 'the indispensable pivot that encouraged the community to continually turn to dialogue'.¹⁵⁸ Buber recognised that the dialogue between the Hasid and the Zaddik was also intertwined with each Hasid's personal dialogue with God, placing the Zaddik in the role of guide or teacher.

In his discussion of the Zizioulas component, Esler acknowledges that one of its weaknesses is the possibility for relationships to be satisfied solely within a one-another context (p.63), and that any beneficial spillover to other members of the community of an individual's otherness may be coincidental. He disappointingly directs the reader to group identity theory for resolution. Here is a perfect opportunity to discuss the role of community leadership in both governance and influence/teaching capacities. Given the diverse leadership roles expressed in the New Testament through Jesus, the Jerusalem church, Paul and the immediate Corinthian church leadership, there is sufficient evidence that leadership certainly influenced, at times substantially, the nature of the I-Thou relationship and the overall expression of the community.

3.2.2.3 Importance of Speech

I disagree with Esler's perspective that communion relationships are *only* achieved through speech. Whilst it's certainly reasonable given anthropological and sociological insights to recognise the role of speech in forming relationships, again there is more than

¹⁵⁸ Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 89.

enough evidence in scripture and contemporary life to demonstrate other ways to experience communion relationship. Certainly, Christ's death and resurrection were more than sufficient for us to enter into communion relationship with Him. The woman touching the hem of the garment and receiving healing (Mk 5:28), the woman sacrificing the jar of perfume over Christ (Mt 26:7), and the paralytic picking up his mat (Lk 5:19) all reflect actions of love and relationship that are not conditional on spoken communication.

For Buber, genuine dialogue is a necessary precursor for the experience of love to occur between people.¹⁵⁹ How does Esler reconcile this sequence with 1 John 4:19, 'we love because He first loved us', or with his validation case study of 1 Cor. 10-14 where he acknowledges that Paul privileges agape love over spiritual gifts?

Esler's model for relationship narrows further with the constraint that communion only occurs with the exchange of ideas. By contrast, the L'Arche communities excellently exemplify communion relationships where speech, let alone genuine dialogue, barely exists and yet some of the most profound communion relationships develop.¹⁶⁰ Given Buber's and Rosenzweig's personal contexts, speech is critical because it enables dialogue, which was a key value in their Jewish and academic culture. Disappointingly, Esler chooses not to reconcile this component with the Christian narrative where relationship forms through other mediums.

3.2.2.4 Human Response to Community

For a more realistic understanding of community, the nature and consequences of human response within community must also be considered. Esler describes a model that fails to recognise, firstly, our freedom to choose and, secondly, the impact of our sin.

How might considering the implications of the image of God factor into community? How might innocent free choices have made by an individual shape the community? For example, what is the impact upon the community when one person decides to leave or when another decides to join? These, albeit simple, examples reflect choices that personify the unique freedom of the individual and that have the potential to significantly impact the community. Moltmann offers that human beings are only in the *image* of God *when* they are in human fellowship, but he also recognises the reciprocal tension that exists between the community and the individual. He states, 'The rights of human beings to life, freedom

¹⁵⁹ Kramer, *Martin Buber's I and Thou*, 23-24.

¹⁶⁰ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 86.

and self-determination always arise *together with* the community's claim upon people'.¹⁶¹ Exploring this tension between the rights of the individual and the community expression would strengthen Esler's model.

The impact of sin on community is perhaps even more necessary to explore than freedom of choice. In *Communion and Otherness*, Zizioulas suggests that a product of the Fall is not only a fear or rejection of a 'specific other' but also a fear of 'all otherness', a fundamental rejection of relationship with others if their difference appears to threaten us.¹⁶² He continues that the rejection from these perceived differences translates to division that then results in death. Minimally, these are the others that do not belong within our community. Miroslav Volf terms this 'fear of all otherness' as the sin of exclusion and locates it as an issue of our identity. He reasons that when we define our identity as a sovereign independent, then all others reflect difference and threat and should therefore be rejected. He proposes that by following God's creation model in Genesis 1 of separating and binding, human beings should seek to define themselves as a unique composition of interdependent relationships. Our individuality arises from this composition whilst the interdependence upon others resolves the threat and potential to reject.¹⁶³ How we understand our own identity therefore critically shapes the nature of community. This is an especially significant issue for Christian community that is intended to function as non-exclusive.

3.2.2.5 Community or Christian Community

The absence of any clear missiological consideration in the community expression, along with the description of relationships that are not uniquely Christ-centered, raises the question of whether Esler's model, as observed from the outside, applies to a general community rather than one that is specifically Christian. The value of spoken, intelligible communication creates appeal and inclusivity for any community as does table fellowship. Other than Zizioulas's Trinity, very little of Esler's model is unique to the Christian faith, and much of it seems applicable to any religious or altruistic community expression.

¹⁶¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 25.

¹⁶² John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 1-4.

¹⁶³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 65-67.

3.3 Moving from New Testament Community to Contemporary Community

How do the observations on Dunn's and Esler's New Testament communities inform contemporary community development, and specifically *Activate*?

3.3.1 The Nature and Impact of Spirit-Enabled Organic Community

Dunn's view is that New Testament community only existed in the working and functioning together of community, in other words, through its charismatic ministry.¹⁶⁴ Forms of early Christian community often originated through the Spirit's engagement with members of a few neighboring households. Activity and focus would be Spirit-enabled, charismatic and spontaneous. The relational fabric occurred as much through proximity and frequency of interaction as through aligned beliefs, values and purpose. Over time, given increasing participation, the desire for convenience and simple inertia, practices and rituals became formalized, giving rise to an institutional community structure that was then simply sustained by human process and convention. Reliance on the Spirit's direction was increasingly less present given the familiarity and transparency of the community form and structure. With that diminishing reliance there were fewer expressions of supernatural faith.

Where originally the Spirit's activity was the criterion and central focus for the community, the emphasis shifted over time to the activity and work by the community. This was the experience of *Activate* at CCF. Today, in our western church experience, this focus is the system and programming that drives Christian community. The pathway that led from these original Spirit-initiated communities to the contemporary systems such as *Activate* is relatively easy to see and quite understandable as the desire for sustainable community evolved. The challenge for *Activate* and all contemporary communities is how to thrive in the freedom and power of the Holy Spirit whilst still leveraging the value of process and structure that can facilitate its expression without defining or constraining the community.

From the participant experience, this challenge points firstly to the sensitivity that each participant must have regarding the maturity of their relationship with the Spirit and their willingness to seek and yield to the Spirit despite personal desire and sin nature. The challenge points to a willingness by all participants to relationally invest in others regardless of cultural dynamics and, finally, to the expectations of leadership to enable and equip each participant according to a Spirit-led paradigm, trusting for an outcome that they may have little capacity to understand or determine. For all of these dimensions, process and structure

¹⁶⁴ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 120.

can add value but cannot be the determinant or constraint for the community. Process and structure are perhaps better understood as enabling tools for the community that are triggered and initiated according to the Spirit's prompting. This last observation would certainly be a necessary refinement given my experiences of the *Activate* system at CCF where the structure was all too easily the sole determinant for the community expression.

3.3.2 The Spirit's Shaping of Community Relations

Esler's use of Zizioulas and Buber creates a dominating foundation for community, that of ekstasis-oriented, one-another relationships. I contend that Buber's I-Thou, one-another, relationship unit actually carries a far greater weight in our personal experiences of community than we explicitly recognise. When invited to consider how we are known by others, we will eventually conclude that we are only truly and uniquely known by another through the experience of individual relationship, one to another. For example, I may have a casual knowledge of members of my Christian community given our common beliefs and practices, but the greatest concentration of relationally knowing an individual comes from the history and interactions that I have through one-on-one experiences with them. This perspective again contradicts the *Activate* paradigm that encourages convenient relations that satisfy the system configuration. Notwithstanding Esler's emphasis solely on spoken, intelligible interactions as the vehicle for relationships, the ekstasis orientation of one-another relations establishes a relational fabric that has the potential to offset oppressive relational dynamics that implicitly exist within contemporary culture. Whereas the patron-client system defined much of the relational fabric in New Testament community, today's post-modern tendency for individuality and freedom that disincentivises relationship and community may be significantly diminished in the face of free, creative, loving relations.

3.3.3 The Spirit's Work to Reach Those Beyond the Community

Dunn's discussion of community ministry might be easily understood as the same form of outreach to non-believers that shapes today's contemporary evangelism programs. Certainly, the case study experiences of inviting the small groups to satisfy the outreach agenda by serving together at the local food kitchen or hosting a children's event at the church in order to invite the neighbourhood could be interpreted this way. By contrast, Esler's almost singular emphasis on establishing a relational fabric that is invitational and inclusive, through ekstasis and intelligible experiences, is an entirely authentic and superior outreach form that offers meaningful potential for non-believers to come into relationship

with Christ. Importantly, experiences such as baptism and the Lord's Supper should be understood as symbols of identity and not criteria for community membership. The implications of approaching outreach along these dimensions also suggests that equipping community and leadership requires a re-orientation in focus and direction, compared to conventional approaches like *Activate* that today focus on homogeneous group events and programming that operate largely within the context of the institutional church infrastructure.

3.3.4 The Spirit's Shaping of the Overall Community

Dunn insists that unity occurs through a core belief in Jesus as the exalted Christ that then motivates subscription and adherence to Christ's teachings. This suggests that Christian community has a strong, visible identity and mission that is a contrast to the surrounding neighbourhood. The increasing alignment with this core belief and its resulting practices clearly raised the primacy and visibility of the New Testament Christian communities. Over time, this identity and mission would certainly appear as a counter-cultural and non-exclusive community.

For Esler, unity in communion relationships occurs through the process of genuine dialogue where all beliefs and views are to be accepted without judgment. There was no place for a unifying mandate to unite around the belief of Jesus as the exalted Christ. Whilst his model allows for a missiological aspect, he neither acknowledges its importance for Christian community nor discusses the importance of leadership in shaping this aspect.¹⁶⁵

This contrast provokes a question regarding how and where unity occurs for community and, more importantly, for Christian community. Under Esler's model, unity exists through explicit participation in a dialogical process. Put simply, the willingness of all participants to engage in this process establishes a form of unity. However, in reality, the extent to which unity is achieved is highly subjective and dependent upon each individual's willingness, receptivity and maturity to actively and unconditionally engage in the process without judgment. For Esler, unity is experienced internally by each individual when electing to engage in dialogue. Therefore, unity is internal and invisible.

Actions speak louder than words might be an apt comparison between Dunn's and Esler's unity definition. For Dunn, obedience to Jesus as Christ and His teachings provides an objective and external reference point by which the community and others can observe,

¹⁶⁵ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), chap. 6:2180, Kindle.

experience and measure unity. Whilst an individual's interpretation of Jesus as Christ can remain intangible, a willingness to practically and consistently engage in Christ's teachings to explicitly love and serve others and to go and make disciples provides tangible and demonstrable evidence of worshipful alignment under Christ.

Given this Dunn-Esler contrast, I suggest that if unity is to serve as an attracting element of Christian community, it must predominantly find its definition in a form where its achievement is not solely determined by the individual or where it is solely an intangible consideration but where its manifest expression can be practically observed and validated by others. Building further on these criteria, a unity expression should also not be derived from a static community expression that inhibits the fluid movement of the Spirit, as is the case with the *Activate* community.

Finally, Dunn's comments on 'testing' for acceptable diversity have value and application for contemporary community expression. In his discussion of how the canon of the New Testament can continue to delineate acceptable and unacceptable diversity, Dunn re-frames his analysis as follows: The New Testament contains a variety of instances of what is acceptable diversity. The definition of acceptable diversity is determined not by the ultimate structure or appearance of those instances, but by the fact that the instance does not undermine the integrating centre of 'historical Jesus, Christ exalted'.¹⁶⁶

This evaluation test is similarly applicable for determining whether contemporary Christian community reflects the Christian faith. Having enhanced the unity and diversity model with the necessary sociological factors, the test becomes simply whether *a belief or action* undermines the community's holistic alignment with this integrating centre. While this is perhaps overly simplistic, I suggest that explicitly leveraging this evaluation along the development path of newly forming Christian communities such as Fresh Expressions can materially improve our clarity and effectiveness as the missional Body of Christ.

3.3.5 Leadership That Facilitates the Spirit's Work

Much of the commentary in this section begins to describe the posture and function of community leadership. Whereas conventional leadership models often draw the community into alignment and activity to support a singular purpose that is identified and directed by the highest tier leadership, the model of leadership that is emerging here is one

¹⁶⁶ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 245.

where those in leadership are facilitators and enablers of the Spirit's activity that occurs through each member of the community in relational outreach.

3.4 Informing the Shape of Pneumatologically-Constituted Community

Concluding this chapter, I draw together the observations on contemporary and biblical communities as they relate to the questions raised in the *Activate* case study of chapter one. Whilst none of the observations fully captures the nature of any particular aspect of the community, they do illuminate relevant fundamentals for effective community and also provide guardrails for developing the challenge model that ultimately informs the hybrid community framework.

The concept of a community, originated and shaped by the Holy Spirit, was entirely familiar and acceptable as an early Christian community. Communities were relatively small, physically co-located, and seemed to pay little attention to the cultural dynamics, preferring instead to prioritize the reality of their faith experience. The function of structure and system increased for human comfort and convenience, prompting diminished evidence of the Spirit in the community expression. Today, the human tendency to prioritize culturally-derived systems over Spirit-led fluidity has almost entirely replaced the Spirit's guidance despite the awareness that the resultant community is substantially diminished. This is clearly the case for the *Activate* system. Whilst there can certainly be value in structure and process for creating transparency and engagement, the human tendency to rely solely on structures that facilitate personal comfort and convenience at the expense of the Spirit's guidance should be guarded against. This perspective of cultural convenience and system reliance was readily observed throughout the *Activate* case study experiences. The challenge for contemporary Christian community formation is, therefore, how to develop a structure such that the Spirit can work freely and optimally through the community.

Ekstasis-based relationships are substantially more meaningful than the social relationships described by the *Activate* system or even a conventional understanding of community relations. Relationship exists firstly with Christ, and then through Christ, with those identified by the Spirit. For the participants, these relationships may entirely determine their engagement with the overall community entity. Given that these relationships are the central fabric of the community, inviting the Spirit's presence to understand how and with whom we are to be in relationship is critical. Recognising that outreach principally and effectively occurs through one-another relations requires that we acknowledge and address our tendency to emphasise relations within the community and

avoid the discomfort of developing these new relations. The perspective requires two important shifts for the community. Firstly, leadership must focus their equipping and encouragement on the unique development needs and challenges of each participant's relational sphere. Secondly, leadership must acknowledge that programmed, impersonal events occurring within the church institution may not facilitate effective outreach relational opportunities.

Unity or oneness within the community, when constituted by the Spirit, provides a sense of belonging and identity for participants and is also a powerful, attracting element to those beyond the community. Spirit-constituted unity has both an implicit and explicit quality: implicit as it represents the increasing alignment of participants' beliefs and values in Jesus Christ, and explicit through an observed expression of participants' relational love and action toward their neighbours. Given this unity understanding, *Activate's* behavioral alignment in the case study experiences where all small groups studied the same materials or participated in the same outreach event may be better understood as an expression of uniformity that may or may not facilitate the Spirit's presence. Assuming a Spirit-constituted unity expression, effective community leadership is less about creating a visible, unified community expression with a static identity and far more about enabling the Spirit-led fluidity and responsiveness of a network of individuals in relations. Leaders must develop the capacity to continually and flexibly respond to that direction and equip community participants with a similar capability.

With these fundamentals and guardrails, I turn now to step three of Fiddes' method, the process of developing a challenge model, specifically a Spirit-led organic community. In chapter four, I propose the pneumatological contributions to this community, essentially the core or spine that shapes our human response and engagement.

CHAPTER 4

A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CORE FOR ORGANIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Step three of Fiddes' integrated method of ecclesiology develops a challenge model to the *Activate* community system. Fiddes' criteria for an effective challenge model is that the proposed enhancements should allow God to freely and creatively operate within the community.¹⁶⁷ Accordingly, the Spirit should function as the pneumatological core, or spine, for the community. From the questions posed at the end of chapter one that explore this concept, this chapter addresses the third: what activities of the Spirit most relevantly engage participants and the community such that Christ-centred, life-giving expressions can occur?

Through an exploration of the Spirit's work, I clarify how the Spirit can establish the capacity within the community to be an effective expression of the Gospel in terms of enabling both transformative relations within the community and offering life-giving, attractional introductions into relationship with Christ and the community for those who do not yet belong to it. This community concept is organic in nature, recognising that the Spirit's work begins with and through the individual, regardless of whether they are simply participants or incrementally function as leaders of the community. The Spirit flows through each individual into their relationships within and beyond the community. Combining the work in individuals, their relations and through leadership that shapes the community entity, the Spirit creates and shapes the overall experience of community for all participants. A useful image that describes the Spirit's work and focus is offered by A.W. Tozer who asked 'Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork, that is the Holy Spirit, are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow'.¹⁶⁸ Regardless of the diversity of musical notes offered by each piano, they are all tuned by the one fork to create a singular, harmonious sound. The Spirit works additionally to establish a context of freedom for these Christ-centered activities and relationships and facilitates a unity or oneness that presents an observed community expression that attracts others into relationship with Christ and the community participants. This observed expression can be understood in scripture by the Body of Christ image (1 Cor 12), where there is a diversity of members and activities that exist and function in aligned oneness directed by Christ.

In the subsequent chapters (five and six), I explore the responses to the Spirit's direction

¹⁶⁷ Fiddes, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, 25-35.

¹⁶⁸ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2004), 69.

by humankind in terms of their participation in the community, the nature of engagement from beyond the community, and by community leadership.

4.1 Introduction

The community experience and expression that I am proposing can be understood as the result of the interaction between an overt, static structure and the dynamic, contemporaneous influence of the Spirit. Community structures, such as the *Activate* small group system, are often derived by combining elements of past tradition and contemporary experience into an integrated system so that they can be expected to produce effective community. The core assumption for this formation approach is that effective and identifiable behaviours, values and beliefs from past communities or from those observed in culturally relevant community entirely determine the shape and nature of contemporary effective Christian community. The concern is that whilst the Spirit may have been historically active in these past communities, only the resulting visible expression can be recognized and subsequently codified within the new community structure. Consequently, the structure is prescriptive in nature and is imposed uniformly upon all community participants. Functioning as a set of guardrails, the structure determines the activity, process, vocabulary and organization of the community. Community formation is entirely visible and deterministic.

As contrast, in this pneumatologically shaped community the influence of the Spirit begins organically with the individual, progresses into the community relational fabric, and combines to establish the overall community entity that is experienced by participants and observed by those beyond the community. I explore four specific areas of the Spirit's work: 1) the manner in which the Spirit brings unique, contextual and continual revelation of Christ to each individual that initiates human activity that bears witness to Christ; 2) the context of godly personal freedom, made possible by the Spirit, that establishes a range of life experiences for each individual; 3) richer and deeper relational dynamics between individuals, given the Spirit's presence; and 4) the nature of the unity or oneness that the Spirit establishes within this community. The Spirit's influence may align with a defined framework or, significantly, may invite the participant to act beyond the prescribed activity or value, provided the action falls within the reference of Jesus' life on earth. A community framework may partially facilitate this pneumatological formation, but it must also provide space and time for the Spirit's activity such that the resulting entity and its effectiveness becomes the hybrid of the interaction between framework and Spirit.

I consider the Spirit's activity principally through the work of three theologians: Barth,

Zizioulas and Moltmann. Barth's exposition of revelation by the Spirit to an individual establishes the unique and contemporaneous knowledge of God that invites the individual to contextually respond in word and action toward Christ and others. Zizioulas's understanding of the ecclesial person predicated on continual engagement with the Spirit establishes a relational fabric that is intended as a correspondence to the immanent Trinity. For both activity and relationship, Moltmann's contributions on Spirit-enabled freedom suggest an expectation and potential for deeper and broader experiences, given their Christ-ordained reality, than are expected within the secular reality. Finally, I engage Barth's and Moltmann's work to draw together the diversity of individual activity and focus through deepening Christ-centred relational fabric to establish a community in observable unity.

Beginning with Barth's understanding of the Spirit as revelation to the individual, I discuss the Spirit breaking through as '*afresh and anew*' revelation¹⁶⁹ to the individual in order to establish a vibrant expression of Christian life that is specific to the individual's life context and sphere of influence. Fully yielding to the Spirit's direction can substantially shape the diversity within the community as individuals each uniquely respond to these diverse promptings of the Spirit, thereby presenting a diverse range of human activity. An equally critical component of revelation is the freedom made available to the individual through relationship with Christ in the Spirit. I incorporate Moltmann's discussion of the substance of this freedom, specifically its positioning of the individual on a vastly different spectrum of experiential potential that expands their expectations and anticipation for life on earth predicated on their life in Christ. The reality of this new understanding of freedom similarly creates a shift in relational context and expectation for each individual. Zizioulas's dialogue on 'being as communion' repositions the community participant not as an individual in isolation and independence but as a person whose being and fullness is entirely contingent upon Spirit-enabled relationships through Christ with one another. This is the essential relational fabric of the community. In addition to the Spirit establishing this fabric, I incorporate Aquinas's and Moltmann's dialogue on the Spirit's work in resolving the relational dissonance that can prevent participants from experiencing this relational fabric. I speak to the focus of the Spirit's work, described by Barth and Moltmann in drawing together the uniqueness of each individual and their communion relations to form an experiential and observable community that represents a unity or oneness of identity and belonging and an attraction to the surrounding environment.

¹⁶⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 1.1, eds G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 159.

4.2 The Spirit as Revelation and Freedom to the Individual

Pneumatologically-shaped community begins with the Spirit's work in the individual. Two foci are relevant: firstly, from Barth, the Spirit's autonomous, spontaneous and unique engagement with each individual to bring the reality of Christ and the invitation of vibrant life and relationship with Christ; and, secondly, given relationship with Christ, Moltmann's understanding of godly freedom in Christ for the individual in terms of their personal and relational reality. These two themes, the uniqueness of individual engagement and the context of godly freedom, directly challenge the *Activate* system, where all participants are expected to conform in their activity within a narrowly defined range. Despite attempts to rigidly follow the system, CCF failed to experience the promised growth. Along the way, the youth pastor and his family, along with a number of long-time members of the church, left and broke relationship with the community. As I stated earlier, implicit in the system is a formulaic understanding that specific behaviors generate specific results with no room for behavior that may be far more relevant to the context and moment. When the Seed Slingers group stepped away from the system and pursued a very different outreach approach, the Spirit facilitated meaningful and transformative experiences in them and for the neighbouring community.

4.2.1 Barth's Foundation

To appreciate the mechanics of Barth's explanation of the Spirit as revelation, I first outline his core ideology and the dialectic building blocks that he employs to explain the Spirit's work. This foundation provides the context for the Spirit's lens toward humankind and clarifies the appropriate posture and nature of humankind's engagement as worshippers of Jesus as Lord.

4.2.1.1 Veni Creator Spiritus

Barth summarizes his theology as 'Veni creator spiritus'—'Come, o come thou spirit of life'¹⁷⁰—describing his anticipation, hope and longing for the coming of God, a new world and new humanity, whilst at the same time representing a decisive protest against all human attainment and possessions. Consistently throughout *Church Dogmatics*, Barth employs a singular and simple lens: that of total and sole reliance upon the particular revelation of Christ through the particular presence of the Holy Spirit. There seems to be no better starting point for

¹⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 58.

a project on a pneumatologically-constituted community than this theological foundation.

Barth's ideology is evident within his revelation structure: God reveals Himself as Lord of humankind, and sinful humankind has no capacity to know God other than through God's free, self-revealing communication.¹⁷¹ As Gustaf Wingren describes, Barth's model presents 'a gulf between a higher being (God) and a lower being (humankind). God sends a message to humankind across the gulf, which both indicates the difference between God and humankind and discloses God's will to fellowship with humankind'.¹⁷² Rowan Williams asserts that this communication is so infallible and irresistible that Barth's description of the acknowledgment by humankind as response to God's revelation is essentially superfluous and allows no room for freedom of response. He endorses Freud's perspective of Barth's model that suggests that Barth offers humankind an infantile relational posture toward God rather than an adult human relationship.¹⁷³ Where Williams presents the implications of this ideology as negative, I find it to be a necessary position that invites appropriate and powerful humility on the part of humankind. I imagine Barth's intent is to offset the vulnerability of the proverbial Tower of Babel. It's helpful to elaborate on the image of Wingren's gulf, seeing it not as a separation where God is slightly elevated and marginally separated over humankind, but rather as an infinite and vertical chasm that is utterly impossible for humankind to conquer. God's communication is not simply a passive desire for fellowship, as one might read the words of an invitation from a friend, but is always and can only be an ontological, actualized experience of His unconditional and limitless love. It is this experience of His love that is His revelation.¹⁷⁴

Building further, recognising that God's communication is in reality an experience of His love supersedes and diminishes the critique that Barth emphasizes rational knowledge over justification or the event of salvation.¹⁷⁵ I imagine that Barth considers that the revelation of Christ's love is known simultaneously as experience and cognition. Consequently, cognition and experience are symbiotic, where the function of cognition is to allow the individual to explicitly convey the reality of experiential truth to others.

¹⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 306-333.

¹⁷² Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), 24.

¹⁷³ Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2007), chap. 7:2199-2242, Kindle.

¹⁷⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 483-4.

¹⁷⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 17-18.

4.2.1.2 Dialectics

A second paradigm, found throughout *Dogmatics*, is Barth's use of dialectic contrast in order to explore and understand theological truths. Several classes of dialectic are relevant for a discussion on the Spirit as revelation.¹⁷⁶

Supplementary realdialektic is a dialectic in objectively real relations where one of the pair predominates in value and power over the other and eventually takes the weaker up into itself. The initial situation of opposition ultimately gives way to reconciliation. Examples include the relationship between *real* history and *unreal* history (Romans 1) and real humanity in Christ and unreal humanity in Adam, where, in both cases, the real overcomes the unreal. One of Barth's two foundational paradigms, time-eternity, falls within this supplementary realdialektic. Eternity enters into history without being overcome by it and takes time up into itself, thereby fulfilling it. Time is not the antithesis of eternity, but rather the weaker partner in the pair. Within this particular dialectic, Barth further identifies the tension of being and becoming in humanity. In Christ (real history, real humanity), we (unreal humanity) already *are* made new (past tense). In unreal, we are continually *becoming* through repeated actualistic breakthroughs of the righteousness and knowledge of God into our temporal fallen existence. Here Barth describes a process dialectic in which breakthroughs are grounded and contingent upon the teleology of real history.

Complementary realdialektic occurs where two members stand in open contradiction or antithesis. No reconciliation or synthesis between the two can occur. The 'contradiction or antithesis of two magnitudes is steadfastly maintained in order to bear witness to a truth lying beyond both of them'.¹⁷⁷ This dialectic is one of becoming, in that thinking cannot be constant or once and for all in position but rather is in continual movement between the two contradicting magnitudes.

4.2.1.3 Time-Eternity and Veiling-Unveiling Dialectics in Barth's Doctrine of Revelation

Two dialectics primarily shape Barth's theology and form the core of his doctrine of revelation. They are the time-eternity and veiling-unveiling dialectics. Time-eternity is the precursor that explains the veiling-unveiling between God and humankind in revelation.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Beintker *Die Dialektik in der 'Dialektischen Theologie' Karl Barths* (Berlin: Kaiser, 1987), 38-89.

¹⁷⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, Kindle e-reader book, part 1:1890.

God reveals himself to us in the present moment and in that revelation fully expresses the victory given to us in Christ on the cross. Whilst God reveals himself in a creaturely medium, there is no synthesis between God and the medium. Consequently, the unveiling of God is entirely God's choice as to where and when the veil becomes transparent, requiring and creating faith in the human to receive the revelation. In eternity, the divine decision to reveal was made once, in the past. However, in the present moment, because the individual can never own the revelation, he or she must always receive the revelation anew, in each unique moment.¹⁷⁸ During the event of revelation, God concretely unveils Himself as the Word of God within our secular reality. The individual is made capable of hearing and responding to this revelation solely by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁹ God alone determines 'to whom, what, when and where' revelation occurs.¹⁸⁰ Revelation is never universally present or attainable. It is a unique event, specific to an individual person, given in time and context for that moment. Revelation is therefore continually given at all times (*anew*). Revelation is uniquely expressed (*afresh*) each time.¹⁸¹

4.2.2 Barth's Doctrine of God's Revelation to the Individual

Barth understands revelation as the Father revealing himself *through* the Son and *in* the Spirit. Logically revelation follows a Trinitarian structure: 'God reveals himself. He reveals himself through himself. He reveals *himself*'.¹⁸² God is simultaneously the Revealer (the Father), the act of revelation (the Son), and the perpetual impartation of that revelation (the Holy Spirit).¹⁸³

Revelation is the concrete knowledge of God. It occurs as an event when God freely unveils Himself and manifests as the Word of God to a specific individual during a specific event within secular reality.¹⁸⁴ The particularity of revelation means that it is continually and newly given and expressed in different form each time.¹⁸⁵ Its nature and content are contingent upon the contemporaneous context of the individual receiving the revelation.¹⁸⁶ Whilst revelation is utterly unique, it has continuity at all times within the individual and

¹⁷⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 159.

¹⁷⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 169, 182.

¹⁸⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 65.

¹⁸¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 159.

¹⁸² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 296.

¹⁸³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 295-304.

¹⁸⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 11, 213; 1.1, 69.

¹⁸⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 145, 117, 159.

¹⁸⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 141, 183, 161.

across all individuals.¹⁸⁷ Note that this continuity does not insist upon conformity of activity or response by the individual.

The nature of revelation is always reconciliation in substance, summoning the individual to freely submit to the Lordship of Christ.¹⁸⁸ God speaks what individuals cannot say to themselves.¹⁸⁹ Revelation is simultaneously Gospel in content and Law in form, revealing both the grace of God and sin of the individual.¹⁹⁰ Revelation occurs within an asymmetric relational context, 'person to person'.¹⁹¹ Revelation never leaves the sphere of God, as, in reality, it is given to Christ in the individual through their mutual indwelling.¹⁹² Revelation is the sole mechanism for providing knowledge of God within the process of justification, sanctification and vocation. Receiving knowledge of God through unique and fresh revelation prompts a unique response by the individual that gives witness to this unique revelation of the knowledge of God.

How is revelation given? Initially Barth states that revelation is given through a creaturely or derivative expression, delivered through the 'spoken/written' form of proclamation or scripture.¹⁹³ Later, in *Dogmatics*, he expands his perspective, acknowledging that revelation may occur, albeit indirectly, in sign-giving through the sacraments, church life and acts of service from one individual to another.¹⁹⁴ Regardless of the specific form, revelation *only* occurs if and when God chooses to reveal or actualize Himself within the event in the specific expression. Otherwise these expressions are simply descriptive witnesses or recollections to past revelation or expectations of future revelation.

Synthesizing Barth's logic, the Spirit uniquely gives revelation of the knowledge of God to an individual through the proclamation of the word, through scripture, the sacraments, acts of service or participation in church or community life. Revelation knowledge of God occurs as an event, through an individual to another individual.

¹⁸⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God 2.2* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 711.

¹⁸⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God 1.1*, 144.

¹⁸⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation 3.2*, 186.

¹⁹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God 2.2*, 511.

¹⁹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God 1.1*, 150-153; Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 216-220.

¹⁹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God 1.1*, 241.

¹⁹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God 1.1*, 166, 117.

¹⁹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God 1.2*, 227.

4.2.3 Freedom Given by the Spirit in Revelation

Galatians 5 contrasts life by the Spirit with life in the flesh, citing fruits of love, joy, peace, patience and so forth as the manifestations of such Spirit-filled existence (Gal 5:22). However, receiving and experiencing these fruits is contingent upon the foundational context provided by the Spirit, that is, a life in freedom (Gal 5:1, 13). In his communication to the Galatians, Paul is concerned that they do not misconstrue freedom as the liberty to pursue their personal agenda without consequence. While freedom signifies freedom *from* slavery to sin and *from* the law, Paul importantly reminds the Galatians that it also invites and represents freedom *to* a new lifestyle and way of thinking and *to* a responsibility to remain free.¹⁹⁵ Barth clarifies that this is a freedom that can only be given by God, who is originally free, and it is far from a passive experience of freedom. For Barth, it is only in God-given freedom that ‘Man is, as he knows God; he is, as he decides for God; he is as he asks after God and moves to His judgment. Thus he is as he lives’.¹⁹⁶

Moltmann builds on this exegetical foundation with a compelling vision for life in the Spirit that includes body, soul and our social world (our community), against the context of life in the flesh where we are immersed in a field of oppressive forces. Two relevant constructs emerge here: firstly, without the intentional engagement of the Spirit, community naturally deteriorates given continual oppression; and secondly, life and freedom in the Spirit is meaningfully defined by our ‘social experience of self and the personal experience of sociality’.¹⁹⁷

The second work of the Spirit to the individual is the unveiling of an expansive freedom that the individual is invited to inhabit. Life in Spirit-enabled freedom critically opens up the expectation and possibility of relationality not possible within the natural realm. I begin this second focus on the Spirit and the individual with the question of how Spirit-enabled freedom shapes their environmental kingdom context of community. Following this, how does this freedom contribute to individual personal reality given the kingdom context? The third component, the nature and responsibility of our human free choice in response to this freedom, is discussed in chapter five.

¹⁹⁵ Peter G. Kirchsclaeger, “The Relation Between Freedom, Love, Spirit and Flesh in Galatians 5:13,” *Acta Theologica* 19, Suppl. (2014): 130-142.

¹⁹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 186-188.

¹⁹⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), chap. 4:1244-1346, Kindle.

4.2.3.1 Freedom as the Context for Life in Christ

Second Corinthians 3:17, ‘where the Spirit is, there is freedom’, suggests a symbiotic relationship and form in its interaction. Expressing God as the Holy Spirit, who is also truth and love, Moltmann establishes a concept in which the lordship of Christ is understood as the ‘free space or free place’ of human freedom, an explicit environment that surrounds and permeates our being.¹⁹⁸

Ratzinger clarifies that this kingdom environment, constituted in love, is the reality of godly truth and order. In this environment, truth relates to freedom in that what we are corresponds to our actual nature, which in turn corresponds to the actual nature of God, and where the Mosaic law and new covenant describe the boundary conditions of kingdom order (1 Cor 14:33).¹⁹⁹ He further clarifies that order, the law, is integral to freedom. The law conditions or constitutes freedom in that it provides a necessary internal structure for the coexistence of diverse freedom expressions (freedom *from*, freedom *to*, freedom *with*) that both mutually limit and mutually support one another.

Our alignment in response to this godly order is always specific in nature given the moment by moment variability and instability of our human condition. Consequently, social order is always relative and directionally aligned but never absolutely aligned. Our optimal behavioural response is continually calibrated and defined by the Spirit, based on the Spirit’s dynamic interpretation of our position vis-a-vis kingdom order. Finally, godly alignment, as a result of our response, is confirmed through inner peace that ultimately manifests in an expression of outer peace.²⁰⁰

In this free place, humankind is not simply released from oppressive ties but is given knowledge of and invited to partake in God’s expansive, loving and creative possibilities. In this free place, humankind exists as a participant ‘within a complex web of relationships through which the Creator loves everything and through which He gives and preserves life’.²⁰¹ In vivid contrast to the human condition that perpetually strives to minimize loss, this free place invites hope, vision and imagination that expands us beyond innate human capacity and enables us to fully experience this web of relationships through the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

¹⁹⁸ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 5:1729.

¹⁹⁹ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Beliefs and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 256.

²⁰⁰ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 249-257.

²⁰¹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 5:1736.

4.2.3.2 Freedom as a Personal Reality within Social Experiences

Oppression, the antithesis of freedom, manifests in a myriad of ways within the relational context. At one end of the spectrum, it can manifest as domination, abuse, or control by one seeking power over the other. At the other end, oppression can manifest as submission, dependency, or perceived invisibility by the one needing to be accepted within the relationship.²⁰² Regardless of the nature and reason for oppression, its hallmark is the denial of true personhood for *both* individuals within the relationship. Denial of personhood implies a rejection of God's life-giving design for the individual and for the other. Here then is the breeding ground for dissonance, conflict and potential division.

If freedom in the Spirit is a complete release from oppression for the individual, then an entirely different reality for our social experience must also exist. From Moltmann's discourse, availing ourselves of this Spirit-sustained freedom begins with a liberating faith that has personal belief and comprehension of this truth, not as an edict or tradition, but as an experiential reality. This is a life-giving, captivating faith that invites the believer to embrace the relationality and power from being established in the Spirit with one another.

Notwithstanding that the power of oppression is entirely removed when standing in this faith, a certain effort is necessary to dilute the impact from human perception and from behavioural tracks, Moltmann's 'inward compulsion',²⁰³ that motivate continuation in oppression-shaped pathways. Here also, faith through engagement in the Spirit can dissolve the impetus and energy that sustains these pathways, such that we are transformed beyond a simple understanding that the power of oppression has gone to the truth and hope that 'all things are possible' (Matt 19:26) and that relational life in the Spirit is one of limitless opportunities and potential.²⁰⁴ Hope for and the realization of this potential represents a crystallization of the truth that in the Spirit we have the possibility and capability for living in relational excellence that embodies stability, intimacy and connectivity beyond anything previously understood or imagined.²⁰⁵

Moltmann adds to this foundation of liberating faith a second dimension: 'communicative freedom', the idea of a mutual love in which persons are only truly free when they are respected and accepted by others. This respect and acceptance are predicated on the openness and sharing of lives, such as in true community. Life in freedom is a 'life

²⁰² Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 5:1491.

²⁰³ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 6:1978.

²⁰⁴ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 5:1630, 1648.

²⁰⁵ Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 91.

of communion in communication'.²⁰⁶ Moltmann's concept tilts strongly toward Zizioulas's understanding of persons in communion where freedom is contingent upon an understanding that I truly exist as a person only when I recognise that the existence of the other in freedom is a necessary condition of the freedom of *my* personhood.

Freedom, therefore, provides the space, faith and time to embrace the *truth* of our relational context and also necessarily provides the truth of our *capacity* to experience life-giving creativity within relationships as they grow and deepen through the Spirit.

4.2.4 Synthesizing the Spirit's Work to the Individual

At the sole discretion of the Spirit, an individual in community may receive unique and specific revelation of life and relationship in Christ that can spontaneously prompt unique activities by the individual in support of the kingdom mission. Revelation incorporates the ontological reality of freedom in Christ and presents a magnetic invitation to align within the truth and order of the kingdom reality where faith is given in order to know and experience God's creative love in and through relationships, where joy and peace are evident, and where there is capacity for relationship to exist as an expression of Christ worship, given that its content and form occurs through the Spirit's direction. In this freedom, individuals are invited to follow the Spirit's direction such that their lives and those they connect with increasingly align and facilitate the Spirit's purpose. Barth describes a community of such individuals as comprised of 'indispensable, ordinary little people with the task of doing here or there, in this way or that, what is entrusted and demanded of them'.²⁰⁷

4.3 Spirit-Constituted Relations

Building on the foundation of the Spirit's work in each individual, I turn now to the Spirit's focus in shaping relationships. Numerous authors describe these Spirit-constituted relations as a fundamental aspect of Christian faith. Roger Walton describes them using Luke 24, The Walk to Emmaus. He suggests that our personal transformation in Christ most effectively occurs as we journey and engage with another. He states, "These times of journeying through life with 'companions in the way' are the holy friendships that challenge the sins we have come to love, affirm the gifts we are afraid to claim and help us dream dreams we otherwise would not dream."²⁰⁸ In essence, a rhythm of discipleship occurs as

²⁰⁶ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 5:1683.

²⁰⁷ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Lecture Fragments: Church Dogmatics 4.4* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 98.

²⁰⁸ Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 9:2555.

two people journey together, with movement and in transformation. As disciples, believers live in a continuous dance of faith, gathering for praise, prayer and reflection and then dispersing to engage with the world as agents and partners of a loving God. As believers choose to be transformed into Christ's image by engaging in such 'holy friendships', they become 'pilgrim people', His community church moving toward the hope of His better country (Heb 11:16).²⁰⁹

Pete Ward proposes that True Church is shaped according to a 'theology of paradox and kenosis as the basis for relationship'. He describes the church as an organism moving toward completion through being bound together as ligaments and joints in the body that the Holy Spirit continually animates and makes alive such that the church is a fluid community of believers imbued with God's love.²¹⁰ Effective community only occurs as God's continual love is experienced in and through relationships with one another, that is, within the ligaments of Ward's motif. Whilst these relations can appear diverse and fluid in their exterior form given their pneumatic configuration, their interior is entirely composed of God's love that transcends all other variables. As such, the essential operating platform for effective Christian community is a fabric of pneumatologically-enabled relations, the holy 'one another' friendships journeying together and emanating Hirsch's 'strange kind of holiness that is so profoundly attractive to nonreligious, and yet offensive to religious ones'.²¹¹

As the authors of *Activate* remind us, 'relational intimacy cannot be forced, it's the work of the Holy Spirit' to establish meaningful relationships.²¹² Whilst their observation is accurate, it's disappointing that they seem to have constructed the *Activate* system so tightly as to leave no space and time for the Spirit to guide participants into these deeper relationships. The *Activate* small group experience with Nancy and John directly points to this circumstance where even as we were experiencing the prompts to step into their challenges and support them, we were also aware of the *Activate* guardrails that inhibited or prevented those Christ-like actions. Similar tensions were felt when the young adult revealed her challenges and the group struggled to respond. To be clear, *Activate* does not forbid meaningful relational development. What it does with its simple, actionable and highly structured guidelines is incentivise and encourage a type of conformity in order to

²⁰⁹ Walton, *Disciples Together*, chap. 9:2635.

²¹⁰ Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and the Church* (Boston: Brill, 2017), 27, 45-47.

²¹¹ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 143.

²¹² Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 25.

achieve success that directly supports humankind's desire for comfort and convenience. In response to this concern, I engage Zizioulas's work on 'being as communion' to establish an understanding of the nature of these meaningful relationships when they have been shaped and developed by the Spirit, that is, when they have matured. There is naturally a journeying toward this experiential maturity as individuals personally grow in faith, in relation with Christ and the Spirit, and toward one another. Given the strong possibility that relational dissonance or friction occurs along that journey that can inhibit or even prevent the fullness of these communion relational experiences, I also explore how the Spirit explicitly works to resolve this friction using Aquinas's insights on the Spirit's actions in the relational resolution process.

4.3.1 Zizioulas's Spirit-Constituted Relations, Being as Communion

For Zizioulas, 'being as communion' is the notion that individuals are only fully who God intends them to be if they are freely and creatively in relation with other persons, enabling these others to become fully who God intends them to become.

Zizioulas proposes that human relations are a correspondence of the immanent Trinity, where the divine persons have identity *only* in communion. The divine essence of the Trinity is identified as the communion of holy love amongst the three of the Godhead.²¹³ 'God is only known through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life and life means communion.'²¹⁴ Consequently, relationship is the basic nature of reality rather than one unknowable substance. The Spirit's role in community is therefore to constitute human relationships such that they exist as a correspondence to this communion expression.

Zizioulas presents an understanding of persons as communion that represents mature relations in Christian community. Predicated on these relations, immanent Christ-centered community is present and accessible to all believers.²¹⁵ The conventional interpretation of these truths is that *every* Christian community embodies this immanent form, given that they are implicitly contingent and predicated upon Christ's historical actions. Whilst accurate, the simple statement fails to explicitly call out that this immanent community is *only*

²¹³ Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 2182, Kindle.

²¹⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 16.

²¹⁵ Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 94.

accessible through the continual, mediating and transformative activity of the Spirit within the community.²¹⁶

Zizioulas's core theological characteristics for communion relations include the importance of our union with Christ through the Spirit, the interweaving of our being in ekstasis-oriented love expressions toward the other, the function of freedom and otherness within relations, and, finally, the Spirit-enabled capacity for knowing truth. These characteristics are summarized below:

4.3.1.1 Personhood through union with Christ²¹⁷

The divine person (hypostasis) exists entirely within the context of communion with the other. The divine person is unique, irreplaceable and also 'other'. Whilst retaining a particularity or otherness, the divine person is simultaneously only understood in terms of constituting the other. As humanity, we have the capacity to exist as a correspondence of divine persons only through salvation and the resultant hypostatic union in Christ. True personhood can therefore only be constituted *through* union with the divine persons. This understanding of person is inseparable from the understanding of the person's being.

4.3.1.2 Communion as Our Mode of Existence (Being)

For the Triune Godhead, communion is the expression of free, dynamic reciprocal exchanges of love amongst the Three. The divine persons are persons because *ekstasis* constitutes their *divine being* rather than their works within the economy of salvation.²¹⁸ Person and communion (ousia) are therefore simultaneous and ontological.²¹⁹ Therefore, an essential characteristic of personhood is ekstasis, the movement beyond our ontological human particularity toward the other in order to overcome the distance of individualization.²²⁰ This movement occurs in the freedom that constitutes love.

Torrance is concerned that Zizioulas's person, as appropriated to humanity, implicitly assumes that a person requires some minimum threshold of cognitive transcendence that is not present in the very young, very old or those cerebrally

²¹⁶ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2016), chap. 5:7322, Kindle.

²¹⁷ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 44-55.

²¹⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41-50.

²¹⁹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 44.

²²⁰ Robert D. Turner, "Foundations for John Zizioulas' Approach to Ecclesial Communion," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 78, no. 4 (December 2002), 441.

handicapped.²²¹ I agree that Zizioulas's model of person would benefit from an exploration of the ontological implications of Torrance's concern and the nature of God's grace given such circumstances; however, I suggest that a love-based ekstasis experience does not necessarily require cognitive intent. I will speak to this perspective in chapter 6.

4.3.1.3 The Necessity of Otherness and Freedom in Relations

Within the ontological and historical character of salvation, knowledge of truth is realized only by experiencing life in communion. The idea is not unlike Polanyi's tacit knowledge model.²²² Knowledge of truth comes through experience within community rather than through the assimilation and rationalization of data within the individual mind.²²³ Therefore full knowledge of truth is available and retained only in communion with others. No single individual can know the full truth.

Truth as freedom within community is the movement of continual affirmation.²²⁴ Persons live truth, not as a code of ethics, but as love expressed through kenotic acts toward others.²²⁵ Freedom's ontological character is expressed as a drive toward love and creativity. The human person, as an 'image' of God's will and capacity, seeks to create beings other than him- or herself through innovation and modification and, on a social level, to personally achieve otherness through uniqueness.²²⁶ Our very being drives us toward otherness through creativity in freedom. '*As persons, we are therefore otherness in communion and communion in otherness*'.²²⁷ This perspective requires a small revision to the understanding of love. We can only love if, firstly, we are persons and, secondly, we allow the other to be truly 'other' whilst remaining in communion.²²⁸ Therefore, 'love is the assertion that one exists as other, that one is particular and unique, that a person is in relation to some other who affirms him or her as other. In love, relation generates otherness; it does not threaten it' (1 John 4:18).²²⁹

Zizioulas further leverages the idea of otherness when he addresses division within relationship. He suggests that a fear of otherness, or difference, originates from fear of

²²¹ Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion, An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 301.

²²² Tony Clark, *Divine Revelation and Human Practice: Responsive and Imaginative Participation* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), chap. 2:1528, Kindle.

²²³ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 113.

²²⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 121.

²²⁵ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 81.

²²⁶ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 40.

²²⁷ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9.

²²⁸ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9-10.

²²⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 55.

others. Predicated upon a foundation of repentance, he orients the understanding of otherness: from a perspective of fear and division based on differences in human qualities to one of necessity, love and embrace based on the *ontology of the person*.²³⁰ The true identity of a person exists only within the context of relationships with others. A person exists in freedom to be completely oneself and absolutely unique. Given this lens, the freedom of personhood is not freedom *from* the other but *for* the other. Otherness is therefore necessary for freedom to exist.²³¹

4.3.1.4 Spirit-Enabled Capacity to Know Truth

Finally, western theology has tended to limit the understanding of truth and ecclesiology to an economic and historical faith basis.²³² Historical data has predominantly shaped eternal existence and today's church. Recognising *Christ* as truth introduces a necessary eschatological reality to truth as well as to ecclesiology. Truth is the eschatological reality of *Christ actualized and realized by the Holy Spirit*. Truth simultaneously exists as ontological communion and comes as a charismatic 'present-moment'.²³³ Communion of persons is therefore essential for knowledge of truth.²³⁴ From this understanding of *Christ* as truth within time, the Holy Spirit is therefore inseparable from the presence of *Christ*. The Spirit brings eschatological truth into the present time by making the living communion of believers an incarnation of the eschatological *Christ*.²³⁵ Critically, this is the only human community that forms around truth.²³⁶ The Eucharist celebration is the 'perfect' community.²³⁷ The Spirit is therefore constitutive of both Christology and ecclesiology.²³⁸ A necessary condition for these realities to inform the community is that believers intentionally and continually engage with the Holy Spirit in a present-moment, real-time relationship of revelation rather than as an historical or future-oriented event.

²³⁰ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 2-4.

²³¹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 51.

²³² Turner, "Foundations," 449.

²³³ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 111-116.

²³⁴ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 110-121; Turner, "Foundations," 441, 458.

²³⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 58.

²³⁶ Hauerwas et al., *Resident Aliens*, 77.

²³⁷ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 115.

²³⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 139.

4.3.2 Spirit-Led Relational Resolution

The ‘already and not yet’²³⁹ dialectic is readily observed throughout the Christian faith, no less so than in the notion of Christian community. The ‘already’, or immanent, community was established through the historical actions of Jesus Christ and is continually constituted by the ongoing engagement of the Spirit. However, it is this accessibility and mediation by the Spirit that, in parallel, is also the power that transforms the believing community from its ‘not yet’ condition to its ‘already’ state.

The Christian community that corresponds to the immanent Trinity continually and increasingly exists as a network of free, loving and giving relationships, where every aspect of its expression is initiated and sustained by the presence and activity of the Spirit. This perspective serves as the point of arrival, the ‘already’ community, toward which the relational fabric must evolve from its earthly reality of ‘not yet’.

The earthly reality, or ‘not yet’, of relations is clearly very different from the ‘already’ immanent point of arrival. Our innate human condition, in concert with diverse oppressive forces, stimulates ongoing deterioration in relationships that is frequently observed as dissonance and friction amongst believers. As critically, there is a deterioration in expectation and capability for godly relationships as evidenced in the case study and the review of contemporary trends where relational development techniques increasingly lower the bar for meaningful relations and propose tools that short-circuit relational depth. In short, community relations exist without a vision for their potential, given the freedom available in Christ, or a capacity to choose to develop them toward this relational potential.

4.3.2.1 The Spirit as Gift and Love: Moving Community From ‘Not Yet’ to ‘Already’

The Spirit’s intervention that can move the community from the ‘not yet’ condition toward the ‘already’ state is especially critical. In this section, I consider how the Spirit engages with each community member such that their relationships can overcome dissonance or conflict, grow in relational equity, and increasingly approach a condition where relationship is an expression of worship. Aquinas’s insights on the nature and activities of the Spirit,²⁴⁰ as well as Moltmann’s discussion on the Spirit as ‘Spirit of Life’²⁴¹ and the ‘Church in the Power of the Spirit’ inform this discussion.²⁴²

²³⁹ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, chap. 5:7137.

²⁴⁰ Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, chap. 5:7137-7940.

²⁴¹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 4:1244-1978.

²⁴² Jürgen Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 293-342.

Similar to Barth's perspective of the Spirit as 'self-giving love',²⁴³ Aquinas identifies the Spirit's proper names as Gift and Love. This is constructive for this discussion in that being 'gift and love' toward one another, or more usefully giving and loving continually, is an appropriate correspondence and steady state condition for the ontological form of believers in community, that is, the 'already' community. This understanding also aligns with Zizioulas's description of 'persons in communion' who exist in a continuous state of ekstasis and kenosis.

Aquinas proceeds to address the concern of relational conflict and how the Spirit works to provide a pathway for conflict resolution.²⁴⁴ He describes the role of the Spirit according to visible and invisible missions. In faith and through the sacraments, the visible missions are forgiveness of sins and the power to teach and evangelize (Acts 2:42). In forgiveness, the Spirit isolates, repels and negates evil and sin. Through equipping from teaching and evangelism, the Spirit bestows the new law upon the messianic community. Aquinas's invisible missions of the Spirit are sanctifying grace and the theological virtues, where grace *qualifies* the soul and the virtues *perfect* the soul. Through sanctifying grace, the Spirit qualifies or conditions the human soul to receive the divine persons such that God can move humankind toward His goodness. The Spirit directs our will with a gift of love that motivates us to do supernatural good. As the Spirit moves our will, we find joy as we freely engage in loving friendship with the Spirit. Through this inner transformation, the Spirit guides the believer in knowledge and understanding (Is 11:2-3). The Spirit reveals knowledge of the truth of the believer as creature and establishes an understanding of godly alignment for the creature-believer, as becoming-person, within the kingdom order. Consequently, the Spirit makes the believer amenable to undertaking actions that satisfy the Spirit's goal of restoring godly order (1 Cor 14:33).²⁴⁵

Given Aquinas's understanding of the Spirit's work within us, conflict resolution and relational health are achieved when the believer has been sanctified to receive the Spirit and is consequently pre-disposed through the gift of the Spirit's love to resolve the conflict. The Spirit provides contextual knowledge and understanding of kingdom order for addressing and resolving conflict according to the Mosaic law and Jesus' commandments. Further, the Spirit has enabled believers to resolve conflict through communication of the law and

²⁴³ Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 65.

²⁴⁴ Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, chap. 6:8977-9040.

²⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica (Complete & Unabridged)*, first article [I, Q. 43, Art. 1], [I, Q. 43, Art. 3] (Clairmont: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010), 8456, Kindle.

through the giving and receiving of forgiveness. The Spirit contextualizes the believers' true nature as creatures and isolates specific sins and oppression within the conflict. Consequently, the Spirit moves believers to actions of communication and forgiveness such that they resolve the conflict and relationally align according to kingdom reality and order. As and when believers follow the Spirit's direction and align with this reality, they are drawn into a deeper relationship with God and one another that is experienced as love, joy and peace.

Aquinas's description of the Spirit's missions and gifts within us demonstrates a viable transactional process. However, Moltmann's positioning of Spirit-enabled freedom conveys a more compelling interpretation of the Spirit's work given today's culture. Specifically, he describes an experience of freedom that corresponds to a trinitarian freedom where resistance can be overcome and the invitation, grace and faith to align with kingdom order is highly attractive. Given the contemporary appetite for individuality and independence, I imagine that by establishing this freedom context, the likelihood for successful conflict resolution and increasing relational health is substantially enhanced. For Moltmann, conflict resolution and relational health are achieved when, by the Spirit, believers are aware of the law and the power of forgiveness. In dynamic and continual engagement with the Spirit, believers live in the vivid, life-giving reality of kingdom freedom. The truth of this reality amplifies the possibility of limitless creativity for the believers as they move into deeper relationship with God through one another.²⁴⁶ This grace-filled amplification invites the believers to freely relinquish their 'self'-oriented priority of motive, thought and action and instead adopt the Spirit's priorities. These priorities, aligned with the law, invite actions of communication and forgiveness to enhance relational health, manifesting ultimately as joy and peace.

4.3.3 Synthesizing the Spirit's Work in Individuals and in Their Relationships

Summarizing the discussion on key areas of the Spirit's work for effective Christian community thus far, I have highlighted the event of revelation where the reality of a relationship to Christ is made real to the individual. The nature of the event is entirely specific and unique to individuals in their time and place and relevant to their context. Through this event, the Spirit prompts the individual to thought, action or prayer that simultaneously draws the individual into a deeper relationship with Christ and pursues the Gospel mission directive.

²⁴⁶ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, chap. 4:1244-1978, 1677.

An aspect of this revelation event is that we receive an understanding of the freedom now available to each individual through relationship with Christ, a freedom that expands the potential and expectation in relationships from a narrow and cognitive transactional engagement to a life-giving, creative expanse where relationship enables one another to reach their fullest potential, joy and creativity in Christ.

Building on this work in the individual, the Spirit establishes a new relational fabric conditioned upon our union with Christ. Just as true community fully and presently exists in its pneumatological constitution, believers also truly and presently exist with one another through Christ in the Spirit. As believers we are therefore connected beyond our natural finite human understanding. Pivotaly, only in the presence of the Spirit are we able to access and engage this relational reality and truth. This Spirit-enabled fabric allows for human relations to become a correspondence of our understanding of the immanent Trinity relations. Recognising our humanity, the Spirit also offers a pathway for resolving dissonance that can inhibit the relations from experiencing this God-ordained fabric.

The final section of this chapter considers how the Spirit works to draw together individuals and their one-another relations into a form or expression that fosters a sense of unity in identity and belonging for community members and an observable expression of unity that is lifegiving and attractional to the non-member of the community.

4.4 Spirit-Informed Unity in Community

Conventionally, unity has been expressed through consistent and repetitive visible practices rather than relying on the outcomes in thought, word and action from common beliefs or values. Examples include a community studying the same book of scripture, using the same study guide, or universally participating in a single mission or outreach event to the neighbouring community. This was certainly the experience of the *Activate* system at CCF. We understood unity as all church members attending a small group each semester, following the same Bible study or participating in the same outreach initiative. This expectation for uniform participation led CCF to communicate that you could not be a member of the church if you were unwilling to regularly attend a small group. Clearly the consequence of such a law was costly, causing the loss of leaders and relationships. Sadly, CCF leadership chose to interpret these losses as an indication that these individuals were called to other communities rather than recognizing that our understanding of unity through imposed participation was the antithesis of Christ's invitation for all to belong.

It is often easier and simpler to mandate unity through explicit, consistent action over implicit belief. This approach again reflects a systemic or top-down expression of a unity that is uniformly imposed upon all members. The net effect is often a community expression that embodies what Barth would call *form* rather than divine *content*. This was certainly evident in the case study experience with the *Activate* Small Group system. Numerous descriptions of the Christian community entity are presented in scripture, such as the body of Christ, temple of God, household and family (1 Cor 12; Rom 12; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16-18; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 3:1-6). The array of descriptions and variations reflect an implicit understanding of community as a collective or integrated entity that incorporates a meaningful degree of alignment within the entity. Foundationally, this oneness or unity is recognised as an attribute of community that also has a theological root correspondence within the Trinity. For community participants, unity fosters a sense of belonging and identity that strengthens the commitment to the community expression and purpose. For those beyond the community, identity facilitates recognition and embrace. For Christian community, unity occurs through the experience of alignment in a set of common beliefs, values and/or practices. In a culture of individuality, this expression of unity not only differentiates the Christian community from others, but its emphasis on Christ-worshipping unity differentiates the community in a life-giving manner.

My focus in this section is to understand the nature and form of Spirit-enabled unity that is predicated on the Spirit's work in individuals, their relations, and consequently as the aggregated entity.

Thus far, I have considered the Spirit's activities within the community where participants are invited to undertake a relational journey, in and through the freedom of the Spirit, that enables them to reach the fullness of their God-intended potential. The journey equips participants to move from a relational experience that embodies discord, mediocrity and shallow transactional exchanges to acquiring a transforming capacity for resolving relational discord in order to experience the fullness of one-another, God-intended, relational potential.

In addition to this activity through individuals and within their relations, the Spirit additionally establishes a trajectory of increasing alignment for the community that differentiates it from secular community. As participants yield more deeply to the Spirit in pursuit of this relational and freedom-oriented trajectory, the observed expression increasingly becomes a unique and powerful expression of unity. This community in unity

is continually positioned by the Spirit as a paradoxical statement of contrast and attraction to its contemporary surroundings.

The importance of Spirit-enabled unity cannot be underestimated. And yet it is clearly not a simple or transparent construct. In order to be effective, community unity must satisfy three conditions. Firstly, from a trinitarian perspective, the nature of unity corresponds to an understanding of the unity within the immanent Trinity. Secondly, for participants, unity includes belief, adoration and predisposition to the pneumatologically-constituted Christ. Sociologically, unity manifests in the commonality of belonging and identity and can be expressed both visibly and invisibly. Finally, for those beyond the community, unity is found or observed in the character or nature of life-oriented outcomes given a diversity of Spirit-designated activities by individuals.

I consider several theological perspectives that contribute to an understanding of unity within the community. I begin by reviewing Barth's Pluriform Trinitarian model and the ecclesiological correspondence that describes the Spirit's function in the Trinity and the body of Christ respectively. Secondly, I consider Aquinas's understanding of the nature and function of the Spirit within human community that establishes an experience of unity for the participant and the expression of unity for those beyond the community. Finally, I continue with Aquinas's understanding of the Spirit's work that recognises that truly effective Christian community can only be a supernatural phenomenon.

4.4.1 Unity as Correspondence

Barth summarizes the unity of the pluriform Trinity as God's essence consisting in the 'threeness of the persons'.²⁴⁷ Whilst he recognises that activity is unique to each person of the Trinity, he simultaneously reminds the reader of the perichoresis of the three, again describing the Trinity as 'unity in distinction'. Barth intends a dialectic understanding that *all* participate in each activity even as a *unique* person fulfills it. Furthermore, the Trinity is presented as mutually exclusive and comprehensively exhaustive. Each person must completely fulfill that unique activity in order for revelation to occur. These perspectives suggest that the nature of unity in community is understood as a diversity of aligned activity with an internal core of cohesion and consistency in beliefs and values.²⁴⁸

Barth provides a corresponding expression to the trinitarian model in an ecclesiology that represents the body of Christ on three dimensions: its nature or character as determined

²⁴⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 349-50.

²⁴⁸ Williams, *Wrestling with Angels*, chap. 7:1925.

by its fellowship with the Holy Spirit; its form given its relation to Christ; and, finally, its mission given its relation to the world.²⁴⁹ For Barth, the community's fellowship with the Spirit and how the community forms given this fellowship is a mystery that requires the ongoing engagement, renewal and empowerment in the Spirit for its expression.²⁵⁰ This thought echoes Barth's early dialogue on revelation in event to the individual. As Barth's dialogue turns to the visible expression of the church, specifically its order and form, he appeals to the Spirit-authenticated and attested Christ as its leadership. Christ is ever-present through the Spirit, implying a relational union, that Barth again readily acknowledges as mystery.²⁵¹ Predicated on the logic that 'the Word became flesh', Barth proposes that Jesus Christ *is* the community. He emphasises that the community, the body of Christ, cannot wholly define or express Jesus Christ. Rather, the community is enclosed and hidden within Jesus Christ and is predicated on his being. This is a relationship that is defined by unity, differentiation, asymmetry and correspondence.²⁵² The Holy Spirit binds Christ and the community as an analogy-in-time of the relationship between the Father and the Son.²⁵³ The Spirit is the 'bond of love' and the 'bond of peace' of Barth's trinitarian ecclesiology.²⁵⁴

From this theological positioning of community as the Body of Christ, Barth provides a framework for community life that corresponds to Christ and is intended to shape its activities. Presented as dialectic 'laws', Barth intends for these laws to be interpreted and ordered in Christ and made relevant by the Spirit. His intention here is to retain the necessary ongoing engagement with the Spirit that promotes fluidity and diminishes the risks of stagnation and inflexibility.²⁵⁵ His position also acknowledges the reliance on the Spirit to determine the nature of the unity expression within the community. Barth understands that revelation is now not only Jesus but also the existence of the children of God who have received a revelation of Jesus.²⁵⁶ The children of God, the church, are therefore the *subjective reality of revelation*, existing as both divine and human, eternal and temporal, invisible and visible.

²⁴⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 643.

²⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1, 647; 4.2, 336.

²⁵¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.3.1, 349-355.

²⁵² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 59-60, 655.

²⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 341.

²⁵⁴ Kimlyn J. Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013), 205.

²⁵⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 677-681.

²⁵⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 219, 236.

The third dimension of Barth's community explores its vocation as witness to life with God to the world around it. Following the pattern of the community as correspondence to life and being of the Godhead, Barth presents a picture of myriad forms/expressions of ministry as works of God the Father, enabled by the Spirit and guided by Christ. The ministry forms, variations of speech and/or action, in unity represent the ministry of Christ to the world.²⁵⁷

Running through Barth's ecclesiology, I observe the theme of necessary and unifying engagement with the Spirit, who is the bond of peace and love and who determines and enables the community in diversity of activity such that the community corresponds to the community of the Godhead. And yet, often Barth's strong emphasis on the Oneness of God over the divine Three is frequently interpreted as an override to the elegance of Barth's unity in diversity ecclesiology that results in an interpretation of community that insists on visible uniformity, expressed through programming and structures, as the sole expression of unity. This interpretation has certainly diminished the receptivity to the Spirit's work through diversity as I experienced in the case study of chapter one.

4.4.2 Peace as the Visible and Invisible Mark of Unity in Community

Dunn has proposed that unity comes from alignment through belief in the 'historical Jesus as the exalted Christ'.²⁵⁸ Whilst his proposal reflects a necessary characteristic of unity, it is insufficient in that it can fail to provide a discernible or visible expression of unity for those beyond the community. Welker and Karkainen both question whether the idea of a visible unity is feasible or even appropriate, preferring instead the ideas of 'conscious solidarity' or pluralistic harmony where ample room for diversity is given.²⁵⁹ Soulen similarly amplifies the importance of diversity, citing the multiplicity of tongues at Pentecost as an example. However, he juxtaposes this thought by highlighting the unity in the Spirit that arises when *all* were miraculously able to participate through hearing and comprehending the singular message of the Spirit in their own tongue.²⁶⁰ Soulen's observation is both creative and constructive in that he has relocated the principle of unity to the experience of the observer rather than in uniformity of activity. In the context of community, there is a consistency in the nature of the unity expression that those beyond the

²⁵⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 854-864.

²⁵⁸ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 411.

²⁵⁹ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 282.

²⁶⁰ R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Names(S) and the Holy Trinity, Vol 1: Distinguishing the Voices* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 42.

community observe. Furthermore, given Soulen's model, unity of 'all participating' is contingent upon the 'diversity of tongues'; in other words, unity is contingent upon diversity. In the context of community formation, unity is therefore predicated on a diversity of Spirit-informed participant activities. Moltmann agrees that unity in the Spirit cannot resemble human unity. Rather it must arise in the context of profound human freedom and diversity.²⁶¹ Significantly, and a departure from conventional thought that unity can be constructed within the community, we should understand that true unity is necessarily a supernatural expression, unachievable by humankind.

Aquinas's perspective on who the Spirit is provides the greatest possibility for satisfying the complex criteria for unity shaped by the Spirit. Recognising that within the immanent Trinity, the Spirit as Love is the bond *between* Father and Son, Aquinas proposes that the Spirit *as* Love is the foundation for unity. The Spirit also proceeds as Love *from* Father and Son to direct and cause humankind to conform. In conforming humankind, the Spirit orders or aligns humankind into a unity like that of the cosmos, a unity that demonstrates that our Triune Orderer is One. Practically, the visible hallmark of this unity is therefore the bond of peace that exists amongst one another and is observable to all others. Because 'the Spirit is love, which is the cause of peace, unity in multiplicity is, therefore, the mark of the Spirit'.²⁶²

With this perspective as a foundation, an understanding of unity within Christian community can be found, simply and logically, from the earlier discussion of relational conflict and health where peace is the hallmark of Spirit-constituted relationships. As relationships increasingly reflect a condition of peace, so the community increasingly embodies peace in the Spirit and unity becomes readily and increasingly visible.

4.4.3 Community as a Supernatural Phenomenon

Aquinas's final observation completes the understanding of unity, confirming its supernatural essence. Such a unity of peace can only be constituted and maintained by the Spirit. If this supernatural unity is not present within the community, then neither is the Holy Spirit, and the community fails to be an effective witness of the gospel. The complement to this thought is equally powerful. Understanding that unity is actually a supernatural phenomenon points to a very different type of community, one that exists and

²⁶¹ Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 293, 342.

²⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 268.

is community only through the life-giving mediating presence of the Spirit, who is God our Creator.²⁶³ This is a community whose spiritual DNA invites and enables unlimited possibilities for experiencing and expressing God's power and love. In reality, this is a community whose very expression and presence is holy and miraculous.

4.4.4 Synthesizing the Spirit's Work to Shape the Aggregate Community, the Entity

The Spirit's work in the community participants and through their relational fabric comes to its fullness as the Spirit draws together and integrates the community such that it represents a correspondence of the unity and diversity of the Immanent Trinity. Contingent on the necessary diversity of participants within the community, unity is expressed and observed as relational peace amongst community participants. The substance of this relational peace can only be enabled and sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit within the community. Given this essential presence and fruit of the Spirit's work, community is therefore understood as a holy and miraculous phenomenon. The opposite condition, the absence of the Spirit, is similarly true: without the Spirit's infusion throughout the community, it cannot be expected to be an effective vessel for the Gospel.

4.5 Conclusion: The Flow of the Spirit's Work in and Through Community

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, my intent here is to respond to the third question raised by the *Activate* case study: what activities of the Spirit most relevantly engage participants and the community such that Christ-centred, life-giving community expressions can occur? My response to this question is summarized by the Spirit's work within three spheres:

In the individual, the Spirit gives to each believer faith, freedom and creative form for a potentially diverse and spontaneous array of activities that witness to the revelation of Christ. The Spirit continually gives unique direction to each believer according to his or her relational sphere and time.

Within the relations, the Spirit builds a profound relational fabric amongst believers by locating and sustaining them and their relationships within the life-giving context of kingdom freedom: where relationships are released from oppression, where accessibility to godly relationship is available, where hope and possibility for limitless relational depth are personally available, and where grace-enabled choices that align with godly order are freely made. The Spirit alone enables community to exist as an incarnation of the eschatological

²⁶³ Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord*, 57.

Christ by establishing each believer as a ‘person-in-communion’, where a believer can only live freely and in truth within the context of the freedom and truth of the other.

Within the overall community, the Spirit establishes these works within the community by enabling and sustaining a visible and invisible expression of relational peace that attracts those beyond the community to enter into relationship with community members and with Christ. These works by the Spirit should be understood as representing the pneumatological spine of the community. In chapter five, I address question four raised by the case study: what is the range of human response to the Spirit in the organic community context? What is the community experience for each participant, the relational fabric within the community, and the nature of its outreach to surrounding neighbours?

Critically, I contrast the nature and shape of these communities with the experiences of the *Activate* case study. My goal here will be to highlight contemporary practices and expressions of community that are particularly effective or ineffective. Finally, chapter six builds on chapters four and five, to consider the necessary leadership practices that facilitate the Spirit’s fluid and spontaneous work in order to create effective Christian community. Chapter seven concludes by comparing this organic community challenge model to the *Activate* community and proposing enhancements to *Activate* in terms of values and practices that can improve community effectiveness.

CHAPTER 5

ORGANIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I continue with Fiddes' third step, developing the challenge model to the *Activate* community experience. Specifically, I explore the implications from incorporating a pneumatological core within a community framework such that the community is directed and shaped by the Spirit's interaction. The Spirit's guidance can occur directly to each community participant, through one participant to another and through community leadership to all participants. This is my understanding of a Spirit-led organic Christian community. These interactions shape the relational fabric of the community and the nature of its outreach engagement with those beyond the community. Aggregating these participant interactions and the substance of the relational fabric creates an understanding of the overall community entity. This chapter explicitly considers question four in the case study. Specifically, what is the range of human responses to the Spirit in the organic community context and what is the community experience for each participant, the relational fabric within the community, and the nature of its outreach to surrounding neighbours?

Continuing with Barth and Zizioulas' theology, responses to the question are developed by considering the contextually unique manner in which the Spirit prompts each participant to demonstrate life and freedom of relationship with Christ. Whilst a specific Spirit-prompted interaction may take diverse forms in word, prayer or act, the essential content is always a relationship that demonstrates the vibrancy of relational life with Christ. The form and content of these interactions is, in reality, community outreach. The relational fabric that develops through these interactions is the essence of the participant experience in community.

The overall nature and shape of the participant and observed community is developed from an aggregated synthesis of activities and behaviors by participants that both shape the relational fabric and engage others beyond the community. An additional factor is considered in this response: whether participants continually and affirmatively engage with the Spirit's prompting or do so only on a selective basis and, in doing so, establish a community expression that is only partially directed by the Spirit. A community of participants in comprehensive and continual engagement may take on a more fluid expression than a community of participants that only occasionally follow the Spirit's lead. Appropriately, organic community that develops through fluid interaction with the Spirit

experiences and expresses unity through increasing relational peace, increasing coalescence around Christ, and increasing co-alignment in activities that demonstrate Christ-centered relationships.

At the conclusion of this discussion, it becomes evident that whilst the structure and processes of the *Activate* system certainly inhibit the effectiveness of Christian community, the real constraint is the fact that *Activate* appeals to a condition where, as Heifetz observes, humankind

‘implicitly and intangibly creates a system of structure, culture and language and a suite of norms that condition how they live and relate with one another. This system inevitably facilitates living in a form of harmony where the likelihood of experiencing loss resulting from change, a loss that is always perceived as painful, is minimized. Inherent to this organizational system, the community, is a self-reinforcing dynamic that causes it to do whatever it can to sustain its status quo, in other words, to resist change.’²⁶⁴

Put succinctly, humankind, by its very nature, is fundamentally resistant to the essential responsiveness required by the Spirit for effective community. Overcoming this resistance requires a leadership approach that similarly follows the Spirit’s lead and direction. In the subsequent chapter, I review contemporary leadership practices and recommend protocols that can enable the community to remain continually responsive to the Spirit’s guidance.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the shape and substance of a pneumatologically informed community as it might develop given the typical response characteristics of human nature. The *Activate* system intends to establish community by imposing structure and constraints upon participants through predetermined forms of participation, processes and tightly defined relational criteria. Conversely, a Spirit-informed community manifests primarily through the Spirit’s design and direction to each participant to uniquely pursue life together given the freedom received through their relationship with Christ. Where *Activate* promotes a fixed or static model for community imposed by leadership, Spirit-shaped community suggests a fluid framework that evolves and grows organically through each participant predicated on interaction with the Spirit. My perspective and experience based on *Activate* and other Christian community models is that an intentional diminishment in terms of the level of community structure is critical in order to invite and allow the Spirit’s engagement, which can in turn establish a more effective community. As a response to the deficiencies

²⁶⁴ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 50-54.

created by the prescriptive *Activate* structure, I have proposed an expression of community that grows organically when a pneumatological core is incorporated within a Christian community framework such that the leadership and guidance of the Spirit occurs through each participant. Specifically, the Spirit's guidance shapes individual activity and relational engagement according to individuals' unique contexts and life spheres. The Spirit's shaping exploits the free and expansive possibilities available to individuals that result from their personal relationship with Christ. I contend that this freedom to follow the Spirit's lead, especially along relational dimensions, can result in very different outcomes than those experienced in the *Activate* narratives. Emulating Jesus' life as the relational model, the Spirit establishes and enables a life-giving relational fabric within the community and with those beyond the community. Finally, and contrary to conventional frameworks that establish the community entity from a top-down approach, the Spirit creates the overall community entity by aggregating the diverse and contextually relevant activities that invite individuals into experiences of meaningful relations with Christ and others. As a result, the community presents an expression of unity that is distinctive, highly attractive and inviting when contrasted with its surrounding communities. For this community, outreach and mission is simply its existence rather than transactional tasks.

5.1.1 Barth's Perspective on Christian Community

Barth's description of Christian community initially appears to follow the conventional approach for considering community by primarily describing the nature of the observed community entity, that is, the community that is recognised and understood by viewing it from the outside. However, as I shall demonstrate, Barth's understanding of effective community certainly seems to recognise the role of the Spirit and the potential for a diverse range of human response.

5.1.1.1 Community Definition

Barth defines overall community as comprising both the people of Israel and the church.²⁶⁵ As Israel, the community is the representation of divine judgment. As church, community is divine mercy. The church is the earthly historical form of the Son of God, where Christ is Lord, its head, united with an earthly body. This earthly body is the human Christian community, the provisional representation of the salvation that Christ has

²⁶⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.2, 196.

accomplished for all. It is this community that recognizes and confesses Christ as Lord and acknowledges what God has done for them and for all in Christ.²⁶⁶ For Barth, the local community is the ‘local congregation’.²⁶⁷

Predicated on the logic that ‘the Word became flesh’, Barth proposes that Jesus Christ *is* the community.²⁶⁸ His understanding reflects divine action and actualization in the context of our human impotence. The Holy Spirit binds Christ and the community as an analogy-in-time of the relationship between the Father and the Son.²⁶⁹ The Spirit is the ‘bond of love’ and the ‘bond of peace’ in Barth’s Trinitarian ecclesiology.²⁷⁰

Barth observes that, contingent upon the mutual indwelling of Christ, God reveals Himself to Himself (Colossians 3). Therefore, in Christ every individual *exists as* revelation and, consequently, so does the community.²⁷¹

5.1.1.2 Life in Community – Order Through Law

Barth defines the life and actions of the community as a correspondence to the life and actions of Christ. This life and these actions are structurally reflected in the order and law of the community.²⁷² He emphasizes the importance of order in visible community expressions such as public worship, public functions of the individual, how the community maintains its common cause, and discipline and oversight of individual lives.

The guiding principle for this order is church law. Barth defines church law as a dialectic where the law serves as an essential formed reference for life but where no singular law is understood as infallible and divinely inspired, thereby guarding against rigid legalism. The law is a living law, requiring a dependence on the Holy Spirit for the ultimate direction. Given the Christological foundation for community order, the law is a law of service, just as Christ served. It is a liturgical law, as the community is constituted by its worship. And finally, it is an exemplary law, sourced solely from its Lord.²⁷³ The law does not prioritize community over an individual relationship with Christ; rather, it provides an indirect and relative function of discipline and openness.²⁷⁴ Through all of this, Barth understands that

²⁶⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1, 661-2.

²⁶⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.2, 196.

²⁶⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 655.

²⁶⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 341.

²⁷⁰ Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, 205.

²⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 655.

²⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 676-678.

²⁷³ Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, 209-216.

²⁷⁴ Bender, *Karl Barth’s Christological Ecclesiology*, 84.

revelation is now not only Jesus but also the existence of the children of God who have received a revelation of Jesus.²⁷⁵ The children of God, the church, are therefore the *subjective reality of revelation*, existing as both divine and human, eternal and temporal, invisible and visible.

Barth emphasizes a community common life of participation in confession, sacraments, prayer and mission.²⁷⁶ In confession, the community mutually acknowledges being awakened to know, believe, love and hope in Christ. In the sacrament of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the community remembers the cleansing and renewal in Jesus Christ, and in the fellowship of the Lord's Supper, the celebration and remembrance of Christ's self-offering. In prayer, the community accepts the commission and responsibility for representing Christ to the world around them and, in doing so, are aligned, empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit.

Taken in isolation, Barth's description conveys an emphasis on visible structure and order, similar to systems like *Activate*, that leaves little room to understand how and where the Spirit may function. However, elsewhere in *Church Dogmatics*, Barth makes two observations that suggest that this initial description of community is perhaps only half of the community story that he intends. Firstly, he offers that community is either a missionary community or it is not Christian community at all,²⁷⁷ implying the need for community to engage purposefully and continually beyond its immediate participants in relational and contextual ways. Secondly, he suggests that community is comprised of 'indispensable, ordinary little people with the task of doing here or there, in this way or that, what is entrusted and demanded of them'.²⁷⁸ Integrating these statements with Barth's description of community life and his observation that the church is the subjective reality of revelation,²⁷⁹ which is given by the Spirit afresh and anew each time, suggests that Barth recognises that effective Christian community is fluidly and contemporaneously shaped by the Spirit and that there are very meaningful and necessary opportunities for ongoing diverse activity by individuals within the community. With this perspective in place, I turn my focus to developing a community framework that begins with the Spirit's engagement

²⁷⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 219, 236.

²⁷⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.3, 762-3.

²⁷⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 504-5.

²⁷⁸ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 98.

²⁷⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 655.

organically in and through each individual, which ultimately leads to an aggregate community expression that is effective on both relational and missional dimensions.

5.2 Individual Participant

The prior chapter begins with relevant aspects of the Spirit's engagement to and through each individual that are relevant for community formation. I explored two specific aspects of the Spirit's work. Firstly, the Spirit alone determines when, where, how, and to whom the revelation of Christ is given. Secondly, faith given to receive revelation also brings the freedom and the possibility of pursuing a range of life experiences that are only available through the individual's relationship with Christ. The nature of these life experiences is modeled on Jesus' life on earth. Whilst their form may represent diverse expression, the essential content always demonstrates relational life with Christ. The net effect of these elements is that the specific moment, nature of revelation, and human response cannot be determined or defined in advance. This is clearly counter to *Activate*, which plans and programs the majority of participant activity. Rather, community participants must continually discern, yield and follow the Spirit's direction. Relevant to the fourth question posed at the end of chapter one, how does this ongoing 'discern, yield, follow' expression shape the community experience for individual participants and the nature of its outreach to others?

An individual's interaction with revelation follows three stages: firstly, a point of contact, the unique engagement with the Spirit who brings revelation of relationship with Christ; secondly, the decision by the individual to believe or reject the revelation; and, finally, the individual's response to revelation, specifically in terms of its form and content.

5.2.1 The Point of Contact - The Unique Engagement with the Spirit

Barth's doctrine of revelation serves as the core for understanding the how and when of God's interaction with humankind. He describes that revelation can take place through proclamation and scripture as well as through indirect creaturely forms such as the sacraments, church life and acts of service.²⁸⁰ Clark's application of Polanyi's tacit knowledge and non-verbal comprehension concepts to the doctrine clarify how revelation is given. Appealing to Jesus' teaching practices that engaged the disciples as a dynamic community of practice, using parables and learning through participation,²⁸¹ Clark

²⁸⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 227.

²⁸¹ Clark, *Divine Revelation and Human Practice*, chap. 5:5216, 5314.

demonstrates that the ‘Word becomes flesh’ as Jesus gave knowledge through formats that engaged the individual beyond a solely cognitive ‘speaking-hearing’ structure. Clark proposes that, in essence, ‘divine revelation is God in communicative action’.²⁸²

Importantly, this broadened understanding invites and motivates greater creativity in responsive witness and invites participation by the entire community rather than only those capable of preaching and teaching. Unique events of revelation to individuals within the community cause and shape responses that bear witness to God’s nature and love to those beyond the community. These responses are based on Jesus’ formed reference and are inherently relational and entirely contextual.

An individual exists concretely in ‘experiences’, where an experience is understood to be a determination of the individual’s existence by objects outside and distinct from them.²⁸³ A revelation event occurs within an experience. The individual has no innate knowledge of God and no capacity or ability to establish a personal knowledge of God.²⁸⁴ Christ has prepared us in advance to receive revelation but it is the Holy Spirit who enables the individual to hear the Word of God in faith.²⁸⁵ This faith is made available temporally, for the specific purpose of hearing and responding to this unique revelation. Faith is essentially on loan for the event in order to enable the individual to hear and believe.²⁸⁶ A point of contact occurs as revelation is given by God and received by Christ within us.²⁸⁷ In this point of contact, the individual hears the revelation as a summons.²⁸⁸ Enabled by the Holy Spirit, the individual is invited to freely believe or reject the revelation. In belief, there is an acknowledgement of the actual presence of the Word of God in the individual’s reality. Acknowledgment reflects submission and yielding to the necessity of the Word of God, adaptation to its meaningfulness, and an approval that conforms the individual to the Word of God.²⁸⁹ Acknowledgment is inwardly experienced as a determination²⁹⁰ and outwardly demonstrated as an act of attitude that prompts a response.²⁹¹ An experience of God’s revelation and acknowledgement by the individual is such that the individual no longer

²⁸² Clark, *Divine Revelation and Human Practice*, chap. 5:5624.

²⁸³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 199.

²⁸⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 228.

²⁸⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.1, 149, 174.

²⁸⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 182.

²⁸⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 655.

²⁸⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 201.

²⁸⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 206-8.

²⁹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 189.

²⁹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 210.

understands his or her own existence apart from the objective reality, the Word of God.²⁹² Individuals cannot exist without being in movement toward the source of their existence.²⁹³ They regard themselves entirely from the vantage point of this truth.²⁹⁴ In this context, they acknowledge their creaturely limitations. In humility, gratitude and freedom, individuals will and act as a response to and in alignment with the summons of the Word of God, and in doing so, they transcend the limits of their creatureliness,²⁹⁵ becoming human, or person, in the process. The outward expression of this alignment is contingent upon the freedom of the individual. An individual who chooses not to be in this active conformance to the Word of God is essentially a ‘non-being’ or creature.²⁹⁶ Finally, an individual can only speak of and relate to the experience of revelation as an echo of the actual event.²⁹⁷ These echoes, expressed as recollections or expectations, constitute the subjective reality of revelation.²⁹⁸ From the recipient’s lens, revelation could be interpreted as individualistic and overly discrete. However, a greater and more impactful result occurs by recognising the Spirit’s capacity and activity to continually integrate and aggregate individual experiences of revelation as a community in ongoing response to the Spirit.

5.2.2 The Decision - To Believe or Reject

It’s appropriate at this juncture to consider the criticism that, given the nature of this ‘point of contact’, Barth implies an experience of intuitionism or instant discernment that is so grounded by occasionalism, the uniqueness of the event, and a dependency on the Spirit that the individual has no capacity or capability to contribute to the choice to believe or reject the command. The individual simply acts in passive conformity without autonomy. Further criticism suggests that Barth’s model assumes discrete actions that are potentially incoherent with the believer’s life and, in particular, ignore the existence of a deepening, continuous relationship between the believer and God.²⁹⁹ Werpehowski constructively dismantles these criticisms by clarifying the location and contextually defined terminology within Barth’s logic of divine command and ethics, such that a command is understood as permission and liberation and that it invites human action that is experienced as divine

²⁹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 233.

²⁹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 166.

²⁹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 238.

²⁹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 181, 188-90.

²⁹⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 164, 187.

²⁹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 216.

²⁹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 203, 225, 226.

²⁹⁹ William Werpehowski, *Karl Barth & Christian Ethics: Living in Truth* (New York: Routledge, 2014), chap. 1:15,16, Kindle.

refreshment. Werpehowski continues by highlighting Barth's understanding that the command always presents a step that is in the nexus of the history of divine grace, that it affirms the unity between the individual and others and aligns with divine commands in scripture, Jesus' formed reference. Finally, he restates Barth's discussion on vocation and clarifies that the command is contextual to the individual's life.³⁰⁰

In reality, Barth has acknowledged our moral sensibility but has argued that it cannot be considered independently from God's revelation command. Barth describes the human response as correlating analogically with God's action and also functioning as an act of witness. For example, an expression of love for neighbors is 'self-giving which reflects and therefore guarantees to the other the love of God and the freedom to love him'.³⁰¹ Expressions of this nature establish the history of relationship between God and the individual. This history of relationship forms character and, given ongoing repetition across the diversity of life situations, develops growth-in-continuity for the individual.

Significantly, Barth's understanding of revelation implies the possibility of two paths that shape community formation and effectiveness based on whether participants choose to accept and respond to revelation. The ongoing conflict between human and creature manifests in a tension between the desire to obey the Word of God and the desire to sin. The individual must repeatedly choose, being continually given fresh revelation and the capacity by the Holy Spirit to hear and receive faith with which to conform to the Word of God. Justification and sanctification are therefore a process of 'becoming', starting every time from the beginning, with fresh revelation.³⁰² Three attributes within this process—faith, freedom and obedience—have implications for community formation and effectiveness.

Faith, given by the Holy Spirit, is always related to a single event, an individual decision, in which we decide to conform to the Word of God. We are continually led by this faith.³⁰³ The nature of justifying faith is essential for the quality of community. It reflects an utter humility in human character that is neither chosen nor enforced. It excludes all works and attempts for human cooperation. It is humility of obedience. Individual expressions of confession, proclamation, and works come forth as a consequence of this faith.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Werpehowski, *Karl Barth & Christian Ethics*, 18-22.

³⁰¹ Werpehowski, *Karl Barth & Christian Ethics*, 28-36.

³⁰² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1, 583, 587.

³⁰³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 706.

³⁰⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1, 609, 616-628; *The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 242.

Freedom is particular, true, and unique to the individual. Through the awakening of the Holy Spirit, in faith and confession, individuals understand that they are truly free only in Jesus Christ. They are free to choose for God, for what God wills to do, and to be for Him in this history. Freedom exists only in the obedient exercise of its correct actualized use.³⁰⁵

The individual cannot only hear the Word of God but must also act in obedience in response to its hearing.³⁰⁶ Human activity is circumscribed by divine activity, guided by the ‘formed reference’ of Jesus, and motivated by love.³⁰⁷ In repeated obedience, the human being vanquishes and supersedes the creature. This union of divine and human action is ‘being a child of God’.³⁰⁸ The tension between the human and creaturely nature creates two pathways for the participant: to accept revelation leading to a witness of relationship with Christ or to reject the revelation and capacity to represent relationship with Christ. Full acceptance by all participants maximizes community effectiveness given universal acceptance and Spirit-led responses. Rejection, by some or all participants, diminishes or negates community effectiveness.

5.2.3 The Response - A Hearer and Doer of the Word

John 15, the parable of the vine and vinedresser, is helpful here to visualize the reality of the Spirit’s engagement with the individual who receives and accepts revelation. As with branches on the vine, each participant is entirely dependent upon the Spirit to bring revelation and the indwelling presence of Christ to receive revelation (v5). The continual and reciprocal expressions of love and obedience in v9-10 similarly align with our continual engagement and response to revelation. From this dependency comes a diversity of response expressions, purposefully shaped and leveraged by the Spirit to engage the surrounding world.

Pragmatically, in continual faith and obedience, the child of God becomes a ‘hearer and doer’ of the Word.³⁰⁹ The individual responds to revelation along two dimensions: vertically, in obedience to the Word of God, and horizontally, in love and service to his or her surrounding neighbours.³¹⁰ The Holy Spirit constitutes the child of God in faith.³¹¹ And

³⁰⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.2, 587; *The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 195; *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 495.

³⁰⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 180-187.

³⁰⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 835.

³⁰⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.1, 8.

³⁰⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 207.

³¹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.2, 658.

³¹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.1, 242.

like John the Baptist, children of God live outwardly as witnesses, as ‘sign-givers’, uniquely pointing to and attesting to revelation in proclamation and through acts.³¹² Neither revelation and acknowledgment nor the acts of obedience and signs of witness are generic in form.³¹³ All are contextual, continual and unique.³¹⁴ For this witness to have its greatest impact, it is primarily expressed and received through relationships rather than by association with an inanimate community entity. The ‘afresh and anew’³¹⁵ giving of revelation requires continual engagement by the individual, fluid response based on freedom-in-obedience, a willingness to invest time and resources in others, and, critically, faith and humility to live at the edge of our capacity to control life, trusting in the Spirit for daily direction. This is the underlying logic that Barth understands when he describes the practical reality of believers hearing and doing as ‘indispensable, ordinary little people with the task of doing here or there, in this way or that, what is entrusted and demanded of them’.³¹⁶ The fluidity, uniqueness and creativity of these signs establishes a condition of continual movement or liquidity in community composition.³¹⁷ The liquid nature of this visible community implies an understanding that the non-believers’ primary experience with the community occurs through individual relationships rather than by association with the overall observed entity that is continually evolving in shape and nature. Effective witness is therefore relationally dependent and, given the dependency on the Spirit, cannot be structured or controlled through human design.

How might the participant actually experience revelation and respond to it?

Revelation is always relevant, unique to the individual and their specific life context at that moment and experienced as a fresh and vibrant event of relational life with Christ. My personal experiences of this have been varied. They have ranged from moments when a passage of scripture seems to leap from the page with fresh insight bringing comprehension and contextual relevance, to an inner compulsion to reach out to another with an offer of relationship or support, or to a sense of conviction as the Spirit makes me aware of sinful behaviours in my life that have dimmed my experience of relationship with Christ.

Regardless of this diversity of experiences, the character of revelation always invites me to respond in a manner that aligns with Jesus’ life on earth, that draws me into greater

³¹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 223.

³¹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2, 210.

³¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 206, 210.

³¹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.1, 159.

³¹⁶ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 98.

³¹⁷ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 42-43.

intimacy with Him or that demonstrates relationship with Him. My response to the experience of scriptural illumination was to move into greater intimacy with Christ and to share that experience with others. My response to seeing my sinful behavior initiated a prayer of forgiveness, repentance and a turning away from behaviors that did not align with the way in which Jesus lived on earth. As I responded to the compelling invitation to connect with another, I modeled Jesus' relational life and presented those actions as a sign to others of relational life with Christ.

This discussion of experiencing, interpreting and responding to the Spirit prompts a valid question of how to address situations when the response is misguided or distorted by misinterpretation. Multiple criteria should be considered to validate the interpretation of revelation and response. Foundationally, the interpretation and response should align with scripture and also be reflective of the substance and nature of Jesus life on earth. Further confirmation or clarification may be helpful by triangulating understanding with members of the community and servant leaders to whom the participant has a degree of accountability. More broadly, seeking alignment or correlation with the global Christian church, its tradition and prophetic perspective can bring further clarity to the interpretation and response. A final perspective is to invite the participant to simply wait upon the Spirit for further clarification. In doing so, the participant demonstrates a willing posture of worshipful humility that anticipates continued dialogue with the Spirit.

5.2.4 The Nature of Outreach

The understanding that community participants are to be hearers and doers of the Word is particularly relevant for the second part of question four raised by the case study: what is the nature of outreach by the community to surrounding neighbours? This discussion implies that witness and testimony occur as a highly contextual expression, relevant to the unique moment and situation, and is essentially a relational experience between individuals. This relationship is constituted within the freedom and potential made available to the individual by the Spirit. The content or core experience of outreach is always an understanding of relationship with Christ; however, the form by which this relational understanding is presented can be highly diverse based upon context. Given this relational foundation to outreach, a more thorough response regarding its nature is given in the discussion on relationship formation in the next section.

Anticipating that response, what can be said in terms of the posture of the individual participant is that they are aware that outreach tends to occur on an individual basis, one to

another, rather than through a global program or event as *Activate* suggests. Outreach will be contextual, creative and relevant to the individuals rather than generic in design and execution. Effective outreach may occur spontaneously and in the present moment instead of planned and executed according to a convenient schedule. The participant's responsibility is to continually follow the lead of the Spirit, yielding to that direction in order to demonstrate a relationship with Christ. This implies a willingness to release certainty, control and convenience and to embrace the possibility of spontaneous redirection by the Spirit. Practically, it also suggests that participants and those they are called into relations with beyond the community would live in relatively close proximity in order to be responsive to the Spirit's lead.

Implicit within a discussion of effective outreach is the paradigm that within the uniqueness of the Spirit's prompting to engage in diverse and contextually relevant expressions, the intention is always to demonstrate the vibrancy of relation with Christ using the medium of relations with one another. The next section of the chapter considers the critical nature of this relational fabric.

5.3 Relational Fabric

The *Activate* system recommends that small group relational interactions should be constrained to a relatively narrow and shallow range of engagement. Whilst the authors acknowledge the necessary involvement of the Spirit for establishing meaningful Christ-oriented relations, they have structured *Activate* in such a way that makes little room for the Spirit to shape the relational fabric of the community. Small group meetings follow a structured agenda that limits ad-hoc dialogue, and participants are coached to avoid trying to solve or support others' challenges and concerns during the meeting. Facilitators are trained to handle the system administration and logistics rather than serve the group pastorally, combining this structure with the busyness of daily life and the natural inclination to avoid the cost and discomfort of engaging beyond the convenient and comfortable results in a tenuous and shallow relational fabric within the community. This is a fabric that, whilst culturally appealing, enables participants to maintain a wall of separation or distance between themselves and others, especially when the other is different, in order to sustain their individualized, hyper-independent identity that is prized by post-modern society. In this section of the chapter, I establish the relational deficiencies that arise from a condition of hyper-individuality and then present a roadmap of the Spirit's work that transforms the

individual to a person in communion. Using this transformative journey, I then respond to the question from the case study.

5.3.1 Identity, Individuality and Relational Distance

Without a vibrant personal relationship with the Spirit, the community participant identity is profoundly shaped by their desire for freedom, individuality and self-determination. Jürgen Moltmann observes that human beings are only in the image of God when they are in fellowship, but that there is always a reciprocal tension that exists between this fellowship and the individual. He states, ‘The rights of human beings to life, freedom and self-determination always arise together with the community’s claim upon people’.³¹⁸ Post-modern society today places an even higher value on the independence and individuality that come as a result of a person’s freedom and self-determination to keep others at a safe distance. Clearly, this dynamic substantially undermines the effectiveness of Christian community.

The consequences of sin are similarly severe with regard to community effectiveness. At its core, the motivation for fostering separation or distance is the need to protect the fallen self from the vulnerability of being in the presence of the Creator. A consequence of maintaining this distance is that the individual develops an understanding of the world as an expression of a singular (separated) will rather than as a participant in the fabric of God’s will. In a similar vein, Zizioulas suggests in *Communion and Otherness* that a product of the Fall is not only a fear or rejection of a ‘specific other’ but also a fear of ‘all otherness’, a fundamental rejection of relationship with others if their difference appears to threaten us.³¹⁹ He continues that the rejection from these perceived differences translates to division, separation or distance that critically results in death. These are the ‘others’ that do not belong within the community. Miroslav Volf terms this ‘fear of all otherness’ as the sin of exclusion and classifies it as an issue of our human identity.³²⁰ Whether being driven by self-determination or by sin, Turner interprets the individual’s efforts to continually separate themselves as the ‘distance’ that results in division, destruction and death in their relationship with God, others and creation.³²¹ Two forms of distancing are especially

³¹⁸ Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, 25.

³¹⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 1-4.

³²⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 65-67.

³²¹ Turner, "Foundations," 441.

relevant for community effectiveness: firstly, within the individual's knowledge gathering and assimilation process, and, secondly, in his or her relation to time.

5.3.1.1 Distance in Knowledge Gathering and Assimilation

Knowledge of truth is gained and 'owned' rationally within the mind from the individual's discrete life experiences. Knowledge is memories of historical events that communicate truth. Attaining knowledge is therefore a rational, individualized process in which knowledge is isolated from the original subject and expressed as disconnected, objective information to be assimilated and stored by the mind. There is, as a result, distance or separation between the subject and the information.³²² The consequence of this mechanism is significant. When knowledge assimilation is a primary emphasis, as is the case with much of the western church, the rational works or activities of the Godhead, the economic Trinity, take precedence over the immanent, relational Trinitarian expression. This emphasis concentrates believers' faith experience in the data of discrete historic actions rather than the intangible, contiguous, immanent being of the Trinity, the experiential being of relations. As an individual, there is therefore a propensity and desire to selectively engage, disaggregate and prioritize data according to one's interpretive lens and implicit desire for distance and separation.³²³ Life is experienced and understood through discrete activity rather than continuous being.

5.3.1.2 Distance in Time

The second mechanism for establishing protective distance occurs through a desire to avoid the reality of living in the present moment, the 'here and now'. A focus on the past or future, such that distance is established by time, motivates a lens where life as knowledge of truth is repositioned as objective historic or future data rather than a present-moment experience of truth. This tendency to avoid the present motivates an emphasis on historical faith expression and avoids the vulnerability and spontaneity of engagement with the Spirit in the present.

In combination, these distancing mechanisms favour knowledge and truth gleaned from historical activity over experiential being, past and future focus over present moment

³²² Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 104.

³²³ Turner, "Foundations," 462.

engagement, and a leaning toward a rule oriented, ethics-based relationship with God and others rather than spontaneous and fluid engagement with and through the Spirit.³²⁴ Relevantly, the *Activate* system reinforces these mechanisms by constraining the nature of relational engagement to basic social interactions and through the use of the meeting format and structured. Both components establish boundary conditions in terms of how to engage and when to engage, allowing participants to maintain their implicitly desired distance from others.

By way of contrast, Exodus 3:14, 'I AM WHO I AM', is a biblical image for the community of the Godhead that demonstrates that these distancing behaviors directly undermine the capacity for effective community. Describing the community of the Godhead as 'I AM' highlights three expectations for the individual participant as he or she becomes a relational person. Firstly, the three divine persons exist entirely in relation with one another, such that they manifest as 'I' given the perichoretic intimacy and unity. This is a unity that Zizioulas describes as *ousia* or *koinonia*.³²⁵ Secondly, the ontological form 'I AM', rather than the functional form 'I DO', suggests the primacy of mode of existence or being over the activities or works of the Godhead. Finally, the omnipresence of the Godhead expressed through its present tense in the verb 'AM', rather than 'WAS' or 'WILL BE', prioritizes the present over past and future.³²⁶ Understanding that the human correspondence of 'I AM' is 'We Are', the distancing behaviors reflect an individual's posture as 'I did' or 'I will do'. Therefore, as participants engage with the Spirit's work in relationships, they are maturing from an identity of an individual with a posture of 'I did' or 'I will do' to an identity of person with a posture of 'We Are'.

5.3.2 Being as Communion

Zizioulas's theology of the Spirit's activity in relations intends to substantially expand the possibility and capacity for relational experience with others. Predicated on the understanding that persons exist as communion beings, immanent Christ-centered community is present and accessible to all believers. In the prior chapter, I discussed the primary theological elements of communion relations. Specifically, these are the priority of union with Christ through the Spirit, existing as ekstasis-oriented love expressions toward

³²⁴ Turner, "Foundations," 458-467.

³²⁵ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 46.

³²⁶ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Bible Commentary, Vol 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1987), 39.

the other, the function of freedom and otherness within relations, and the Spirit-enabled capacity for knowing truth.

Embodying Zizioulas's elements requires a series of transformations for the participants as they evolve from distant and separated individuals to persons whose very being is always as communion. For Zizioulas, being as communion implies that true relations exist only through hypostatic union with Christ, require the symbiotic interaction of ekstasis and kenosis, and are optimally experienced only in the present moment. They are Spirit-led movements in reciprocity, in which we are only known by others relationally. Validly, Volf is concerned that Zizioulas's eschatology is over-realized and leaves no room for the presence of un-redemption, 'the already and not yet' experience of saving grace where the human being exists in varying measure as simultaneously individual and person.³²⁷ This constructive critique highlights the value of a roadmap that follows the journey of the becoming-person through the transformation from a condition of 'individual' to fully mature 'person in communion'. I will discuss this roadmap in this next section.

5.3.2.1 Relations Exist Only Through Hypostatic Union with Christ³²⁸

Zizioulas describes a positional, fully mature expression of the person as communion, in which he presumes a near instantaneous transformation of explicit awareness and consideration of all necessary elements for authentic human personhood. He identifies that an individual becomes a person through salvation in the person of Jesus Christ, through the hypostatic union of His divine and human natures. As such, the individual enters this union not simply with Christ, but also in Christ's relations with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, authentic human personhood has its ontological identity through the incarnation of Christ in communion with God. Through the resurrection, Christ's eschatological character amplifies the role of the Holy Spirit for persons as communion and consequently for historical community. In reality, the journey or progression from individual to realized person is far from instantaneous, requiring immersion and re-immersion in a variety of experiences that facilitate the realization of personhood.

Personhood does not exist apart from the event of salvation and, critically, continual and active participation in the hypostatic union with the person of Christ. Relations external to this construct are destructive and decaying in nature. Whilst scripturally, the event of

³²⁷ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 101.

³²⁸ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 44-55.

salvation is positionally sufficient for the availability of personhood, this continual and active participation is necessary for believers to fulfill their personhood. Continual and active participation occurs only through intentional and explicit engagement with the Spirit, that is, the awareness and contingency of the ontological reality of being in the presence of our sovereign Creator within history. Experiencing this reality naturally and continually invokes a free and intentional posture of worship, dependence and humility toward a pneumatologically-constituted Christ. Immediately, the becoming-person should recognize that Christ must consistently be his or her primary relationship, and that all other relations for the becoming-person occur only through this pneumatologically-constituted gateway rather than being additional or adjacent relations. Absent the gateway, relations with others originate from the nature of the individual and exist with a measure of distance between themselves and any other.

Moving from a passive, narrative-based understanding of relating to the Spirit means that the becoming-person intentionally seeks the Spirit's direction and leadership for whom to engage with and how to relate with them. Recognizing again that whilst positionally we share universally in communion with all believers through hypostatic union in Christ, eschatological momentum is demonstrated and displayed in the character of specific relations. Relations are not 'one size fits all'; rather, they are intended to express communion given the unique otherness of the persons. In submission to the direction of the Spirit, these relations serve as an expression of gratitude to the primary relation with Christ and as a witness to the Gospel through and toward others. Persons actively discern the Spirit's guidance both solely and mutually concerning the development, nature and content of the relationship, yielding to the Spirit's direction and relinquishing their individual desire for control and distance.

Whilst the *Activate* system does not advocate against this prioritization of relationship with Christ as the predicate for all other relations, it also does not advocate for or facilitate this priority. The freedom given to create small groups that focus on social and life experiences rather than discipleship and study can be misinterpreted as interpreting any relational experience as relevant rather than a desire to increase participation levels by ceding to the culture.

5.3.2.2 Relations Require the Symbiotic Interaction of Ekstasis and Kenosis

Zizioulas's model for communion and community is anchored to an ontological foundation. Only in this state of being as communion are we a living embodiment of Christ

and therefore a revelation of truth.³²⁹ The symbiotic interaction between ekstasis and kenosis in becoming-persons produces this desired result of being as communion. Ekstasis, a core characteristic of personhood, is movement beyond self to communion with otherness in the freedom that constitutes love. Through ekstasis, a person is taken beyond the particularity of ontological identity and exists in communion.³³⁰ Kenotic, or self-emptying, acts are the means by which the community participant demonstrates the characteristic of personhood. Kenotic acts therefore incarnate truth into history.³³¹ For the becoming-person, the kenotic or self-emptying process provides the necessary experience of denying self-interest and yielding to the direction of the Spirit. Continual experiences of yieldedness and their associated consequences diminish the presence of self and create an environment of receptivity and acceptance of otherness. Kenotic acts simultaneously acknowledge the inability on the part of humanity to save itself and the freedom to express an act of gratitude on the part of creation to its creator.³³²

Whilst engagement in kenotic acts externally demonstrates the character of persons as communion to the world, it also facilitates the substance of ekstasis within the becoming-person. Ekstasis is only realized within the becoming-person when kenotic acts are freely initiated and evidence of reciprocity in Christ is experienced. Freely choosing to conduct a kenotic act rather than obeying a moral or ethical code implies a foundation of love as the motivation for the act. Acts are conventionally understood as expressions of love given through modes of kindness such as word, presence, service or prayer. For the becoming-person, this conventional understanding, even when conducted kenotically, has the potential to create a hierarchical or asymmetric relation where one person continually gives and the other continually receives. Kenotic acts should therefore also be understood as expressions of freedom in the form of yieldedness and acceptance, where an act of kindness is received or embraced. Here, paradoxically, the receiver ‘gifts’ the giver through an experience of acceptance. As the becoming-person freely and continually engages in kenotic acts in the present moment, ekstasis is increasingly embodied within personhood.

Perhaps most relevantly, *Activate* explicitly advocates against relational investment of this nature. Small group participants are directly coached not to engage in deeper needs and experiences but to focus on a transactional level that creates familiarity with one

³²⁹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 107.

³³⁰ Turner, "Foundations," 441.

³³¹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 456.

³³² Turner, "Foundations," 457.

another. Whilst the system designers recognise that relational intimacy is necessary for effective community, it's unlikely that participants will exert themselves beyond the system expectations given human tendency and over-committed lives.

5.3.2.3 Relations Are Optimal Only in Present-Moment Experiences

Implicit in Zizioulas's dialogue is the understanding that persons as communion exist wholly in the present moment of time. His observation that western theology emphasizes a faith expression based on a historical lens reflects a tendency in believers to continually pivot to the past. His eschatological emphasis for ecclesial composition implicitly requires that the future be drawn backwards into the present, as opposed to a lens that directionally focuses on the shape of the future. Zizioulas proposes that past and future converge in the present. The concept is most vividly reflected in his description of believers coming together in the Eucharist celebration, where the celebration is 'perfect community' and where believers come together for a Eucharistic experience conditioned by anamnestic and epicleptic character.³³³

The construct therefore states that truth as communion, with and through the pneumatologically-conditioned person of Christ, is fully available only in the present moment. This is the optimal moment in time for knowing and experiencing God. What occurred yesterday or will occur tomorrow is not constituted in living communion and is therefore not fully truth but rather a rational interpretation of memory or anticipation residing in the mind of the individual. The construct aligns with Barth's view of the actualized presence of the Holy Spirit in revelation, where moments before and after revelation are only times of anticipation and recollection of revelation.³³⁴ The becoming-person has again to acknowledge the self-tendency to hide beyond the confines of the present moment. The person is to risk the vulnerability and intimacy of living in communion with and through the hypostatic union of Christ in the present. Truth, knowledge and communion are only available in this risk. From a foundation of love, humility and transparency, relational activity is therefore limited to that which contributes to experiences for today, rather than anticipating events that contribute to future relational equity. Experiential kenotic acts similarly require a present-time context given that they're constituted in love. Love is ontological and is experienced in the present moment. Love that occurred yesterday is rationally maintained by memory. Love that will occur tomorrow

³³³ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 115, 143.

³³⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God* 1.2. 203, 225, 226.

is rationally anticipated based on present moment experience or past memory. Consequently, the becoming-person cannot rely on the relational equity that was created yesterday as a credit toward today. Whilst that which was available yesterday has value, its value deteriorates over time as it becomes simply rational knowledge stored as memories. From this present-moment foundation, God incarnates truth by transforming each act according to His will and purpose.

A consequence of this tapered window for authentic life in communion is that it again motivates being over doing. It amplifies the importance of smaller, frequent, informal engagements over structured, grandiose, infrequent activity. It reinforces a critical dependency on the Holy Spirit's lead to enable such engagements. It diminishes rejection of others by establishing a simplified and expanded basis for frequent engagement that reduces the ability to remain detached in the relationship. And, finally, such intentionality also limits the number of relations that the becoming-person can meaningfully participate in given his or her finite human capacity, further reinforcing the necessary role of the Spirit to guide each person toward which relations to invest in and how to invest in them.³³⁵

Somewhat less obvious but still relevant, *Activate*'s highly structured meeting format and semester cadence again undermines the possibility of spontaneous, frequent, real-time engagement with one another. The absence of such fluid and free-flowing interactions inhibits the possibility for the genuine relational interactions that occur in the daily experience of life together.

5.3.2.4 Relations Are Spirit-Led Movements in Reciprocity

Throughout the process, kenotic experiences of giving and receiving are to be orchestrated according to the Spirit. Reciprocity manifests as free, potentially asymmetrical experiences of offering and response rooted in the graciousness of God.³³⁶ In doing so the becoming-persons' yieldedness is, itself, expressed as a gift of gratitude and worship to the Creator. If there is then a benchmark for these acts within relations, it is an increasing priority on and intimacy with Christ and the Spirit, continual yieldedness to the direction of the Spirit regarding the nature, timing and outcome of each kenotic act toward others. From this basis, there is continual movement in reciprocity toward one another through Christ that is expressed in Thurman's practices of intimacy that flow freely into neighbouring relations,

³³⁵ Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 76.

³³⁶ Ellen K. Wondra, "Participating Persons: Reciprocity and Asymmetry," *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (2004): 72.

beyond the immediate Christ-following community to the larger institutional church and to engagement and relationship with nature.³³⁷ This relational dynamic falls within the concept of perichoresis, albeit as Bracken observes, its human embodiment describes an ‘aspirational ideal’, requiring greater transparency regarding the facilitating role of the Spirit rather than the practically achievable reality.³³⁸

5.3.2.5 Relations Are Essential for Knowing the Fullness of Truth

Only yielded, kenotic, present-time relations through Christ in the Spirit reveal knowledge of the eschatological Christ and of the other. Knowledge of truth is a shared experience garnered only through living as persons in communion. This construct raises an important question of relatedness to others in their uniqueness and particularity, especially if their particularity is expressed in a very different form than our own. Relevantly, Zizioulas’s reframing of otherness onto an ontological basis requires the existence of otherness in order for the identity of the becoming-person to be expressed.³³⁹ Positioning otherness on an ontological basis also invalidates the option to qualify the other according to acceptable moral or natural qualities. Together these two factors mean that rejection or even ‘mere tolerance’ is counter to the Christian ethos.³⁴⁰ In other words, relations must begin from a posture of inclusiveness and acceptance.³⁴¹ From this initial posture, how does the becoming-person move from acceptance to love and embrace of the other? Aligning with one another ontologically, in the presence of the Spirit, must emphasize the nature of our engagement on the eschatological reality of who and how we are becoming rather than on what we were or currently are. Only through this lens are persons graced to experience unity and communion in Christ.

A final element for achieving a sustainable state of otherness in communion is that persons can answer, to their satisfaction, how they truly know the other and their ontological trajectory. Zizioulas’s view that knowledge is principally gathered experientially addresses this question. Life in a defined community with one another provides the platform for developing an experiential knowledge base. The continual adherence to these values and

³³⁷ Cathy H. George, "Howard Thurman's Practice of Intimacy in the Development of Community," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 26, no. 1 (March 2016): 29-46.

³³⁸ Joseph A. Bracken, "The Challenge of Self-giving Love," *Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (December 2013): 864-866.

³³⁹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 39.

³⁴⁰ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 86.

³⁴¹ Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 92.

practices constitutes the arrival of individuals whose original identities were ‘I did or will do’ to realised persons, ‘We are’, corresponding to an Exodus 3:14 community.

From a secular perspective, the journey for becoming-persons seems costly, requiring continual yieldedness and attentiveness to the Holy Spirit’s lead for whom to relate with and how and when to relate. However, for the surrounding world, the embodiment of this posture is essential for witnessing the reality of the eschatological Christ. The being of this community is truly Christ incarnate. The reality for becoming-persons is an exquisite and unique experience of relationship in the presence and power of the Spirit. These are relationships where interaction with another is predicated on increasing intimacy and love with Christ in communion that manifests as life-giving and creative experiences beyond human conceptualization and expectation.

Again, *Activate*’s programmed format, calendarisation, and transactional interaction inhibit and often entirely prevent community participants from truly knowing one another as Zizioulas describes. As I’ve previously noted, even if these structures were not in place, human desire for individuality through distance may still reject the invitation to live in such relational proximity.

5.3.3 Responding to Activate Question Four: Participant Experiences Within Community and In Outreach

My response to the second part of question four of the *Activate* case study, which concerns the participant experience in terms of the relational fabric within the community and the nature of community outreach to surrounding neighbours, is developed by combining the discussion on this pneumatologically-constituted relational fabric and the contextual outreach activity by each participant.

Unlike *Activate*’s narrowly defined and shallow relational transactions, Spirit-enabled relations can become deeply meaningful and life-giving experiences that consistently point to relationship with Christ. These are relations that occur solely through Christ in the Spirit. At their most fulfilling, they exist as a series of present-moment experiences. They require the symbiotic interaction between ekstasis and kenosis in order to fully and truly know one another rather than being simply functional. Relationships may not exist or thrive on a symmetrical basis but can be Spirit-led movements in reciprocity where what is given and received is designated and shaped by the Spirit in order to deepen the communion. Finally, only through experiences of these relations is truth fully known and understood. The result of these relationships draws each person into deeper relationship

with Christ as a pre-condition for establishing intimacy between one another. The posture, nature and fruit of these relationships is entirely predicated on the participant's yieldedness to the Spirit and the priority of Christ as the principal relationship. In essence, these relationships exist as an expression of Christ-worship. From an outreach perspective, participants follow these same principles and protocols when developing relations with those beyond the community, regardless of whether others have a personal relationship with Christ. Therefore, whilst the sign-giving expression of outreach can take diverse forms according to context, the intent and substance of these outreach relations always begins with and reflects this relational essence.

Relationships are more likely spontaneous, fluid and unstructured, based on frequent diverse interactions that allow the relationship to be experienced in the present moment rather than occurring in structured, programmed events that satisfy a calendar or schedule. Building community on this foundation of being as communion rather than activity again challenges contemporary community expressions, such as *Activate*, where system and cultural convenience take priority. Given that participants should remain continually engaged with and responsive to the Spirit's leading, our capacity to meaningfully exist as communion beings likely requires living in close proximity to Spirit-designated 'others'. This relational fabric resembles a fluid network or set of sub-networks that may have only minimal visibility to the observer given that much of the relational investment is kenotic in substance.

How does this reality compare with the experiences for individuals in the *Activate* system? Structured community-wide programs and relational constraints undermine the freedom and creativity of the Spirit. Whilst it's possible that the Spirit may leverage the *Activate* structure and processes for community development, it is not guaranteed. The absence of certainty and definition in terms of when the Spirit prompts relations and sign-giving activity can conflict with *Activate's* structured meeting format and cadence, relational space, and outreach programs. Logically, at its most effective, *Activate* is only beneficial when and if the Spirit chooses to leverage its structure and process for community development. When the Spirit chooses to work beyond the *Activate* guardrails, there is the possibility that the individual will ignore or even intentionally reject the Spirit, given human predisposition to conform to the convenience of structure. Therefore, for the individual participant, there must be a receptivity to spontaneity, creative response, and continual discernment as to whether and how one should participate in the *Activate* structure. This Spirit-led autonomy on the part of the participant has the potential to undermine much of

Activate's structure and, consequently, the likelihood of its success. The Seed Slingers small group most closely reflected the experiences of a group following the Spirit's leadership, where the group was willing to step away from structure and yield to the fluidity of the Spirit's guidance. Relevantly, here is where CCF experienced effective and long-lasting fruit from its outreach efforts.

The more significant weakness of *Activate* is the implicit effect of incentivising and facilitating participant inertia and indifference. Whilst the system constraints inhibit participants from experiencing and realizing the fullness of Spirit-enabled community, it is human nature that chooses to accept the comfortable and convenient system constraints rather than potentially uncomfortable, inconvenient and unknown relational experiences. *Activate* is, in reality, simply enabling or condoning human nature. This reality is a far more consequential driver of ineffective community than the rules and structure of the *Activate* system. I contend that changing these behavioral dynamics is unlikely to occur simply by changing or removing the system rules and structure. Rather, intentional community leadership that is similarly sensitised to the Spirit's leadership is required to motivate, encourage and equip individuals to hear and respond to the Spirit. This topic will be addressed in the next chapter.

5.4 The Community Entity, For Participants and Observed by Others

This community has taken shape through a pneumatological core that organically guides the community, firstly in and through each individual participant, then flowing into their relations within and beyond the community. The community entity is described by the aggregate of the participant experiences and by the observed community expression that is presented to those outside the community. The critical interaction within this community is the degree of engagement between the Spirit who brings revelation and the individual participant. The doctrine of revelation describes God's activities that reveal His nature and will to the individual. Contingent upon the mutual indwelling of Christ, God reveals Himself to Himself (Colossians 3). Therefore, in Christ every individual exists as revelation and, consequently, so does the community.³⁴² To the extent that all participants fully and continually engage with and follow the Spirit, the community itself exists as an expression of revelation. When participants only partially engage with the Spirit's guidance, the

³⁴² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 655.

aggregate community, for participants and observed by others, is something less than the fullest possible revelation.

In this final section, I outline the hallmarks of effective community and the specific work that the Spirit does to shape the community at the entity level. I introduce a third dimension to the discussion, that of whether participants continually engage with the Spirit compared with selective or intermittent engagement. Continual engagement implies a fluid community expression. Selective engagement can imply a more static expression. Integrating these dimensions with the discussions on the individual participant and the relational fabric, I describe the participant experience of the community entity and the observed expression of community. I conclude the section with an additional response to question four in the case study.

5.4.1 Hallmarks of Effective Christian Community

Sociologically, the participant experience of community is one of identity, a sense of commonality with others, which fosters an experience of belonging due to affiliation and alignment amongst the participants. This provides the locus of community unity. This sense of belonging creates implicit or explicit criteria for acceptance or membership within the community and, as a consequence, an understanding of the ‘other’, those who do not belong within the community. Participation in the community often requires satisfying certain criteria in order to be accepted and belong. Frequently, community has expression beyond its present and physical construct in imagined or invisible dimensions given its history and memory or hope and purpose. An individual’s participation, identity and belonging within community are a direct function of his or her relationships and an indirect function of association with the entity. From a Christian perspective, identity and belonging are principally determined by the participant’s personal relationship with Christ and, with Christ, through one another. Both are expressed through beliefs, values, ethics and activities. Unity is experienced and identified by the commonality of these elements.

The observed community expression is as an intangible memorialization or recognition of the community for those within and, indirectly, those outside the community that reflects the community identity or purpose. This recognition or perception can be construed as a boundary condition that determines who can participate or belong to the community and who does not. Those seeking to enter community are influenced and enabled directly through relationships with participants of the community and, indirectly, by a desire to associate with this observed community. From a Christian perspective, the

observed community might be described by its denominational affiliation, its mission, or its social justice purpose. Contrary to secular communities, and despite some denominational perspectives, access to and participation in Christian community should not be conditional upon membership.

As discussed, participant community experiences using the *Activate* system are highly structured, rigidly following a series of steps and processes that drive enrollment, meeting cadence and content. Identity and belonging are derived as much by system conformity as Christian beliefs and values. Unity is expressed by uniform and repetitive participation in group meetings and outreach tasks. *Activate's* observed community is recognizable by its visible consistency and static expression. Culturally resonant language and engagement mechanisms promote transparency and familiarity that facilitate community acceptance.

5.4.1.1 The Spirit's Shaping of the Organic Community

The community develops from a pneumatological core that begins with the individual, shaping his or her relational engagements that in turn are aggregated to form the overall community entity. The Spirit continually gives unique direction to each believer according to his or her relational sphere and time. As a consequence of this, there is the possibility of a diverse range of activities, though always expressed within a relational context, that are intended to maximally serve as signs pointing to relationship with Christ. . The Spirit builds and maintains this relational fabric. Finally, the Spirit establishes these works within the community by enabling and sustaining a visible and invisible expression of relational peace that attracts those beyond the community to enter into relationship with community members and with Christ.

5.4.1.2 Fluid Versus Static Community

Given this pneumatological core reflecting the Spirit's sovereignty, the degree to which individuals engage and follow the Spirit substantially informs the ultimate shape of the community. Considering two levels of participant engagement, continual and selective engagement, demonstrates this effect on the community. Through continual engagement, individuals exist in perfect harmony with revelation from the Holy Spirit, such that their response fully conforms and is coincident with the Spirit's direction. Under selective engagement, conforming responses lag behind the Holy Spirit's direction or are consciously rejected. This second scenario represents the more common community expression.

5.4.1.2.1 A Community in Continual Engagement

Continual engagement with the Spirit and revelation implies the potential for continual movement. This movement may take the form of accepting the invitation to acknowledge and become a new person in Christ or rejecting the invitation and remaining as creature. This perspective represents Barth's statement, 'we are always on the way', as we transform through changes in knowledge, belief, experience, attitude and physical expression.³⁴³ Whilst all movement is fully aligned and shaped by the Holy Spirit, the actualistic nature of revelation can result in a community that may appear frenetic, discordant and diverse in activity to its members and to the world. Nevertheless, this community functions optimally for God's purposes and exists in full authority and witness to the Word of God as each individual serves uniquely as a sign to the non-believer. Unity, identity and belonging through uniformity of activity cannot be assumed.

In order to maintain a fluid and malleable community, the actualistic nature of individual revelation suggests that many contemporary forms of Christian community, such as *Activate*, are not appropriately designed to effectively function in a missionary capacity. For example, highly structured, large-scale mission and service initiatives may frequently be out of step and inflexible for facilitating concurrent revelation. Moreover, requiring participation in these initiatives undermines the value of freedom-in-obedience and more likely fosters response out of, as Barth calls it, unsatisfactory obedience, potentially leading to future disengagement.³⁴⁴ At a minimum, ministry infrastructure should be evaluated for its capacity to facilitate free, diverse and spontaneous response.

5.4.1.2.2 A Community in Selective Engagement

Selective engagement by some or all of the members produces a community that functions sub-optimally as a vessel for experiencing and witnessing relationships in and through Christ. Reasons for selective engagement can include theological rejection of actualistic revelation, conscious rejection of a specific revelation, or simply our creaturely tendency to disengage from the Spirit. Contemporary Christian communities typically reflect the reality of one or more of these reasons. Consequently, the community exhibits less receptivity to the Spirit and less capacity for dynamic response. Therefore, it exists with stale knowledge of the Spirit's direction and without continual faith for transformation. It relies on human cognition and strength that results in lagged responses and asynchronous

³⁴³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God* 2.1, 201.

³⁴⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 529-530.

alignment with the Spirit. Responses may be less creative and diverse and may be deployed for durations beyond the Spirit's intent. A community of individuals in selective engagement appears more stable and unified in outward activity but is also less effective in witness. The issue here is not necessarily that the specific community form is wrong, but rather that it is static in nature.

A residual effect of selective engagement is visible unity. With visible unity, identity and belonging become located in outward activities that participants perpetuate beyond the Spirit's direction. Simple unity is more easily experienced and observed given the greater aligned response amongst the members. Such 'easy' access to key experiences of identity and belonging motivate increasing investment in these activities, again likely without the direction and enabling of the Spirit. As a result, there is a further loss in fluidity and responsiveness and a diminishment in capacity for witness. As the community increasingly aligns with a sociological community form, it becomes increasingly less effective as a witness.

In summary, these engagement scenarios suggest two important insights for community effectiveness. Firstly, in order to function with full sensitivity to revelation and the Holy Spirit, the community must be fluid and malleable in structure, process and character. This emphasis diminishes the value of expansive ministry infrastructure and overhead. Secondly, the community is inherently challenging and uncomfortable for the individual, creating a propensity for ongoing attrition unless other attributes offset and stimulate commitment such as new expressions and locations for unity, identity and belonging. Conversely, a community that is more static in nature results in a more visible expression of unity, identity and belonging. However, it is likely functioning with diminished engagement in the Spirit and consequently a loss of missional focus and effectiveness. This tension between a fluidity that enables the Spirit and a static community expression that optimally satisfies participants' desire is considered in the subsequent discussion of the participant community.

5.4.2 The Participant Community Experience: Hearing and Doing, Deepening Relations

The Spirit engages with each individual participant in forms that manifest as signs of relationship with Christ predicated on a human relational paradigm. Practically, the focus for participants is simply one of growing and deepening relations where the Spirit directs. Acts 2:42, 'They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (NASB), captures this relational fabric of community. Whereas western Christian culture often emphasizes the cognitive activities of teaching and prayer mentioned in this verse, in reality, authentic community, the being of community, exists in the experiences of continual fellowship and breaking of bread. This is the essential foundation for Christian persons as communion in community. As discussed earlier, each person is invited to respond to unique revelation given by the Spirit. Whilst responses are shaped by Jesus' formed reference, the specific nature of the response is determined by variances associated with the uniqueness of the revelation to time and context. These variances arise from the un-knowability of unique revelation to the individual, the contextual specificity of its nature, and the inconsistency of human response. Effective Christian community allows for these individual experiences to be uniquely fulfilled and also fully integrated within the community.

Similar to Ward's *Liquid Church*, spirit-ordained relations create sub-networks within the overall community, where each relationship serves as a unique expression of Christ-worship and in parallel as an expression of reducing distance between persons through a diversity of kenotic acts toward one another. Acts and experiences are numerous, diverse, spontaneous and less visible to the community at large and to those beyond it. Through these acts and experiences, the community is spontaneous and continually fluid. Despite this fluidity, the community emphasis on 'being in' over the 'activity of' manifests as unhurried, without direction or measurable progress or intention. It appears as the antithesis of contemporary, western Christian community models. The network of relations is unique to each person; it is generally a subset of the participants within the community but may also include relations beyond the community. Zizioulas identifies the possibility of exclusiveness and insularity in these sub-network relations given their nature and activity, most especially when participants are not fully yielded to the Spirit. It will be the task of community leadership to discern this exposure and facilitate the response.

5.4.3 Observed Community Expression - Evidence and Experiences in Unity

Effective community must simultaneously encourage outreach engagement, facilitate common life in Christ and Christ-based relations, and diminish the prevalence for individualized relationships. Achieving this has implications for the individual, the community expression, and ultimately for its leadership. Additionally, the impact of unique revelation and individual response disrupts much of the contemporary understanding for community that is typically expressed through institutionally constructed unity, identity and

belonging. Visible forms of unity that manifest through common activities will be less evident and effective in demonstrating the purpose and identity of the community. Generally, this pneumatologically-shaped community is more liquid in its visible form. This liquidity does not have to imply a loss of community; rather, it suggests a shift in how we understand and observe community. Furthermore, Christian community should also serve as an entity-sign, contrasting its nature in Christ with the nature of creature and sin in the world.

In summary, the community should represent an expression that explicitly values and communicates the attraction of Barth's freedom-in-obedience and obedience-in-freedom over participant self and control³⁴⁵; unity in Christ over uniformity in action; a dynamic and spontaneous posture over static and stable structure; and relational equity and depth over mere faces in crowds. Patrick Franklin, drawing on Newbigin's theology of mission, describes this community expression as 'a living testimony to the gospel that has been granted a taste of God's presence, power, grace and reconciliatory unifying love. It is an experience and expression that results in an explosion of joy in the church community that overflows into the world'.³⁴⁶ Given the participant expression of community, how does this observed entity manifest and, critically, how is unity recognised and understood by those beyond the community? Whereas, the presence and awareness of unity through wide-scale, common activity, such as exists in the *Activate* system, has conventionally provided a sense of belonging and identity, the pneumatological core and organic development of this community expression challenges the likelihood of this visibly observed unity. Additionally, the self-emptying constitution of kenotic acts intentionally diminishes their footprint, further obfuscating visible unity. For participants within this community, identity and belonging cannot exist through alignment with the static community 'institution'; rather, unity occurs through relational experiences within each person's unique sub-network. These characteristics not only suggest a revised understanding of unity, they also raise the question of whether an emphasis on static or overt unity might undermine authentic alignment and prioritization of Christ by participants if not appropriately formed and located. Whilst static signs, such as uniform participation in a single activity as encouraged by *Activate* at CCF, represent a visible and unified community expression, they inhibit the necessary fluidity that

³⁴⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* 4.2, 93.

³⁴⁶ Patrick S. Franklin, "Missionaries in Our Own Backyard: Missional Community as Cultural and Political Engagement in the Writings of Leslie Newbigin," *Didaskalia* (Otterburne, Man.) 25, (September 2015): 161-190.

signals the community's capacity to respond to the Spirit. Critically, the mandate for the community to retain an ongoing sensitivity to the Spirit's direction that can prompt a diversity of activity requires flexibility in response that manifests as fluidity in expression. Consequently, an expression of unity should be similarly fluid in nature. Given the Spirit's engagement in and through individuals and through their relations, three visible characteristics can represent the fluid oneness or unity within the community: firstly, the relational peace that exists between persons as they grow into deeper, Christ-centered relationship; secondly, coalescence as individuals continually move into more intimate relationship with Christ; and finally, coalignment as individuals increasingly align decisions and responses with the Spirit's purposes.

5.4.3.1 Relational Peace

In a culture of independence and individuality, experiences and evidence of relational peace predicated on the Spirit's constitution is a rare, compelling and attractive unity expression. This unity element is located and expressed not through a structure or process but within the relational fabric of the one-another relations in networks and sub-networks of the community. To the extent that all community participants fully engage with the Spirit's guidance, a relational peace that exists and thrives in the fullest freedom offered by the Spirit to enable one another to achieve their God-ordained potential is a profound experience of life in and with Christ for each participant. More significantly, the expression of a community that embodies and amplifies this relational peace is a vivid marker and witness to Christian faith in a culture of discord and dissonance. As I highlighted earlier, this is also a marker of the Spirit's necessary presence within the community that identifies the community as a supernatural experience for participants and expression for others. For those beyond community, this is a relational peace that establishes the 'strange kind of holiness' that Hirsch describes from persons 'living as such an incarnational community as to manifest that strange kind of holiness that is so profoundly attractive to nonreligious, and yet offensive to religious ones'.³⁴⁷

5.4.3.2 Coalescence and Co-alignment

Unity is also observed within the concepts of coalescence and co-alignment. Recalling Tozer's image of pianos calibrated to a single tuning fork from chapter four, members coalesce around Christ with a resulting co-alignment in intent and purpose from a

³⁴⁷ Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 143.

diversity of activity rather than simple conformity to the same activity as is the case with CCF outreach projects.³⁴⁸ Members experience an inward holy coalescence in Christ, being continually drawn into deeper relationship with Christ and, through Christ, to each other. A holy coalescence amplifies each participant's understanding of joy and truth in Christ through an awareness that all are concurrently sharing in this same joy and truth. In co-alignment, obedience to the Spirit is prioritized and a corresponding freedom through individual activity is observed. Coalescence and co-alignment can further offset the concern associated with *communitas* expressions where individuals can have a tendency to bond on a human level without Christ's presence.³⁴⁹

From a practical perspective, language, metanarrative, size and location can enhance the expression of coalescence. *Activate* and other contemporary small group systems have readily embraced the value of this approach. Developing and socializing a common language that contemporizes the gospel establishes a broader capacity for consistent interpretation and comprehension and implicitly provides a tool to facilitate identity. Maintaining a vivid metanarrative using this contemporized language to locate the community and its actions within the context of Christ's mission creates a sense of belonging to the community and to the larger church. Language and metanarrative additionally facilitate comprehension and receptivity in mission. Despite contemporized common language, consistent interpretation and comprehension will diminish as the community grows in size, simply due to variances in personal interpretation. The extent to which this loss diminishes the effectiveness of individual witness and community contrast should govern the size of the community. In all likelihood, a smaller community can maintain a more aligned interpretation and comprehension, and, therefore, a stronger sense of coalescence, than a larger community. Validly, co-locating the community within a relatively small geographic footprint offers an additional benefit of community visibility and contrast. A final contrast relates to the overall pace or velocity of community. A relationally predicated witness, the ongoing fluidity of language and metanarrative, and the necessary investment in coalescence all suggest that community must conduct daily life at a much slower pace than our contemporary, transactional culture desires.

³⁴⁸ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 69.

³⁴⁹ Carl F. Starkloff, "Church as Structure and *Communitas*: Victor Turner and Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 1997): 643-668.

5.4.4 Responding to Activate Question Four: The Community Entity - Identity, Belonging and Attracting

As a result of the Spirit's shaping in and through this entire community, what is the nature of the aggregate community such that it provides an experience of belonging and identity to the participants and is also visible and attractive to its neighbours? Drawing together these discussions on responses to the Spirit's shaping in community, the participant's experience of community can be described by the following.

The sense of identity and belonging for the participant occurs principally through the unique engagement and response to the Spirit's prompting, resulting in a network of creative and meaningful relationships that readily include relations beyond other community participants. Interactions are intended to deepen relational intimacy rather than transactional exchanges. They are likely individual, frequent, and unstructured rather than calendarized group programming. Participants are drawn into increasing intimacy with Christ as they engage with the Spirit and recognise their alignment with other participants who are also drawn into increasing Christ intimacy given a common metanarrative, purpose and language. The resulting community is one of continual relational flow, always outward toward others within and beyond the community and always inward toward Christ. These relational flows establish the substance of the participant unity experience, specifically increasing relational peace and fulfillment, coalescence around Christ, and co-alignment in activity. Given the specific nature of the Spirit's work, the community is able to be most effective if it is physically proximate and engages fluidly and interactively on a real-time basis.

The observed community is recognized or observed in two dimensions. The first dimension is through personal, frequent, unstructured engagements by participants when they interact relationally with those beyond the community. The nature of these engagements reflects a genuine intent to know the other regardless of belief, value or behavior and is a demonstration of relational life with Christ. Contrary to cultural expectations, these interactions are largely invisible, appearing as simply daily life with one another yet all the while creating a deep relational fabric. This first dimension implies that the community leverages only minimal structure and programming. Consequently, it lacks conventional visible form and familiarity. Contrasting the focus and impact of this first dimension against the backdrop of cultural experiences for community, this community is recognised as a profound contrast. This is its second dimension. Known principally through its practices and expression of authentic, inclusive relational engagement, the community is

amorphous in visible form whilst being highly inviting and attractive as the Spirit intentionally works through the community as an entity and through its participants to continually represent the possibility of Christian life.

5.4.5 The Necessary Role of Leadership

Throughout this chapter, I've reflected how and where the *Activate* Small Group System fails to support this experience and expression of community. Overtly, the failures could be attributed to the constraints and conditions that *Activate* insists upon. However, if these criteria and constraints were removed, would the community now become effective? I contend that it would not, given that community practices would devolve to a lowest common denominator expression wholly shaped by participant self-interest and cultural resonance. This is Barth's 'daily drowning of Adam' that so easily overwhelms and disables us.³⁵⁰ There is a very real possibility that the community becomes simply a well-meaning social club if it is not led and guided by the Spirit. Given this implicit predisposition by participants, the role of community leadership becomes increasingly essential for community effectiveness. Just as a receptivity to the Spirit's leadership must permeate the community, a form of leadership that is similarly receptive to discern and facilitate the Spirit's leadership is critical. Functionally, community leadership must enable the community to sustain its capacity to develop its relational fabric and to pursue diverse outreach engagements. I suggest that community leaders have four core responsibilities: to equip the individual participant, to facilitate community relational health, to guard the narrative and language, and to determine how and where to leverage systems such as *Activate*. These responsibilities will be described in the subsequent chapter.

5.4.6 Leveraging The Activate Small Group System

As I previously observed, the *Activate* structure and processes can disable community effectiveness when they are strictly adhered to, especially at the expense of clear and contrary direction from the Spirit. It's appropriate to consider how systems such as *Activate* can add value to community effectiveness without inhibiting the work of the Spirit.

In reality, the *Activate* structure and format is not in and of itself the root of the issue. Rather it is the human desire for convenience and comfort that continually gravitates to

³⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 631.

following the system. In many ways, *Activate* invites and sanctions the innate human resistance to change and desire to self-protect that Heifetz describes. Despite this concern, *Activate* can still serve as a valuable contributor, principally as a model and example of an instance in which community can function provided there is clarity that it is not the sole expression for the community. To that end, it's more helpful to consider the system as operating parameters that can suggest an initial architecture for community without becoming the wholistic definition for community. By way of example, *Activate's* semester format and weekly meeting cadence promotes the importance of receptivity to forming new relations, frequent interaction in order to build relational familiarity, and intentionally seeking to know one another. The equally critical criteria will be to understand this *Activate* principle as simply the beginning and not the free and full potential for relational intimacy that Christ intends.

Leveraging *Activate*, or any contemporary community system, in this fashion places a further requirement upon community leadership, that of evaluating whether the community is becoming complacent and, as a result, static, losing its capacity for the necessary fluidity that the Spirit requires. In the next chapter, I consider four contemporary leadership practices: transactional, transformative, servant, and adaptive leadership. From these practices, I propose a leadership protocol that most readily addresses the needs of a pneumatologically-shaped community. As a test case for my proposal, I review and analyze Paul's leadership of the Corinthian community in 1 Corinthians. I conclude with a response to the case study question on leadership.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has identified both the possible and typical responses that humanity can make to a pneumatologically shaped organic community. In the possible response, organic Christian community is profoundly relational in every way. Participants follow and demonstrate Jesus' model of engagement to show the vivid reality of living in the freedom and expansive opportunities of loving relationship with Christ and one another. Every relationship is represented through unique and specific expressions relevant for the individuals and the moment. There may be little evidence of organic community structure and format; rather, it is experienced by participants and others through its relational fabric, its increasing coalescence toward Christ, and in its coaligned activities that reflect Christ-centered relations. The continual movement along these dimensions represents community unity. Organic community is consequently substantially fluid in nature, with its sense of

identity and belonging found in the sub-networks of increasingly meaningful relations. In many ways this is the antithesis of the *Activate* community.

In the more likely response, the community is a blend of engagement derived from the tension between the participant's desire for convenience and protection and the Spirit's invitation to engage in relations and activity beyond the comfort level. In this scenario, a hybrid of the two approaches, organic and system, can form a community that appropriately utilize systems such as *Activate* in order to facilitate a relational and outreach framework. As such the community may be experienced and observed by structure and format that provide a transparent, visible entity but can also respond fluidly to the Spirit's guidance.

Throughout these discussions, the role and value of community leadership has become increasingly clear. Leadership responsibilities include equipping participants, facilitating a healthy relational fabric, maintaining a community narrative, and, critically, following the Spirit's direction to enable a fluid expression that may benefit from helpful structure at appropriate moments. Given these leadership activities, the next chapter concludes Fiddes' third step by considering contemporary leadership practices in order to identify practices most suitable for this challenge community.

CHAPTER 6

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP – CONTEMPORARY AND BIBLICAL EXPERIENCES

This chapter focuses on developing an understanding of the essential leadership criteria for the challenge model, Spirit-led organic community. Specifically, this is question four of the case study, the final component of Fiddes' challenge model. Similar to the overall approach for developing small groups, *Activate*'s leadership method is highly structured leaving little room for the Spirit to freely direct and align the community. Whereas *Activate* requires leaders to simply administrate the small group processes, expecting conformity from the leader, the model of organic community that I have developed suggests a leadership role that allows for and facilitates the fluidity and diversity that the Spirit can bring to community. In doing so, the organic community has the potential to be a vivid and attractive contrast to the convenient and culturally familiar communities surrounding it.

In order to evaluate the four leadership methods, I outline the necessary leadership functions and responsibilities of the organic community. Each leadership method is considered for its capacity to satisfy these responsibilities. From this evaluation I propose a hybrid leadership method that best serves the needs of the Spirit and the organic community. I conclude the chapter by examining Paul's leadership engagement with the church in Corinth to surface evidence of this hybrid leadership.

A popular term in today's culture is that of 'disrupter' – one who breaks apart or throws into disorder. Perhaps no better term characterises the leadership function and responsibility within the organic community. From the review in this chapter, effective leadership primarily embodies a servant leadership mode that equips individuals in the community to be Christ-oriented disruptive contrasts to their unique life sphere and a secondary adaptive leadership mode within the community to disrupt the systemic infrastructure of the community that inhibits the Spirit's true leadership. As a demonstration of this hybrid leadership, I suggest that Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is an excellent example of these disruptive modes both within the community and between the community and surrounding culture.

Introduction

The organic Christian community challenge model that I have developed as a response to the *Activate* system community requires a form of leadership that is not readily enabled by any single conventional approach, either secular or Christian. Giving effective leadership to this community must value the simple existence of a fluid community over the achievement of a specific static goal. The sense of identity and belonging, that is necessary for community experience, forms and exists implicitly within each community participant and therefore may not be recognizable through explicit membership processes. And critically, leadership must intentionally and continually relinquish its desire and capacity to control the community focus and submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as expressed through each participant. Effective leadership for this community must simply facilitate and make space for the Spirit's leadership to occur through everyone within the community.

I approach this leadership topic from a personal experience base in Christian and business leadership of over twenty-five years. In the business sector, I have led and shaped organizations of as many as a thousand employees through periods of economic growth and downturn, I have catalysed organisations at their inception and also led them through complex, challenging transitions. As a Christian leader, I have served as an elder, deacon, ministry overseer and given leadership as organizations grew, evolved and sometimes failed. My personal journey as a leader began by rigidly following programs and books that offered formulaic approaches to leadership such as the ones discussed in this chapter, to today, where I practice a form of leadership that is founded on the relationship between leader, follower and the Spirit, my willingness to serve and model this service, and humility to recognise that healthy organisations require a multitude of voices in leadership rather than a single charismatic personality. Whilst leadership functions might be learned in books and programs, effective leadership is forged through experiences of humility and perseverance.

6.1 *Activate's* Leadership Approach

As context for this leadership discussion, I describe *Activate's* approach to leadership using Northouse's framework.³⁵¹

Activate is a highly structured small group development process described by the tagline 'Focus-Form-Fill-Facilitate'. Its leadership reflects a similarly structured approach

³⁵¹ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2016), 3-6, 164-169, Kindle.

that largely follows a transactional leadership method.³⁵² During the *focus* phase, leaders plan the specific calendar timeframes and work to *form* small groups for the upcoming semester. Small groups are promoted by leadership throughout church life and *filled*. Finally, groups are administered and *facilitated* for the semester.³⁵³ Requirements for leadership are simple, generally administrative with a low qualification threshold. Leaders are expected to serve as apprentices rather than experts. They receive frequent and focused coaching on how to follow the administrative processes that enable *Activate*. As a result, the leader-follower dynamic is similarly simplified. Followers observe and understand that leadership is based on objective and transparent administration processes that implicitly invites confidence and trust in the leader given the uncontentious nature of the role.³⁵⁴ The intention behind a simplified and transparent leadership function is to incent others to willingly step into this apprenticing leadership process, that in turn will spur more small groups. This is the core element for Collins' Good-to-Great flywheel principle that the authors posit is how small groups will multiply that consequently leads to church growth.³⁵⁵ Motivation for following the leadership and for joining small groups centres fundamentally on the fact that the small group ministry is the principle, and often sole, expression within the church for belonging and therefore for identity. Followers are simply required to engage with the organization as prescribed by leadership and process in order to satisfy the participation expectation.³⁵⁶ Motivation may be further reinforced when churches, such as CCF, mandate small group participation as a criteria for membership of the church. The focus or goal for leadership is simply to achieve maximum attendance and participation in the system. The *Activate* authors define success by the metric, crowd participation.³⁵⁷ Crowd participation is 100% when any and all attendees to the church over the prior three months have become involved in a small group.

To understand which leadership method is most effective for Spirit-led organic community, I first outline the leadership expectations or responsibilities necessary to enable a community of this nature.

³⁵² Northouse, *Leadership*, 3.

³⁵³ Nelson Searcy & Kerrick Thomas, *Activate – Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura: Regal, 2008, 2018), 113-115.

³⁵⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 5, 163.

³⁵⁵ Searcy & Thomas, 84-87, 97-100.

³⁵⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 168-169.

³⁵⁷ Searcy & Thomas, 30.

6.2 Leadership Responsibilities Within Spirit-led Organic Community

From the discussion of the Spirit's engagement in an organic community, I suggest that leadership has three principle functions: to facilitate the Spirit's guidance in and through each person, to facilitate the co-alignment of diverse relationally-oriented activities by individuals and to facilitate the increasing coalescence in Christ-centered beliefs, values and ethics within individuals. I describe the leadership responsibility for these functions below.

6.2.1 Facilitating the Spirit's guidance

Chapters four and five propose an understanding of the Spirit's role as sovereign and central in creating and sustaining the contextual or cultural fabric of the community, shaping the relational character within and beyond the community, and in directing the missional activities of each community participant. The Spirit is essentially the sole, real-time leader of the organic community. Regardless of his or her specific role in the community, each participant is therefore a follower of the Spirit's leadership.

Communities, such as those structured by the *Activate* system, often embody a centripetal force that perpetually draws activity and resources toward its 'centre', usually where leadership is located and focused and where identity is most clearly defined. My experience of participating in *Activate* demonstrated that a sense of belonging deepens for individuals as they devote increasing amounts of time and resource to furthering leadership's goals. Along the way, individuals often develop a personal agenda to become a leader that can enhance their personal identity and status within the community. Given participant resource and time is directed toward the system centre and away from the community relational edges, the community appears as monolithic and homogeneous in nature and often unwelcoming and impenetrable.

In contrast, I suggest that Spirit-led organic community represents the opposite of this singular centripetal force. It reflects a diversity of resource flows that are continually directed away from the community center and into the unique, contextual relational fabric inhabited and developed by each individual, both within and beyond the community. The effectiveness of this community therefore hinges entirely on the freedom that the Spirit is given to be the primary leader who enables these flows. Leadership is responsible for establishing and sustaining an environment where each person is increasingly capable of discerning the Spirit's guidance for themselves. Leadership is not a conduit for the Spirit; rather, it serves as a witness and enabler to the voice, work and aligning activity of the

Spirit.³⁵⁸ Leadership is more naturally understood as facilitating the Spirit's guidance. Keith Yoder has written extensively on the topic of Presence-based leadership. In his most recent book, he describes the leadership process as one of 'moving beyond simply asking and believing God for something, to intentionally listening for what Christ through the Spirit is already doing in a situation and how He invites us to partner in it'.³⁵⁹ Predicated on a theological foundation that God continues to reveal Himself through the Holy Spirit today and a Pentecostal perspective that followers of Jesus are vessels of the power of the Spirit³⁶⁰, Yoder proposes an approach for leadership teams to identify the Lord's direction through times of group listening prayer, scripture study and dialogue reflecting truth, love and humility. As the team comes into alignment with the Lord's direction, there is an experience of oneness where team members recognise, yield to and embrace the direction.³⁶¹ Having practiced this leadership approach in both Christian and secular spheres for a decade, I can attest to its effectiveness.

6.2.2 Facilitating the Co-Alignment of Relationally Oriented Activity

Responding to the Spirit's direction, individuals are sign-givers to those within and beyond the community. Relationships should continually point to the truth and freedom of Christ.

Leadership's responsibility is to motivate, maintain and measure co-alignment of the relational activities. Meaningful engagement in the community not only includes a degree of relational attachment but also affiliation and alignment between the community mission and vision and the individual's beliefs and values.

6.2.3 Increasing Coalescence in Beliefs, Values and Ethics

The Spirit-created community fabric is an experiential environment of Kingdom freedom and order on both contextual and personal levels. Guided by Jesus 'formed reference'³⁶², described in chapter 5, and enlivened by the Spirit's interpretation, relational excellence is prioritized such that relationships exist as expressions of Christ worship.

³⁵⁸ Tom Marshall, *Understanding Leadership* (Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 1991), 14-19.

³⁵⁹ Yoder, Keith Ed.D, *Mastering The Art Of Presence-Based Leadership*, (Lancaster: Teaching the Word Ministries, 2016), 12.

³⁶⁰ Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership (Engaging Culture): A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), Kindle e-reader, 46.

³⁶¹ Yoder, 179-192.

³⁶² Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation* 3.2, 180-187.

The primary leadership responsibility is to foster dialogue and experience ‘space’. Whilst the Spirit shapes the nature and extent of a person’s conviction and relation with Christ, leadership should again promote forums for dialogue and experiences that invite the individuals to explore their personal beliefs and values with the Spirit. As examples, leadership can facilitate spiritual growth using Cafferkey’s paradox experiences. Each experience invites the participant to acknowledge and worship their Creator and receive fresh revelation in the mystery between these paradoxical realities.³⁶³

Secondly, leadership has a responsibility as the guardian of the community fabric. Spirit-led community is experienced in a variety of ways, such as acts of loving service to those beyond community, self-giving acts toward community members, or individually drawing closer to the Spirit in personhood and freedom. Leadership must develop mechanisms that record these expressions as a maturing portrayal of the community and its impact.

Despite the strong advocacy by *Activate* for employing quantitative metrics, measuring and memorializing the evolution of community should be conducted with discernment. Specifying a metric immediately places a priority upon its underlying causal behavior, potentially at the neglect or diminishment of other behaviors. For example, *Activate*’s crowd participation metric overly promotes an emphasis on attendance that diminishes the attention given to fostering relational depth within community. Metrics should prioritize fluidity and flexibility in the process, engagement and participation in value-developing activities over specific outcomes and targets.

Finally, a community that understands unity as coalescence and co-alignment can be largely invisible in conventional terms. To serve as an effective missional contrast, some expression of visibility can be helpful. Creating and socializing a community narrative that describes community coalescence in Christ and recollections and anticipation of revelation can achieve such visibility.

6.3 Leadership Methods

Four leadership methods are reviewed consisting with an initial description of the framework followed by an evaluation of the how effectively the method can facilitate the organic community on four dimensions: conceptual alignment, the leadership role of the

³⁶³ Michael E. Cafferky, "Celebrating Paradoxes in Christian Leadership," *The Journal Of Applied Christian Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2007 2007), 18.

Spirit, community co-alignment and coalescence, and, where relevant, capacity to contribute to the community fabric.

6.3.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership systems leverage a largely autocratic leadership format. They value the transactional exchange between leader and follower providing the follower performs in alignment with leadership expectations. The leader establishes the vision and goals, clearly identifies each person's responsibility toward the goal, and communicates the reward for achieving the required result.³⁶⁴

Transactional systems do not generally reflect an individualized component in terms of unique needs and development for the follower. Rather, they offer generalized value in order to advance the corporate agenda, leveraging the procedural infrastructure. Rewards are contingent upon follower conformity.³⁶⁵ Individual feedback is more likely to be 'management by exception' and focused on correction and negative reinforcement. Transactional leadership is most effective for achieving immediate, quantifiable goals and results.³⁶⁶ Much of *Activate's* leadership is modeled on a transactional leadership framework.

Jim Collins and a team of business analysts spent five years scrutinizing the successes and failures of companies across a variety of business sectors in an attempt to isolate the distinguishing factors that delivered sustainable performance. At its conclusion in 2001, Collins and his team published *Good to Great (GTG)*, identifying seven leadership principles that were successfully practiced in high performing organizations.³⁶⁷ The Good-to-Great principles represent a transactional leadership method based on reward/penalty behavioral motivation. In 2004, Collins followed up with a brief monograph, *Good to Great and the Social Sector*, in which he discusses the strengths of these seven principles for leading social sector organizations and the necessary refinements given the absence of a reward/penalty motivation mechanism.³⁶⁸ GTG is an excellent example of this leadership approach in the wider literature.

³⁶⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 162,165.

³⁶⁵ Mats Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture* (London: Sage, 2013), 3059, Kindle e-reader.

³⁶⁶ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 51-52.

³⁶⁷ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 12-14, 39-187.

³⁶⁸ Jim Collins, *Good to Great and The Social Sector*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), Kindle e-reader book, 444-449.

Structure

The framework relies on measurable performance metrics to define success: financial metrics for businesses and mission-centric metrics for social sector organizations. Three steps are applied: disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action. Each step involves two components. Surrounding the three steps of the process is a flywheel descriptive that characterizes the nature of the organization's momentum. A summary of each step and component is provided below:

Disciplined People

Level 5 Leadership: Instead of charismatic and dominant leadership, executives are humble but demonstrate unwavering will and strength in focusing and steering the organization. Organizations maintain transparent governance and hierarchy with a centralized executive power base. For the social sector, governance is more ambiguous given the typically obscured power base. Additionally, social sector leaders must draw on an influence dimension in order to motivate value- and belief-inspired volunteers.

First Who, Then What: Ensuring the organization is resourced with the 'right' people and removing the 'wrong' people takes priority over setting vision and strategies. Here social sector organizations have a significant advantage in that individuals with aligned values and passions self-select into the organization.

Disciplined Thought

Confront the brutal facts (yet never lose faith): Meaningful and sustainable results can only be achieved within the context of a truthful interpretation of current reality. Transparency regarding complexity, constraints and competition whilst maintaining profound faith in the organization's ability to succeed is essential. The absence of explicit 'market pressures' in the social sector can inhibit the motivation to face reality honestly.

Hedgehog concept: Organizational success occurs solely from behavior generated from the intersection of three lenses: what the organization is passionate about, what the organization is superior at, and what drives the organization's economic engine (profit). For the social sector, the idea of a resource engine, comprised of time, money and brand, can be substituted for profit.

Disciplined Action

Culture of Discipline: A culture of transparency and focus that releases resources only for initiatives identified by the hedgehog concept and rejects anything else delivers results more effectively than controlling hierarchy and bureaucratic oversight processes. Social sector organizations are often substantially challenged to create and sustain this culture given distractions from a desire to help in diverse areas, donor 'special requests', etc.

Technology Accelerators: Technology must serve to enhance innovation and efficiency, rather than function as an initiator.

The Flywheel View

Successful organizations recognize that there is no single ‘magic bullet’ to achieving results. Momentum builds incrementally, slowly at first and then with increasing velocity as activities incrementally build upon each other.

Conceptually, the GTG approach contradicts the central operating paradigm for organic community. Whereas organic community is expressed as a myriad of diverse resources and events flowing from the centre (the Holy Spirit) outward into the localised relational spheres of those within and beyond the community, the GTG approach presumes that resources flow in centripetal fashion toward a single, highly structured goal that is defined and driven by the organization’s leadership. For *Activate*, this was the goal of achieving 100% crowd participation. In addition to undermining the essential strengths of the community, the GTG model is likely to institutionalise a hierarchical human governance structure that clearly usurps the leadership of the Spirit and the unique and diverse guidance given to each individual.^{369 370}

Deficits in the approach are self-evident with regard to the freedom that the Spirit has to guide the community. Despite Collins’ presentation of Level Five leadership as humble and self-effacing, the leader is nevertheless strong-willed and exhibits a level of discipline and focus that maintains the organization’s alignment and direction.³⁷¹ This leadership method offers minimal room for the Spirit’s leadership to or through individuals within an organic community.

The ‘first who, then what’ principle similarly breaks down in that individuals essentially self-select their level of participation or non-participation in the community.³⁷² Community leadership has no meaningful capacity to determine participation other than when observing expressed beliefs and behaviors. The perspective that participation in social sector or faith-based organizations may be stronger given a values-based foundation compared to a reward-based system is valid.³⁷³ However, a values foundation can also inhibit the ability to qualify individuals based on gifts and competency. Clearly the community must rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to bring individuals into the community, thereby negating a critical component of this leadership method.

³⁶⁹ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 52.

³⁷⁰ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 1684, Kindle e-reader.

³⁷¹ Collins, *Good to Great*, 11.

³⁷² Leslie Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant, *Sustaining Impact* in James Perry, ed., *Nonprofit and Public Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 458.

³⁷³ Perry, ed., *Nonprofit and Public Leadership*, 458.

The GTG approach essentially succeeds by management through a system of interrelated, closely monitored metrics that shape performance and the culture of discipline.³⁷⁴ The nature of organic community is that much of its expression and activity cannot be concretely measured given the Spirit's emphasis on investing relationally, often intangibly, in one another. 'Performance' metrics that are derivatives of salvation or community relations are solely the purview of the Spirit and attempts to lead and manage progress against them again usurps the Spirit's role. Furthermore, establishing a suite of metrics that address only tangible outcomes naturally leads to an emphasis toward those activities that produce the measured outcomes, again at the likely expense of Spirit-directed intangible activities. As a result, the community expression and mission may skew away from the Spirit's intended shape and purpose.

GTG's culture of discipline and single goal or focus does not facilitate the freedom and spontaneity of the Spirit's guidance to engage in relationship development through a diversity of sign-giving and kenotic acts. This necessary aspect of the organic community similarly invalidates GTG's 'hedgehog concept'. Were the community to implement the hedgehog concept as an organization-wide filter for qualifying appropriate activities, its expression would again be undermined by the concept's convergence criteria.

The approach's motivation mechanism only indirectly engages individual values and beliefs and provides minimal capacity for exploring and evolving them. The inherent power of beliefs and values to shape participation and character, coupled with the inability to use reward mechanisms to affect these beliefs and values, means that GTG is so profoundly ill-equipped to facilitate the coalescence process that it is essentially disqualified as a leadership method for the community.

I've previously discussed why metrics, when used rigidly to steer a community, are ineffective and undermine the Spirit's leadership. However, metrics, when used to create awareness and transparency regarding how and where the community is growing, can serve as a tool for accountability, encouragement and adjustment. Whilst honouring the Spirit's leadership, maintaining a 'health of the community' dashboard that describes the life of the community and its journey over time can empirically support narratives of the Spirit's work and consequently contribute to flywheel momentum.

Useful metrics should reflect value-oriented engagement in activities and processes, outreach beyond compared to activity within community, volumes of initiatives,

³⁷⁴ Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), Kindle e-reader, 14.

participation levels, and so on. The intention is not to create goals or targets for these metrics, but rather to simply track levels of engagement over time and where that engagement is occurring. Finally, a dashboard can also serve as a community ‘360-degree’ self-assessment tool in which participants are invited to evaluate the health and development of the community through an objective lens.

Appropriating goals, discipline and metrics methodologies at an individual level can facilitate focus and engagement with the Spirit’s work in and through each person. Encouraging persons within the community to develop their unique personal hedgehog concept that represents their passion, competencies and accountability metrics can provide a tool for motivating each person to hear and effectively engage with the Spirit’s leadership. In a frenetic and fluid societal context, this kind of tool can be especially helpful for establishing healthy, fruitful discipline and focus within the organic community.

Summary

Despite transactional leadership’s success in secular leadership, its contradictory conceptual flow and limitations in each of the three dimensions disqualifies it as a holistic, viable leadership method for organic community. Beyond this specific discussion, there is also the potential for Christian organizations that have embedded this leadership method within their institution to maintain a hierarchical, human-centered governance system that leaves little room for the Spirit’s leadership. My concern specifically arises when a charismatic leader is hierarchically positioned to singularly set the vision and agenda with no accountability to hearing the Spirit’s direction through other members of the community. As a safeguard against this, Lencioni makes an excellent case for team leadership where a small group of individuals are collectively responsible for representing the membership, hearing the Spirit’s direction, and portraying the aligned vision and goals given this combined voice.³⁷⁵

6.3.2 Transformational Leadership

Similar to transactional processes, transformational leadership was understood as ‘getting followers to do what leadership wanted done’.³⁷⁶ In transformational leadership, this occurred through *influence*, based on the charisma and visionary capacity of the leader and the *shared* values, ethics and long-term goals of the leaders and followers.

³⁷⁵ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2012), 21.

³⁷⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 4.

Transformational leaders influence followers, individually or as a group in a process, to exceed expectations such that they achieve both their individual and combined goals. Consequently, *both leaders and followers* experience transformation as they are raised to higher moral and motivational standards. Essentially, transformational leadership builds on the transactional approach by relocating the reward experience to the followers' core values and ethics.³⁷⁷ It could be argued that *Activate's* behavioural motivation to foster a sense of belonging and identity with the community through participation aligns with this concept. Typically, transformational-based results surpass transactional results and are more likely to be sustainable.³⁷⁸

The theoretical model considers four dimensions. *Idealized influence* is the charismatic, strong role model provided by the leader, usually with high moral and ethical standards that followers want to trust and identify with.³⁷⁹ ³⁸⁰ *Inspirational motivation* describes the leader's high expectations that are effectively communicated to followers, inviting alignment with and support of the vision for the organization.³⁸¹ *Intellectual stimulation* by the leader motivates the followers to be innovative and challenge the status quo. *Individualized consideration* recognises the need for the leader to provide a supportive environment that is unique to the followers.

The approach additionally requires that the transformational leader serve as a social architect, given that the followers' engagement with the organizational culture critically shapes their desire and capacity to succeed.³⁸² The leader must continually understand the network of relational and activity flows, interactions, and critical paths in order to ensure that the network does not inhibit either follower or organizational effectiveness.³⁸³

Kouzes and Posner are recognized as leading experts in the field of transformational leadership. In *The Leadership Challenge*, they summarize their findings on exemplary leadership from surveys, interviews and performance reviews with leaders in profit, non-profit and faith-based organizations across a range of race, gender, geography and socio-economic contexts. Their findings, summarized as 'The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership', show that regardless of diverse contexts, these practices are consistent in

³⁷⁷ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 52.

³⁷⁸ John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 10th Anniversary Edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 15.

³⁷⁹ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 2729, Kindle e-reader.

³⁸⁰ Terry L. Price, *Leadership Ethics: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008 Press), Kindle e-reader book, 191.

³⁸¹ Price, *Leadership Ethics*. Kindle e-reader, 203.

³⁸² Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 2775, Kindle e-reader.

³⁸³ Northouse, *Leadership*, 34.

superior leaders.³⁸⁴ This text serves as the primary reference for the discussion on transformational leadership.

Structure

In 2004, Kouzes and Posner collaborated with six notable Christian leadership practitioners—John Maxwell, Nancy Ortberg, Ken Blanchard, Bill Bright, David McAllister-Wilson and Patrick Lencioni—to explore how these practices align with Jesus’ leadership method.³⁸⁵ Foundationally, the five practices are predicated on a trusting relationship between the leader and follower. People are willing to follow a leader provided they perceive the leader to be credible, exhibit a character of honesty and competence, and have the ability to look to the future and to inspire. The five practices are:

Model the way

Leaders lead by being the visible, transparent example of what the organization is called to be and to do. To be this example, they must first ‘know’ and be able to explicitly articulate and model their beliefs, principles and values within and beyond community. Maxwell reinforces the importance of this step, reminding us of Paul’s repeated advice to ‘remember how I acted’.³⁸⁶ Shared values and beliefs create an implicit ‘covenant’ of sorts between leaders and followers, establishing an institutional language and releasing resources and passion that ultimately forges an expression of unity.

Inspire a shared vision through a common purpose

Leaders look to the future and envision what the organization can accomplish. Working with the organization, they see through contemporary challenges and complexities to create and articulate an aspirational future reality that every follower can mentally and emotionally align with, and where all followers offer their commitment and understand their unique contribution to its fulfillment. The Christian vision inspires hope, alignment and sacrificial service. Only from the context of this vision can individual mission be developed and taught.³⁸⁷

Challenge the process

Incumbent methods and processes embody the status quo and, by definition, generate mediocre results. Leaders encourage followers to challenge the status quo through a dialogue forum of creative ideation and method

³⁸⁴ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 5th Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 30-212.

³⁸⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, ed., *Christian Reflections on The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

³⁸⁶ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 41-52.

³⁸⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 55-67; Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller, *The Secret: What Great Leaders Know and Do* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2014), Kindle e-reader book, 40.

enhancement, all while retaining organizational focus and alignment with its vision and mission. Leaders encourage followers to experiment and take risks in multiple small ways in order to create organizational learning. Lencioni highlights the responsibility of the leader to continually risk and embrace change but stresses also the responsibility to respond with humility in moments of success and with perseverance when there is failure. To demonstrate these qualities, leadership must understand that they lead as an expression of worship and that this devotion to Christ enables them to persevere in the face of personal cost.³⁸⁸

Enable others to act

Leaders encourage and facilitate a foundation of trust such that each individual maintains a personal investment in the organization and in its vision. They foster collaborative team environments that explicitly promote freedom, creativity, affirmation and interdependency along with a shared sense of success or failure. Ortberg connects this practice to the model of Jesus as Servant Leader and proposes that a personal faith in Christ and His vision for the organization may be more critical in this practice than in any other. A servant heart is necessary to invest in others to help them develop skills and capabilities. Enabling 'others' requires faith that these 'others' will ultimately assume the responsibility for fulfilling their contribution to the mission.³⁸⁹

Encourage the heart

Leaders continually seek to creatively and publicly celebrate not just the success, but also the underlying values and actions that were instrumental in achieving success. In doing so they create transparency, confidence, courage and hope within the organization regarding the 'achieve-ability' of success. Leaders create and foster a sense of community built from experiences of success, celebration and appreciation for one another. Blanchard suggests that 'accentuating the positive and catching people doing the right thing' is the most important leadership concept in a leader's toolkit.³⁹⁰ He concludes that without a profoundly humble perspective on their own capability, developed through intimacy with Christ, leaders cannot effectively lead others.

Conceptually transformational leadership lends itself well to the organic community. Whilst the approach assumes a shared vision and common purpose, there is neither onerous specificity nor a control mechanism that requires conforming behaviour. Additionally, the emphasis on relationship and value alignment rather than reward-outcome mechanisms allows substantial flexibility and growth for each individual. The primary obstacle to a successful application of transformational leadership for organic community is, similar to transactional leadership, its orientation toward a single goal or outcome.

³⁸⁸ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 71-81.

³⁸⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 85-99.

³⁹⁰ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 101-118.

Transformational leadership emphasizes a leader-driven approach to shaping the community. Helpfully, the team collaborative lens that undergirds many of the five practices can offset the potential for a solely human-constructed community expression. This lens, in essence, makes ‘room’ for the Holy Spirit to speak, to be heard and to lead.³⁹¹ The approach promotes a team or shared leadership dynamic rather than requiring an individual ‘leader’, and consequently invites shared discernment for the holistic direction of the Spirit through the many voices within the community. The approach aligns well with Zizioulas’ understanding of how the Spirit provides the knowledge of truth and Christ to the community.

Similarly, shared discernment facilitates ownership and commitment in the overall vision and ideally brings a measure of unique interpretation of the vision for each individual. However, this specificity must be carefully developed. The approach proposes a singular goal: for effective community that pursues a diversity of Spirit-led activities, the only feasible ‘singular goal’ relates simplistically and nebulously to community growth and salvation, neither of which necessarily inspires the individual to a greater level of relational engagement. Leadership must enhance the understanding of vision and mission to include expressions of values and beliefs, such that an individual’s values and activities meaningfully fit within the overall vision whilst retaining individuality and ownership.

The principal vehicle for educating and inspiring individuals to participate in community is for leadership to ‘model the way’ in terms of beliefs, values and activities.³⁹² Leaders are therefore expected to make a substantial commitment to developing relational equity within and beyond the community, to the daily pursuit of the mission, and to the embodiment of Christian values and ethics. Such a commitment is clearly intense and can easily lead to burnout. Without diminishing the vital modeling responsibilities of the leader, the use of teams and networks can again helpfully narrow the diverse sphere that an individual leader is responsible for and therefore diminish this risk of burnout.

Challenging the process, taking risks and experimenting with small steps is perfectly suited to an organic community that is called to practice numerous, diverse acts of relational outreach. The willingness to ‘fail in order to learn and grow’ can motivate individuals to explore how they engage with the Spirit. Enlisting others to participate similarly satisfies

³⁹¹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 316,

³⁹² Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader 1726.

the configuration of this community, provided individuals continue to have the freedom to pursue their unique directions.

The belief-and-values basis that informs the shared vision invites greater alignment and engagement than a reward-based mechanism. However, the approach requires refinement in order to consider the evolving nature of individual values as these individuals mature in their faith relationship or when resolving critical differences in beliefs and values within the community. Finally, encouraging the heart of each person and fostering a sense of community through recognition and celebration of achievement additionally provide a powerful ‘hook’ that strengthens relational identity and sense of belonging.

Kouzes and Posner omit any discussion of how to measure the community journey in quantifiable ways. As with transactional leadership, capturing and socializing values-oriented metrics and trends that represent the movement or evolution of the community rather than specific outcomes will strengthen its motivational mechanism. Taken in conjunction with success and failure stories, a robust narrative emerges of the community that facilitates commitment and engagement.

Summary

Transformational leadership certainly embodies many beneficial practices to facilitate an organic community. If there is a potential for failure in the approach, it is the sequence or order of the practices that emphasizes a leader-centric focus and vision rather than a Spirit-defined, follower-engaged portfolio of initiatives occurring at the grassroots of the community in and through each individual. I consider the implications of this emphasis when compared to the servant leadership method in the next section.

6.3.3 Servant Leadership

Whilst servant leadership advocates many similar practices discussed in transformational leadership, most especially the need for a deep, healthy relational fabric in the organization, it introduces one profoundly critical shift that, in essence, inverts the entire leadership method. Whereas transformational leadership represents a ‘leader-led’ paradigm, servant leadership effectively represents a ‘follower-led’ paradigm.³⁹³ To avoid redundancy, I will discuss the implications of only this paradigm shift.³⁹⁴ Servant leadership can address the most critical leadership aspect of the organic community.

³⁹³ Seth Godin, *Tribes: We Need You To Lead Us* (New York: Portfolio, 2008), Kindle e-reader, 316.

³⁹⁴ Northouse, *Leadership*, 225.

Robert Greenleaf originally developed servant leadership from the position that moral authority is entirely based upon sacrifice. He proposes that conscience inspires a leader to commit to a worthy cause, that the ends and the means to achieving it are inseparable, and that leadership is wholly based in genuine relational networks. The leader must be primarily a servant and secondarily a leader. In reality, *followers choose* their leaders by agreeing to follow them.³⁹⁵ Greenleaf's text serves as the primary reference for the discussion on servant leadership.

For a leader with a servant heart, the primary goal is not to steer the group toward a common goal, but rather to be attentive to the care, needs and vocation of the follower.³⁹⁶ A servant leader places the followers first by empowering them and helping them to develop their full potential, to become freer and to become servant leaders themselves. This paradigm critically addresses the needs of the organic community. This perspective of the leaders empowering others to develop their full potential presents a possible conflict with the idea of a common goal or aligned vision that seems so critical to the leadership methods discussed here. If each person within the community follows the path given to them by the Spirit, can there be a primary vocation by which the community is identified? Or does Christian community simply exist as Barth describes, 'indispensable, ordinary little people with the task of doing here or there, in this way or that, what is entrusted and demanded of them'?³⁹⁷ Cottrell points us to the answer with his observation that vocation is found and understood through prayer and contemplation, in other words when each participant seeks guidance and then follows the Spirit.³⁹⁸ Effective organic community will follow the Spirit's leadership for individual activity and also, by the Spirit's gift, receive an understanding of how these activities, diverse or not, are its vocation. Regardless of whether this vocation is observable and provides identity, organic community must by its very nature be and act as a contrast to its surroundings, at all times bringing light to the darkness.³⁹⁹ Finally, as with many other elements of organic community, vocation must similarly reflect a measure of fluidity given its mandate to be a continuous contrast to the evolving surroundings.

³⁹⁵ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 6,22, 231-260.

³⁹⁶ Skip Bell, ed., *Servants & Friends: a Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2014), Kindle e-reader book, ch10: 3958

³⁹⁷ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 98.

³⁹⁸ Stephen Cottrell, *Hit the Ground Kneeling* (London: Church House Publishing, 2008), Kindle e-reader book, ch4:564.

³⁹⁹ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*,3028-3041, Kindle e-reader.

Servant leadership values community because it provides an experiential platform for people to exist in interdependence and to develop respect, trust and individual growth.⁴⁰⁰ Servant leaders are ethical in approach and lead in such a way that their work serves the greater good of the community and society through their work with each follower. Servant leadership most clearly reflects a Christ-centred approach to leadership that dismisses the notion of a charismatic personality with grand vision who people are expected to blindly follow.⁴⁰¹ Instead, servant leaders seek to produce God-given life in and through others whilst themselves embodying in their own lives an expression of humility and clear dependence upon God.⁴⁰²

Structure

Whilst research on the model is still formative, the general model considers three components – the antecedent conditions, the leader behaviors and the leadership outcomes.

Antecedent conditions

The first component considers the organizational context and societal culture and the qualities and disposition of the leader, such as his or her unique traits and the level of follower receptivity to a servant leadership method.

Leader behaviours

These form the core of the model. Leaders must demonstrate competency to conceptualize the organization's purpose, mission and complexities. They must exhibit sensitivity to followers' well-being and emotional health, a willingness to prioritize the interests and success of followers over themselves, and an ability to equip and help them to grow and succeed. They must empower and allow followers to be independent and self-sufficient. They must value transparency and behave ethically. They must create value for the community through their work with followers, consciously and intentionally giving back.

Leadership outcomes

These include follower performance and growth in terms of greater self-actualization, engagement as servant leaders and derivatively greater organizational effectiveness, resulting in societal improvements.

For Ken Blanchard, a recognized practitioner in secular and Christian leadership models, Kouzes' and Posner's transformational model naturally incorporates an essential

⁴⁰⁰ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 3016, Kindle e-reader.

⁴⁰¹ Robert W. Hull, *The Christian Leader: Rehabilitating Our Addiction to Secular Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 16.

⁴⁰² Skip Bell, ed., *Servants & Friends*, ch1:826.

servant leadership dimension.⁴⁰³ However, both Greenleaf’s theoretical Servant Leadership model and Blanchard’s application reveal a subtle but important shift in emphasis that I believe makes this a fundamentally superior approach for organic community leadership.⁴⁰⁴

Sequence	Transformational Leadership (K&P)	Servant Leadership (Greenleaf/Blanchard)
1	Model the way	See the future (with others)
2	Inspire a shared vision	Engage and develop others
3	Challenge the process	Re-invent continuously
4	Enable others	Value results and relationships
5	Encourage the heart	Embody the value

Figure 6.2: Approach Sequence - Transformational Leadership and Servant Leadership

The table above (figure 6.2) compares the two approaches in terms of the primary steps and sequence. While substantial similarity is evident, the *sequence* of these steps significantly determines community effectiveness. Whereas transformational leadership draws individuals into a leader-centric vision that dictates each individual’s equipping needs, servant leadership invites individuals to align with a future understanding, but then immediately allows them to discern with the Spirit their unique resources and equipping needs given how they personally see the future.⁴⁰⁵ The net result is that servant leadership facilitates the freedom for the Spirit to shape the organic community through each individual.

A further contrast is the opportunity provided by servant leadership for active versus passive engagement by individuals. The transformational approach expects individuals to seek equipping in support of the shared vision even if this equipping does not align with their personal priorities. This posture can result in *passive*, and therefore less effective, engagement. Servant leadership intends to directly address the individual’s prioritized needs and motivates *active* engagement and commitment.

Finally, the servant leadership sequence effectively allows the Spirit to be the principal leader throughout the organic community.⁴⁰⁶ As a result, there is greater opportunity for freedom in the community expression when compared to the

⁴⁰³ Kouzes and Posner, *Christian Reflections*, 101.

⁴⁰⁴ Blanchard and Miller, *The Secret*, 97-123.

⁴⁰⁵ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 80.

⁴⁰⁶ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 80.

transformational approach where leadership's 'model the way' practice can act as a gating constraint for ways in which the Spirit's voice and work can manifest.

Servant leadership can be more accurately understood as facilitation of the Spirit's true leadership, voice and work throughout the organic community. Leadership is ideally a team format, where the 'primary facilitator' takes the role of 'first among equals'. This again allows the Spirit to lead, invites a diversity of voices, and fosters greater ownership in the organic community vision.

Leadership must also seek the continual guidance of the Spirit to navigate the potential for conflict between individual needs and the community vision, working within the tension of serving one at the expense of the other given constrained resources. Leaders must foster and develop a deep foundation of personal faith that sustains them and others, that gives hope to see and move toward a future shaped by the Spirit, and brings humility to serve, listen and prioritize others above themselves.^{407, 408}

Leadership is charged with enabling the community to 'see the future' both individually and corporately, and then equipping each individual to actualize his or her unique interpretation of 'the future' and associated role and activities within it. This future must prioritize the individuality of community. Simultaneously, leadership sacrificially equips each individual and embodies unconditional love and giving as the value-basis for relationships.

Servant leadership recognises the necessity of community as the petri dish for serving and loving one another in transparency, truth and accountability. Consequently, serving one another facilitates values-based growth instead of skills and competencies. Encouraging and enabling belief- and value-driven attributes of servant leadership to develop in each individual expands and deepens the community identity and alignment.⁴⁰⁹

Observations regarding transformational leadership are similarly relevant for servant leadership. In this case, incorporating metrics and trends to enhance the community narrative are especially beneficial, given a leadership method that invites the fullness of the Spirit's freedom, resulting in a highly diverse and visible community expression. In

⁴⁰⁷ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 27-38, 80; D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons From 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1993), 93.

⁴⁰⁸ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, 188, Kindle e-reader.

⁴⁰⁹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 52-58.

essence, the narrative and these metrics will function as the sole description of unity for the community.

Leadership vocation, authenticity, authority and a safeguard to relational vulnerability.

As discussed, the servant leadership method aligns well with the heart of the organic community where the relational fabric between one another serves as the essential platform for purpose and effectiveness. Employing servant leadership, leaders engage community members within the context of this relational operating paradigm to equip and enable members to deepen relationships, firstly with Christ and then with others both within and beyond the community. Of all the ‘one-another’ relationships, this ‘leader-follower’ relationship warrants particular attention given its potential to profoundly impact community effectiveness, positively or negatively.⁴¹⁰

Thus far this discussion has focused on the positive and productive results of Spirit-led servant leadership and the fruit that manifest in the lives of followers, that in aggregate forms the participant experience and the observed community expression. I contend that it is equally critical to recognise and safeguard against the potential vulnerability of engaging with one another with such relational intensity. When the leader-follower relationship fails to follow the Spirit’s design, there is a vulnerability that not only destroys the specific relationship but that can profoundly undermine the community and its effectiveness. Leaders must take primary responsibility for the health and nature of the leader-follower relationship. Failure in the relationship can occur when the leader mis-appropriates the power afforded them by their position in order to facilitate their self-oriented purposes.⁴¹¹ Under these conditions, the innate power differential is such that the leader can perceive that they are immune to the consequences of unethical or immoral behavior in order to further their self-interest.⁴¹²

Practically speaking, the leader exhibits inappropriate control and domination over a single follower, over several followers or even the entire community.⁴¹³ In its extreme, the nature of this control and domination can manifest in devastating form such as that which creates cults or which occurred between King David and Bathsheba.⁴¹⁴ Richard Davidson vividly yet accurately describes King David’s abuse as leadership that resulted in Bathsheba

⁴¹⁰ Alvesson, *Understanding Organizational Culture*, 2773, Kindle e-reader.

⁴¹¹ Terry L. Price, *Leadership Ethics*, Kindle e-reader, 68.

⁴¹² Price, *Leadership Ethics*. Kindle e-reader, 79.

⁴¹³ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 31.

⁴¹⁴ Price, *Leadership Ethics*. Kindle e-reader, 80.

being a victim of ‘power rape’.⁴¹⁵ Whilst this may be an extreme scenario, recent failures by secular and faith-based leaders suggests that the possibility for these conditions to occur is high given the flawed human condition. In addition to the possibility of unethical leadership due to a power differential, the relational foundation of Servant leadership can confuse the Spirit-defined follower-leader boundaries arising from prolonged interactions involving beliefs, values and emotional conditions. Under these circumstances, both leader and follower prioritise their self-interest in the relationship above their devotion to Christ. A healthy leader-follower relationship occurs when both leader and follower continually prioritise their devotion to Christ and their willingness to follow the Spirit for all decisions and events above their relationship with one another. When this priority for either or both of the parties fails, the relationship becomes vulnerable and the potential for actions and events not directed or enabled by the Spirit can occur.

Given this vulnerability, the following criteria and mechanisms can diminish or prevent the likelihood of its occurrence. Firstly, organic community leadership, and most definitely servant leadership, must be recognized as a Spirit-enabled vocation and not an organizational position or set of skills that are perpetually accessible to the leader.⁴¹⁶ Nouwen qualifies the leader to receive this presence and equipping by the Spirit as requiring them to forgo any temptation for approval based on experience or knowledge, to be willing to be a representative of God’s heart, and to commit to a contemplative prayer-filled life in order to hear the what, when, to whom and how of leadership.⁴¹⁷ He describes Christian leaders as “those who dare to claim irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows them to enter into a deep solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter of success, and to bring the light of Jesus there.” At the core of the servant leadership process therefore is the understanding that the leader is equipped and empowered by the Spirit for a specific season, for a specific set of relationships with followers and for specific development purposes. Especially relevant to this discussion of leader-follower vulnerability, only when and if the Spirit is present and followed are the risks of power-differentiation and relational self-prioritization diminished.^{418, 419}

⁴¹⁵ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), in *Servants and Friends: A Biblical Theology of Leadership*, (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2014). Kindle e-reader book, ch4 : 1971-1972.

⁴¹⁶ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1413.

⁴¹⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989). Kindle e-reader book, 176, 256, 270.

⁴¹⁸ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1445.

⁴¹⁹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1487.

Shifting from the theological lens, practical mitigation of the relational vulnerability can occur by maintaining the awareness of the possibility that a power differential or the inappropriate elevation of the leader-follower relationship above personal relationship with Christ may exist. Willingness on the part of each person to invite the Spirit to review and re-calibrate the relationship should be transparently embraced. Whereas the prior step generally involves those within a specific relationship, additional steps may be instituted within the community infrastructure that can further diminish the vulnerability. For example, utilising a team leadership method where different leaders are called to lead different elements of the follower's journey reduces the magnitude and concentration of time between any two individuals. Holding leaders accountable to lead only whilst called by the Spirit, and to fully participate as a community member at all other times removes the risk of their identity becoming established solely as a leader and further diminishes the likelihood of followers developing an idolatrous relationship.⁴²⁰⁴²¹ ⁴²² Just as has been the case throughout this study, yielding to the Spirit in humility, in this case under the context of the leader-follower relationship will safeguard the leader-follower relationship ensuring positive and productive results are realized.

Summary

Greenleaf eloquently remarks, 'All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group'.⁴²³ Servant leadership can provide the day-to-day leadership necessary for the organic community. The servant leadership conceptual order provides a superior leadership method given the 'presence and flows' dynamic of the community. This is clearly a resource-intensive leadership format, requiring extensive sacrifice given the intent to develop every individual as a servant leader. The implicit value of this perspective is, of course, that in becoming a servant leader, each person becomes more truly a vessel for Christ.

⁴²⁰ Patrick Lencioni, *The Ideal Team Player* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), Kindle e-reader , 166-173.

⁴²¹ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School, 2002), 177-190.

⁴²² Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 17-63.

⁴²³ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 53.

While servant leadership's superior effectiveness is sourced in its values foundation and application, it similarly does not explicitly account for differences or evolving beliefs and values. Without explicit attention to this condition, organic community may become intransigent and ultimately diminish the freedom of the Spirit to fluidly shape and direct it. Adaptive leadership, the final approach that I consider, can help to infuse organic community with an adaptive capacity culture that maintains the necessary fluidity and receptivity that invites the Spirit's leadership.

6.3.4 Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership was originally developed by Ron Heifetz, Souzan Abadin and Riley Sinderis in the mid 1980s. Their text serves as the primary reference for this discussion on adaptive leadership. Since then, numerous practitioners, including Kevin Ford, have provided compelling case studies that demonstrate the provocative interactions between leadership, systems and adaptive change.^{424,425} Adaptive leadership is an *intervention* process that invites challenge to the core organizational nature, that is, its implicit beliefs, values and ethics, in order to achieve a paradigm shift in performance that is otherwise unattainable from working at the margins of the incumbent organization. Adaptive leadership may not be effective for routine leadership; however the approach allows leadership to facilitate a follower-centric process that meaningfully shifts the cultural fabric of the organization at critical moments in its journey. Importantly from the perspective of organic community, adaptive leadership positions the community as one that is continually learning and evolving. For an organic community, adaptive leadership can dismantle the consequences to individual and community effectiveness from humankind's desire for convenience, comfort and their resistance to change. The role of leadership is therefore to create and nurture environments that foster learning and to provide the resources that enable the community to evolve.⁴²⁶ Adaptive leadership recognizes the implicit systemic weakness that occurs when humanity comes together in life, where we implicitly and intangibly create a system of structure, culture and language, and a suite of norms that

⁴²⁴ Ronald Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009), 13.

⁴²⁵ Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), Kindle e-reader book.

⁴²⁶ Mark Lau Branson, "Matthew and learning communities" *Journal Of Religious Leadership* 15, no. 2 (September 2016): 37-68.

condition how we live and relate with one another.⁴²⁷ This system facilitates living in a form of harmony that is utterly resistant to change.⁴²⁸

Structure

Heifetz's presentation of the Adaptive Leadership process necessarily recognises the challenges and complexity of breaking apart a human-maintained system that at every turn has the potential to create exposure and vulnerability. At each step, Heifetz works to identify many of the potential leadership pitfalls and solutions for remediation. The backbone of the process is a sequence of four steps: diagnostic, interpretation, intervention and solution

Diagnostic

This approach begins with a thorough diagnostic that distinguishes between technical and adaptive 'challenges' within the organization. Technical challenges are relatively easily resolved through adoption of new processes, skills and technique appropriation. Adaptive challenges are far more complex and threatening to individuals and to the community in that they require change in priorities, beliefs, values and loyalties.⁴²⁹ Requiring or requesting changes on these levels often stirs up intense emotions and can be perceived as highly threatening.^{430,431} And yet, if change is not willingly embraced, the organization cannot achieve the necessary performance shift. The diagnostic must thoroughly explore the vast and complex interactions between behaviors, values, relations, resource constraints, power and political bases in order to clarify how these interactions are truly experienced by each individual in terms of potential loss.⁴³² Only from this mapping process can adaptive challenges be isolated and described.

The role for prayer and willingness to seek the Spirit for wisdom is clearly essential here in order to resolve and diminish the fear and anxiety caused by the perceived threat of loss.⁴³³

The diagnostic also classifies the extent to which an organization has an adaptive capacity culture, that is, its receptivity to change, based on five qualities: a willingness to name 'the elephants in the room', a shared responsibility by all for the organization, a capacity and expectation that all would demonstrate independent judgment, continual development of leadership capacity, and whether reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.

⁴²⁷ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2006), Kindle e-reader 2153-2155.

⁴²⁸ Heifetz, et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 50-54.

⁴²⁹ Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 70-100.

⁴³⁰ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 2199.

⁴³¹ Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), Kindle e-reader, 301.

⁴³² Warren Bennis, *On Becoming A Leader* (Philadelphia: Perseus Books Group, 1989), 135-146.

⁴³³ Cottrell, *Hit the Ground Kneeling*, Kindle e-reader book, ch5:649.

Interpretation

Having isolated a specific adaptive challenge, accurate interpretations that expose the complexity of the reality and transparently identify root causes even if they create vulnerability and risk for participants.

Intervention

From a diverse and creative set of interpretations of the challenge, an intervention is designed that explicitly invites consideration and revision of deeply held beliefs, values and priorities. The nature of the intervention should embody the following qualities: it is a long-term solution; it expects transparency and is likely to create discomfort amongst those involved; it uses the discomfort to expose resistance to the status quo; it creatively leverages relational networks and strengthens the adaptive capacity culture.⁴³⁴

Solutions

Solutions based on specific interpretations of the intervention must now be ‘experienced’ in order to truly dimension the loss and to create learning and capacity for individuals to mature in their beliefs and values. A series of experiments are constructed to experience solution effectiveness. Simultaneously, leadership creates a ‘holding environment’ that consists of the ‘ties that bind and hold the community together’, such as shared language, orienting values and purpose, organizational memory and narrative, and bonds of affection and trust. In essence, these are the cohesive forces that can offset the divisive impact of loss and vulnerability.⁴³⁵ The holding environment offers safety and security to individuals, especially minority voices, as they expose and risk their beliefs and values and learn how they might evolve into a new operating paradigm.

Adaptive leadership is an intervention, intended to ‘shock’ the system, or community, in order to achieve a paradigm shift in performance. Typically, the adaptive leadership method is applied to misalignment in values amongst individuals or to establish an adaptive capacity culture. Within a Christian context, this adaptive capacity culture is the necessary human context that facilitates the Spirit’s operation.

Specific to organic community development, adaptive leadership facilitates an environment that is receptive to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit’s leadership; to transparently explore and align evolving beliefs and values in order to deepen coalescence within the community; and finally, to embrace values of fluidity and flexibility as individuals engage in Spirit-directed activities.

⁴³⁴ Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 101-110.

⁴³⁵ Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 151-155.

Kevin Ford presents a number of adaptive leadership case studies in *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great*. Drawing on these case studies to demonstrate the adaptive leadership process, I summarize his work with Community Church of Joy, CCOJ, to shift the church from a consumerism environment to valuing community. This particular case study aligns with many elements of the *Activate* system implementation at CCF given *Activate*'s culturally relevant design. In the CCOJ study, Ford differentiates between unhealthy churches that relate as a collection of people acting individually (as consumers of various church programs) and healthy churches that start with and relate as a community where the congregants develop bonds of reciprocity toward one another and personally engage and invest in developing one another.⁴³⁶ This result parallels the prominence of the relational fabric in the organic community.

Ford led the CCOJ leadership team through the four-phase process. The result of each phase is summarized below.

Diagnostic insights. Addressing a consumerism paradigm requires an understanding of the church not only as a 'system', but also as a system within a variety of other systems, representing the culture and sociality. Furthermore, within the church system are a number of sub-systems representing family, ministry, leadership and so forth. Where each of these systems might be relatively easily defined on the technical level, the adaptive dimensions (beliefs, values, priorities, relational network) are profoundly complex. In other words, changing a singular 'church system' requires a consideration of the vast complexities and influence of multiple overlapping and interacting systems.

In addition to this contextual diagnostic, the CCOJ leadership team acknowledged that few were skilled at developing an environment where meaningful and transforming relationships occur. Often, relational infrastructure focuses on creating a false community that revolves around temporal and individual lifestyle interests where meaningful relations are difficult to develop and sustain.

Added to this near incomprehensible complexity is the fear that change will cause not only personal loss, but a physical loss of people from the church and, with that, a loss of donors and resources. In other words, there is a potential that this change will cause the death of the church.

⁴³⁶ Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great*, Kindle e-reader book, ch1:167, 173-179.

Interpretation. The team concluded that this broad network of systems profoundly influences the culture within the church to the point of overriding the biblical culture that the church espouses. As a consequence of this cultural influence, false communities are created that reinforce consumerism and serve to glorify individualism over community.

Intervention. Ford orchestrated a series of meetings designed to expose the issues in a safe environment. Within this meeting format, a holding environment that celebrated the historic shared values, community roots and memories was established to offset the potential fears of loss. Two interconnected adaptive issues surfaced: firstly, the lack of community among leadership that trickled down into the congregation, and secondly, an absence of shared values amongst leadership.⁴³⁷

Solution. CCOJ developed a community framework that they perceived would truly correspond to God's design for relationship, that is, relationships that are creative, reciprocal, loving, prioritize the needs of others, and are united by a common mission.

A simultaneous goal was to establish a culture of adaptive capacity in which being missional was valued and understood as a shared responsibility, there was a willingness to engage in service, and individuals experienced a shared freedom and were actively creative. The consumer and seeker mindset were diminished by removing programs and by minimising the orientation to simply dispense services and goods.

Given these goals, leadership revised its community infrastructure to encourage a shared missional focus and responsibility throughout daily life, to establish an assimilation process that helps individuals identify and use their gifts inside and outside the church, to re-orient their small groups toward mission and genuine relationship development, and, finally, to leverage Ray Oldenburg's 'third place' concept for developing casual relationships in order to re-balance and reduce excessive emphasis on core relations.

The solution took four to six years to take hold. Whilst some left the church and membership declined, giving and participation in small groups increased along with an increase in ministry activity. As a result, Ford concludes, lives were transformed.⁴³⁸

Summary

A community can only be effective if its fabric reflects an adaptive capacity culture that facilitates its receptivity and engagement with the Spirit in the present moment and diminishes the influence of inertia. As Ford's case study shows, adaptive leadership is a

⁴³⁷ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle e-reader book, ch2:408-ch3:575.

⁴³⁸ Ford, *Transforming Church*, Kindle e-reader book, ch12:2392.

high-risk process. However, its capacity to break through intransigent human systems makes it a necessary tool for community leadership.

6.4 An Integrated Leadership Approach for Organic Community

This challenge community model pivots on the concept that it originates through the Holy Spirit within each individual, its formation occurs in relations, and that therefore community presents as an entity of ‘many’. As prescribed by Fiddes, this model allows the Spirit to freely and creatively work. The Spirit directly leads each individual in relational activities that both visibly point to God and invisibly invite deepening belief in and alignment with the values of Jesus Christ. Given this, leadership must explicitly engage at the individual level if it is to effectively lead the community.

On all critical levels, servant leadership can satisfy these spiritual, conceptual and operational needs. It is the appropriate base leadership platform. However as is evident from my earlier comments, I do not consider it a sufficient leadership method for the organic community. The inevitable inertia and intransigence innate to the human condition must be explicitly addressed and diminished at regular intervals. Where servant leadership facilitates the directional flow of the Spirit’s leadership through activity to values formation, adaptive leadership directionally begins with the values that inhibit activity and receptivity to the Spirit’s spontaneity in leadership—the counter-flow, so to speak. From transactional leadership, a quantitative tool such as a ‘health of the community’ dashboard that depicts trends, values-oriented engagement and so forth provides a healthy objectivity and transparency to enhance the community narrative. Furthermore, the tool provides a comparative framework for individuals to self-assess their focus and engagement. Without mandating where and how individuals direct their attention, these metrics can provide a friction that disincentivises a strong inward focus by the community. Finally, despite appearing as a rather passive function, maintaining a contemporary community narrative that employs a common language and tells the journey of successes and failures as they might be understood by God and by the organic community is a powerful tool for continually hearing and observing the Spirit’s work in the community, fostering greater engagement in the journey.

I have intentionally focused my analysis through the practitioner lens with the goal of developing a process-based approach that can accommodate the complexities that are resident within the leadership function. To a reasonable extent, the approaches that I have reviewed here offer paths through and over these challenges. Servant leadership, especially

a team construct, can minimize the likelihood of excessive power and abuse, in addition to creating transparency to identify leadership blind spots that skew behavior and guidance.⁴³⁹ Adaptive leadership provides a forum to address and resolve threatening dissonance, and elements of transactional leadership provide a form of visibility that the Spirit can employ in inner dialogue with each individual to motivate alignment in the Spirit's guidance. The question that should now be considered is whether these leadership approaches can be beneficially incorporated within the *Activate* leadership approach. I will address this question in the next chapter.

6.5 Paul's Leadership Approach and Strategy for Christian Community in Corinth

In this final section on leadership, I examine Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to understand his leadership method and the nature of engagement with the Corinthians as he gave leadership over the transition to a new community expression. This biblical material becomes an important conversation partner because of the resonances with themes that have already been discussed. The Corinthian Christian community existed within a culture that maintained a remarkably strong hold on what was acceptable and what was not. Deviation from this status quo met tremendous resistance. Paul's leadership and letter strove to help the Corinthians break free from this cultural paradigm and enabled them to stand apart as a community unto God. The process that this community must take to break free from cultural practices and values in order to become an effective Christian community is in many ways far more complex than the transition that the CCF *Activate* community would need to undertake in order to become the Spirit-led organic community that I have developed. Whilst the specific challenges within the Corinthian community differ from those within the CCF *Activate* community, the paradigm of a community separating from its cultural environs is the same. Additionally, Paul's direction to continually follow the Spirit's leadership, to develop a deep relational fabric where all are welcomed and loved so that the community appears as a vivid and attractive contrast to the surrounding neighbours represents the same mission and principal components that the organic community embodies. In essence, the value of this case study is therefore to demonstrate that a hybrid servant-adaptive leadership method has the necessary facilities for guiding the

⁴³⁹Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 73-79.

metamorphosis of a community from a static system form such as *Activate* into a fluid Spirit-led organic expression.

Context

Amongst a wealth of commentaries (footnotes), Witherington's *Conflict and Community in Corinth: Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* serves as the primary resource for this discussion.⁴⁴⁰ He critically and ably speaks to the cultural context and challenge for the new Corinthian community and offers a reading of Paul's messages and themes given this context. Witherington's primary resources for the social description are Meeks and Judge and Mitchell, Betz and Watson⁴⁴¹ for macro- and micro-rhetoric. Rather than develop original socio-rhetorical insights, Witherington's contribution is to combine these two streams to present a coherent reading of the letters that considers social dynamics, linguistic nuances and historical background. Of particular relevance to my research are the 'closer look' studies on slavery, dining, association (or community) rules, honour code, and social networks.⁴⁴²

Witherington's study is built upon a historic-criticism foundation. Compared to literary, form or source criticism, his socio-rhetorical criticism lens substantially enhances the relevance of his observations for my analysis of Paul's interaction with the newly birthed Christian community in 1 Corinthians. Whilst he does not speak substantively to Paul's leadership method or to a cohesive strategy for shaping the community, Witherington extensively considers the rhetorical method that Paul employs throughout his communication in order to 'persuade' the Corinthians to adopt his directives. Despite this important contribution, in the end I believe that this heavy focus causes Witherington to miss or at least undervalue some of the essential content in Paul's leadership and strategy.

Specifically, Witherington's concern with demonstrating Paul's rhetorical prowess causes him to downplay the importance of the Spirit's leadership in community transformation and to acknowledge just one dimension of Paul's leadership, that of servant

⁴⁴⁰ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: a Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids; Carlisle, England: Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1995), Kindle e-reader book.

⁴⁴¹ M. Mitchell and H.D. Betz in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. N. Freedman ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1992). D. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988). W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983). E.A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: Tyndale, 1960).

⁴⁴² Jerome H. Neyrey, "Conflict and Community in Corinth: a Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 1997): 182-183.

leader, rather than also seeing Paul's role as an adaptive leader. Clearly Paul sees value in leveraging the rhetorical method. I imagine he employs its use in order to ensure that the dramatic paradigm shift in community is culturally understood through a common language. The language also provides a safety or comfort factor for the Corinthians as they are invited to radically shift out of their familiar environment. However, Paul himself readily dismisses the impact of his rhetorical capability, pointing instead to the power of the Spirit to 'persuade' or more appropriately 'reveal' the new community (1 Cor 2:6-16). My comments are presented therefore as justification to moderate the emphasis on the rhetorical method and are not intended to invalidate Witherington's analysis beyond that.

I begin the analysis by establishing Paul's relationship with the Corinthian community and offering a brief review of the conventional reading of the letter. Given the prior work on leadership methods, I explore how an alternative reading of the letter as an adaptive leadership method might illuminate a necessary step that enables the Corinthian Christians to transition from the incumbent culturally-shaped community to new Christian community. Having motivated this alternative reading, I consider the content of the letter and its various contributions to facilitating the adaptive changes necessary for transformation. In parallel, I identify the tactics for new community formation that Paul uses for 'forcing' change. I conclude by summarizing the findings to evaluate how effectively they embody the adaptive leadership framework and the probability of 'successful' transformation.

6.5.1 Paul's relationship with the Corinthian community

Prior to engaging with the approach and content of Paul's guidance to the Corinthian community, it's useful to understand the nature or posture of Paul's relationship with the community and its leadership. Specifically, I first consider the leadership expression of the Corinthian community, second Paul's relation to the leadership and the overall community and thirdly, the method by which Paul communicates and establishes his leadership with the Corinthians.

Gentile Christian communities as represented in Paul's early letters were often characterized as charismatic communities where authority was not clearly vested in a single or even a group of individuals but where there was a mutual discernment by all members, led and guided by the Spirit, regarding ministry in the body of Christ.⁴⁴³ The community

⁴⁴³ Dunn, *Unity & Diversity*, 106-108.

represented in 1 Corinthians by the body metaphor is a primary example of such a community.⁴⁴⁴ Despite early conclusions that there was no leadership within the community, reinforced by the absence of specific leadership titles in the letter⁴⁴⁵, more recent and refined analysis suggests some leadership function existed within the community, albeit perhaps not formally recognised. This leadership expression within a larger charismatic framework most accurately reflects the organic community that this project has developed in the prior chapters.

Paul is communicating on very specific terms, to the unique Corinthian community, regarding specific circumstances for their context. Given his remote location, the trigger for his communication is likely coming from a subset of the community who are quite possibly serving as the informal leadership. In several instances of the letter (1 Cor 1.11, 1 Cor 5.1, 1 Cor 16:15-18), Paul references representatives within the community who have shared concerns regarding community life that Clarke suggests could represent individuals serving in this leadership capacity.⁴⁴⁶

It's also relevant to recognise the influence of our contemporary lens for church leadership that is largely shaped by an institutional understanding of Christian community and formalized leadership roles. This is the case for the *Activate* system. Whilst this can be one of many bases for leadership today, early Pauline communities typically began as household expressions constrained by size and form given the nature of pre-existing relationships and physical space. Given these household communities, a need for formal leadership identification may not have been necessary or may have already existed in the heads of household.⁴⁴⁷ An informal leadership team may be constituted by the leaders of each household community.

A final consideration regarding Paul's understanding of Corinthian leadership comes from considering the larger body of his writing. Whilst first century culture, as is also the case today, was heavily focused on leadership title and the accompanying status, Paul's perspective is oriented toward the function and character that the individual who serves in leadership, such as prophet and teacher in 1 Corinthians 12, 14. His most frequently used

⁴⁴⁴ Clarke, Andrew D., *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2008), 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Clarke, 42.

⁴⁴⁶ Clarke, 39.

⁴⁴⁷ Campbell, *The Elders*, 183-193 (Clarke 53).

term for leaders throughout his writing is co-worker, occurring 12 times, reflecting no particular rank within the community.⁴⁴⁸

Drawing these views together, I suggest that it's reasonable to understand that there was some informal leadership over the Corinthian community, whilst it still retained its charismatic nature under the Spirit's ultimate leadership. Paul's communication was likely triggered by their request for counsel/guidance over specific concerns. Paul is writing to these leaders and to the overall community on both the specific issues and his sense of the more pervasive undercurrents that have created these issues. Consequently the letter brings guidance for leadership and for the community.

Turning to the question of Paul's leadership posture for guiding the Corinthian community and his method of engagement. Paul takes on varying leadership positions toward the communities that he's engaged with and leverages those positions according to his agenda. Despite being remotely located from the community, his communication and style appeals to key Corinthian values that are intended to establish receptivity, submission and obedience to his leadership as if he were present with them.

Notwithstanding his apostolic title, he readily embraces the status of a servant leader in 1 Corinthians, frequently reflecting upon his own weaknesses, sufferings and vulnerabilities. Within this context of humble servant, Paul exercises a unique form of leadership according to the authority given him by Christ. This is a form of leadership that simultaneously embodies elements of transformational, transactional leadership within a servant leadership context.⁴⁴⁹ An authority that was widely recognized as legitimate.⁴⁵⁰ He regularly communicates that this authority, and as a result his power to lead, is based on his intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, that he was chosen by Christ for this role and that he is answerable to Christ alone. In doing so, Paul represents that he is simply a vessel for Jesus Christ himself. He states his desire that the Spirit will reveal the reality of his own authority versus the much superior authority of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2.13). Paul's intention is not to exercise a form of his own power over the Corinthians but to convey that his message is from Christ himself, the God they worship. Paul presents this authoritative power as a beneficent power, a power for positive social transformation. He principally employs four expressions of beneficent power with the Corinthians, that of parent, teacher, team leader

⁴⁴⁸ Clarke, 47

⁴⁴⁹ Michael T. Cooper, "The Transformational Leadership of the Apostle Paul: A Contextual and Biblical Leadership for Contemporary Ministry." *Christian Education Journal* 2 (1): 49.

⁴⁵⁰ Clarke, 101-102

and shepherd. As parent or teacher, his intent is to foster and maintain the dignity of the individuals whilst also encouraging and enabling their independence. His hope is that the Corinthians will surpass him in the pursuit and achievement of their goals. As team leader and shepherd, his goal is to care, protect and care for the community. Throughout, Paul is attempting to lead the community into an enhanced experience of freedom and life.⁴⁵¹

Paul incorporates a number of culturally familiar persuasive techniques throughout his communication that are designed to enhance receptivity and comprehensibility of his message. Tools range from forceful command structures such as the reprimand regarding the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11.17) to consultative wisdom (1 Cor 2.4). He appeals to the emotions and values of the individual (1 Cor 6.5), and even resorts to creating a sense of urgency by 'begging' for obedience (1 Cor 1.10). A further compelling mechanism for exercising leadership over the community occurs through Paul's encouragement to imitate him. The focus of this imitation is on Paul's character. As individuals choose to imitate him, they implicitly conform to his leadership. Paul explicitly presents himself as an ethical example to be imitated (1 Cor 8-11.1).⁴⁵²

Paul's leadership and power are effective when the Corinthians willingly submit and follow his instructions. Their submission occurs due to his authority in Christ, the trust created through his heartfelt desire for the Corinthians to experience greater freedom in Christ, his persuasive communication techniques and the invitation to follow him as role model for their lives. Despite Paul's remote engagement, I contend that the combination of Christ's authority in him and his servant posture allow him to function as an effective leader for the Corinthian community. This is a leadership method that is readily observed today throughout both mainstream denominations and more fluid networks that are developing organically in the digital space.

6.5.2 Considering First Corinthians as a Model of Adaptive Leadership

First Corinthians is often understood as a response by Paul to the Corinthians driven from the behavioral issues he hears of through Chloe's people and also to specific questions that the Corinthians have sent to him (1:11).⁴⁵³ Paul's intention is to address and correct inappropriate behaviors that are causing factions and disunity within the new community.

⁴⁵¹ Clarke, 110-112.

⁴⁵² Clarke, 164-174.

⁴⁵³ Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Kindle e-reader book; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (Yale University Press, 2008), 181-199.

Commentators recognise a culturally familiar rhetorical method where the presenting issue is first described (1:11-17), followed by a series of context-specific arguments in chapters one through fourteen intended to ‘persuade’ the Corinthians to correct their behavior. Some arguments are related to information provided by Chloe’s people; the remaining arguments are provided in response to the Corinthian questions.⁴⁵⁴ Chapter fifteen stands somewhat separate from the sequence, as it speaks to a theological correction rather than the social corrections in prior chapters. Two distinctive chapters, digressions, are observed within the letter and are again recognized as standard to rhetorical style. Chapter nine describes Paul’s defense of his leadership method and chapter thirteen presents the value and power of love. The net experience of the letter is that it reads as a series of correctives, generally to Corinthians of higher rank and status, ‘requiring’ them to moderate the behaviors that have become innate to their identity and sense of self-worth.

An alternative reading for 1 Corinthians is that Paul is in the midst of using an adaptive leadership process to guide the Corinthians in their transformation to the Christian community. Paul’s overall posture, implicit within this process, is as a unique, servant leader to the community who should be imitated rather than as an autocratic, hierarchical leader.^{455 456} He is writing, as parent, teacher and shepherd, to the Corinthian leadership and simultaneously to the entire community in response to a number of concerns that have been communicated to him. Why is Paul using an adaptive leadership process? The Corinthians are thoroughly immersed in a cultural environment that diminishes or rejects the values and beliefs that Christian faith espouses. For the Corinthians to truly and fully transition to a new community, they must reject the fabric of Corinthian society and embrace its antithesis. They must adopt a fundamentally different value system. There is substantial personal loss, most significantly for those of higher status and especially for influential males who have already risen to the top of the status pyramid.⁴⁵⁷ This is by no means a small metamorphosis for the Corinthians.

The adaptive leadership process is intended to be an experiential forcing mechanism that has the capacity to shift the Corinthians into the new paradigm. Given this alternative presentation, I Corinthians therefore begins with a system diagnostic of the issue and reasons why factions are occurring, an intervention designed to mobilize and incent the

⁴⁵⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, introduction:971.

⁴⁵⁵ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons From 1 Corinthians*, 96.

⁴⁵⁶ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch10: 3999, 4024, 4272.

⁴⁵⁷ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 4021.

transformation, coupled with a series of solutions (or experiments) intended to give the new community constituents vivid experiences of the transformational loss and reward. These experiences provide the learning to embrace the new values, purpose and faith necessary for new community life.

Finally, does Paul's letter arrive at the beginning of or midway through the adaptive leadership process? It seems appropriate to read the letter as a communication that serves as a mid-course correction. His earlier visit has laid out the overall process. Now he must remind, re-motivate and redirect the Corinthians to stay the course.

The issue (1:10-17): 'That all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you'

A community that lives in unity and peace offers a spectacular contrast to a culture replete with factions, quarrels and discord.⁴⁵⁸ Inevitably, true gospel life will always present as brightness in contrast to the encroaching darkness. Paul holds up recurring forms of division as the issue that must be resolved for the health and vitality of those within community and for those beyond.⁴⁵⁹

The diagnostic: honour and the patron-client system

The culture of the time prized honor due to an individual's status. Higher status yielded greater honor and consequently more power and control.⁴⁶⁰ Status was based on intellect, affluence, oratorical achievement and/or nobility. Public recognition of one's superior status profoundly shaped both behavior and values. For those of superior status, life revolved around sustaining this status. Those of lower status were driven to obtain greater status.⁴⁶¹

The enabling system for this culture was the patron-client infrastructure, a system of asymmetrical relationships in which a higher-status 'patron' essentially 'paid' those of lesser status, the clients, to publicly promote or boast of the patron's accomplishments in order to enhance the patron's honour.⁴⁶² Association within a single patron-client system was essential for a client in order to receive consistent financial support. However, the downside of associating with a single system was the potential for enmity given their refusal to

⁴⁵⁸ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, 69-74.

⁴⁵⁹ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 4049.

⁴⁶⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 2:3662.

⁴⁶¹ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 4036.

⁴⁶² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 1:2732.

promote another patron. A specific patron-client system essentially represented a powerful, controlling community. Paul identifies patron-client as the cultural systemic weakness that mandates unacceptable values and behaviors and, through its engagement, prohibits adoption of Christian values and behaviors. Witherington is partially correct in saying that Paul's goal is to dismantle the incumbent patron-client system.⁴⁶³ In 1:17-22, Paul dismisses the value of human wisdom and strength. In 1:26-28, he dismisses the value of the affluent, superior and strong, and in 1:29 he claims that no one can boast of him- or herself or others. However, Paul presents each of these statements as contrasts, likely as part of the rhetorical argument. God's foolishness is greater than humanity's wisdom (1:25). God chose the weak to shame the strong (1:27). Boasting can only be done in and about the Lord (1:31). Therefore, rather than solely *dismantling* the incumbent patron-client system, I contend that Paul seeks to *replace* it by positioning the Christian community as the ultimate 'Patron-client system', one that is far superior to anything that the Corinthians have thus far experienced.⁴⁶⁴ His description of the new Patron-client system serves as an intervention that mobilises the Corinthians to give up their old system for the new that is based on Christ's death and resurrection.⁴⁶⁵

The intervention, part 1: Motivating and mobilizing the transformation to the ultimate Patron-client system (1:17-4:21)

Paul wisely uses both the culturally familiar rhetorical method and the patron-client concept to facilitate comprehension and adoption of the new community paradigm. Positioning the new community within the existing community spectrum provides helpful familiarity. The familiar language and concept functions as part of the adaptive leadership 'holding environment'. Additionally, the approach offers a critical capacity to gauge the superiority of the new community in comparison to the benchmark of the existing systems.

Paul's intervention is therefore a description of a Patron-client system with entirely different values and behaviors, a relational hierarchy and community framework that replaces the priority of 'I' with the priority of 'we' or 'other', all within the prioritizing context of the 'Other'.

Under the new 'Patron-client' system, God is the true Patron (1:28, 30; 3:6, 7) and Christ is the gift, wisdom or payment who redeems, sanctifies and justifies (1:30, 31; 3:10;

⁴⁶³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 4:5410.

⁴⁶⁴ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, 45-56.

⁴⁶⁵ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 3984.

6:11-13, 20).⁴⁶⁶ The Corinthians are God's clients who through Christ's payment are no longer judged or defined according to humankind's standards (2:15). They are free of the status-honour constraint. Rather, in their new identity they are righteous, holy and redeemed (1:31). Paul's use of salvation metaphors in 1:31 to define the new Corinthian identity directs them toward the reality of their eschatological and superior eternal condition.⁴⁶⁷

In keeping with the patron-client structure, the Corinthians are associated solely with God as their Patron, through Christ's payment. They are God's field, building and temple (3:9, 16), robust and sustainable in times of adversity.⁴⁶⁸ They belong to Christ (3:22-23). Therefore, they can boast only in and about Christ (1:31). Grace has leveled the socio-economic hierarchy within which they have been living.⁴⁶⁹ Critically, the Corinthians can only know and experience this new community through the revealing presence and power of the Holy Spirit (2:4) who has replaced conventional human oratorical wisdom.⁴⁷⁰

Paul offers the Corinthians a compelling vision of a new community, a community where all are unconditionally complete and significant in Christ, no longer experiencing the crippling pressure to strive for recognition and status.⁴⁷¹ It is a new community in which behaviour is valued over oratory skill and intellect, where peace is valued over discord, where love is valued over knowledge, and where obedience to the Spirit is valued over human control. For those of lower status, the appeal of this new Patron-client system is obvious, and likely their transition to the new community occurred with minimal friction. The more conflicted constituents, as is evident in the rest of the letter, were those who were already living in elevated status, most especially affluent males. For these constituents, the loss in terms of societal currency is traumatic and is most likely the reason that their transition is wavering, to which Paul is writing.

Here is where I think Witherington has overemphasised Paul's use of rhetoric to describe the power necessary to 'persuade' the recipients of the letter to give up the trappings of status and, in doing so, missed the role of the Spirit's presence. In 2:4, Paul uses the term 'apodeixis', *experiential proof through the Spirit*, to describe the nature of the Spirit's interaction with every Corinthian.⁴⁷² ⁴⁷³ Given that Paul is heading toward a

⁴⁶⁶ Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, 26-31.

⁴⁶⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument1: 2765.

⁴⁶⁸ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 416.

⁴⁶⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument1: 2778.

⁴⁷⁰ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10:4089.

⁴⁷¹ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10:4049.

⁴⁷² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument1:2971.

⁴⁷³ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10:4100-4112.

powerful climactic message on the nature and priority of sacrificial love within the community⁴⁷⁴ (8:2; chapter 13), I imagine that he knows very well that cognitive arguments are insufficient to convince the status-driven Corinthians. Rather, it is only their experiential engagement with God's love through the presence of the Holy Spirit that can motivate change.

The intervention, part 2: Solutions for experiencing transformation

Continuing with the adaptive leadership construct, the remaining chapters in the letter detail the 'learning experiments' that the Corinthians are engaging in. As a reminder, Paul writes mid-experience as he learns of their challenges and in response to their questions regarding specific situations. His tone is at times harsh, suggesting that some of the Corinthians are intentionally and perhaps understandably slow in adopting the new community values and behaviors.

Each topic in the letter appears to serve multiple purposes. Most overtly, there is specific, tactical behavioral guidance for one or more constituents within the community. Secondly, and implicit within the tactics, there is the more personally invasive strategic guidance targeting the rejection of the incumbent cultural values and behaviors and the adoption of new values, behaviors and ethics that are reflective of the new family-oriented community.⁴⁷⁵ Specifically, Paul targets the honour paradigm and asymmetrical relationships, values and behaviors that perpetuate status-based community. These are the fundamental values and behaviors that promote a profoundly egotistical culture. Frequently throughout the topics, Paul uses body-related metaphors as a teaching aid to move the Corinthians from this egotistical posture to a 'we' or 'other'-based posture.⁴⁷⁶

Paul asks the Corinthians to move beyond a society comprised of discrete individuals and self-prioritized asymmetrical relations to an environment consisting of a multitude of symmetrical relations that ultimately form a Spirit-led organic community. Paul uses each topic to shape the new community. Topics sequentially build upon each other, beginning with the definition of the community's outer boundaries, moving to its inner fabric of relations toward one another, and finally describing the posture of relations toward Christ.

Community boundaries: 1 Corinthians 5—6:11. Culturally, sexual misconduct by affluent males was not viewed as wrong or dishonourable, largely due to the fact that the

⁴⁷⁴ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10:4075.

⁴⁷⁵ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 36-37.

⁴⁷⁶ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1041-1053.

behaviours occurred in private (chapter 5).⁴⁷⁷ However, Paul links the behaviour to necessary ejection from the new community, thereby linking the misconduct to a public act that brought shame upon the individual. In doing so he undermines the cultural backbone by redefining what is honourable and shameful behaviour. Furthermore, he expects the Corinthians to participate in the ejection process of the individual, ensuring that they experience and learn from the process.

Continuing to redefine honour-shame, the lawsuit discussion (1 Cor 6:1-11) targets the cultural ‘challenge-response’ behavior, where those of high status and rank were able to bias the legal outcome in pagan courts, garnering both a personal victory and honour whilst shaming the loser.⁴⁷⁸ Paul demands that the Corinthians address any discord *within* the community, appropriating the new community values.⁴⁷⁹ He points to the necessity of learning this approach given that eventually all Christians will ultimately be called to judge the world.

From these tactical directives, Paul defines the boundaries for what is acceptable and not acceptable within the community.⁴⁸⁰ What was previously acceptable because it was hidden is now public, shameful and no longer acceptable to the community. What was done in public to enable enmity, gain personal honour, and shame others must be brought inside the privacy of the community and a peaceful resolution achieved without shame or dishonour. Paul’s intention is to maintain the purity of the community at all costs. As a result, these boundaries present a distinctive and necessary contrast compared with surrounding society.

Community fabric: relational asymmetry, symmetry and freedom: 1 Cor 6:12—7:38. Paul now focuses on the inner relational fabric of the community. In 1 Cor 6:12-20 he again reminds the Corinthians that they belong to a new Patron-client system, having been bought by God. Invoking the body metaphor again to move them from individual to community, they now belong to Christ and are members of His Body.⁴⁸¹

As a first priority, they are to understand that one asymmetrical relationship remains, that of their union with Christ. As such, despite the new freedom they experience in the Spirit, they are to understand that even a sin to themselves is a sin against Christ.⁴⁸² Here

⁴⁷⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 2:3662-3776.

⁴⁷⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 2:3684.

⁴⁷⁹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1884.

⁴⁸⁰ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1047.

⁴⁸¹ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 4049.

⁴⁸² Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 37.

Paul incorporates a new thread to shaping the community: community that is built on a theological or ethical basis rather than a cultural and relativistic basis.

From this one asymmetrical relationship, Paul turns to the most intimate relations within the household structure, marriage (1 Cor 7:1-25). Typically, marriages were arranged with little expectation of love. The age difference between the man and women was often so great that the relation was more ‘father-daughter’ in profile and, again, asymmetrical in experience. The overarching theme in Paul’s message here is one of mutuality that leads to peace. For Paul, marriage is good, even to non-believers, provided it leads to peace. Being married or single are equally good, again providing there is peace within the decision. Importantly, implicit within this position is a woman’s right to choose to marry or remain single, a very counter-cultural perspective. Essentially, Paul has dissolved the asymmetrical relationship between men and women by elevating and empowering women whilst restricting male privilege.^{483 484}

Emphasising an eschatological focus and the one asymmetrical relationship, Paul counsels the Corinthians that ‘time is short’ and that their greatest priority should be serving the Lord rather than concern over marriage vs. singleness (1 Cor 7:25-38). His one caveat to the dissolution of relational asymmetry is the invitation to slaves who may benefit from the cultural patron-client framework, advising them to remain as they are.⁴⁸⁵

This new relational fabric requires just as significant a transition, if not greater, as the definition of community boundaries. A new relational order and values hierarchy is becoming apparent.⁴⁸⁶ Allegiance and honour to Christ is paramount over, secondly, participation as the Body of Christ and, thirdly, relational mutuality and peace all within the environment of Holy Spirit-enabled freedom.

Thus far Paul’s learning experiences have elevated many constituents of lesser status— women, the poor, and slaves if they so choose—at the expense of those of higher status, most especially men. The next sequence of topics perhaps offers a special appeal to influential men who thus far have lost much and seemingly ‘gained’ little in the new community.

Community: leadership and power: 1 Cor 8 – 9. Paul now shifts his focus on community formation to interpersonal behaviors and values. Temple dining was yet another

⁴⁸³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 3:4053-4158.

⁴⁸⁴ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1061.

⁴⁸⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 3:4293.

⁴⁸⁶ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 35.

context where those of higher status could exhibit a superior attitude toward those of lower status. Specifically, Paul addresses an offense to the ‘weak’, those of higher morals, in which those of status were eating meat previously sacrificed to idols.⁴⁸⁷

Paul acknowledges that those of status may have knowledge that there is only one true God, and that therefore there is no personal consequence to eating this meat. However, he states that the situation presents a moral stumbling block to others, particularly the weak in that they may be scandalized by the activity.

Using this context, Paul introduces the most essential community value, love, critically positioning it as a replacement for knowledge. Two phrases in 8:3, ‘knowledge inflates’ and ‘love builds’, create a powerful contrast. ‘Inflate’ conveys a sense of self, expansion without substance and a momentary event, whereas ‘build’ conveys a sense of something other than self and constructed with permanent material. Knowledge represents cognitive, vacuous, transitory learning whilst love implies experiential, permanent, transformative learning. In other words, Paul invites the Corinthians to substitute momentary self-gratification for life-giving, shared agape. Clearly, he has much more to say about love in chapter thirteen, but the groundwork for the connective glue of community has been laid.

Given Paul’s application, love is not understood as a passive or restrictive value but rather as a dynamic attribute that has the power to expand and enhance the lives of others.⁴⁸⁸ Given the Corinthians’ personal salvific experiences, love is surely superior to any culturally- or status-derived power attribute and, importantly, sufficiently superior to offset the personal loss experienced by those of the highest status and rank.

Chapter nine is conventionally understood as Paul’s defense of his apostolic leadership.⁴⁸⁹ Witherington correctly recognizes Paul’s ulterior teaching motive: to present himself as a model of a new leadership expression—servant leadership. First Corinthians effectively provides the profile for servant leadership as we understand it today. Throughout the letter, Paul presents a future and eschatological orientation intended to motivate change. He invests in the development of others, he continually re-invents, he embraces change on a value and relational level rather than simply behavioral modifications, and, finally, he himself models these new values.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 4:4463-4665.

⁴⁸⁸ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1332, 1878, 1884.

⁴⁸⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 4:4854.

⁴⁹⁰ Bell, *Servants & Friends*, ch 10: 4075, 4272.

In order to qualify his leadership, Paul focuses on his moral character. The Corinthians have acknowledged his apostolic position; in essence, *they* have chosen him as their leader. His independence from the patron-client culture, which allows him to remain free of obligation and controlling alliances, further qualifies his leadership. His right to leadership is sourced from derived authority in Christ rather than any cultural power paradigm.⁴⁹¹ As such, his authority to lead is not exclusive to him; rather, it is a resource available to all who believe.⁴⁹² Finally, Paul describes his leadership using an image of the household steward (9:16-18) who is free from all influence yet a ‘slave to all in order to win them over’.⁴⁹³

For higher status Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9 offer a compelling reward, an ‘eternal prized crown’ (9:25), for all that they are being asked to relinquish. This particular constituency is already familiar with leadership, having functioned as leaders in the incumbent culture.⁴⁹⁴ Consequently, they are likely the most receptive to stepping into leadership within this new community. Whilst the understanding of leadership has radically altered, their personal experience with the Spirit as the context for Paul’s dialogue in chapters 8 and 9 compensates for the losses due to the transition and motivates adoption of this more excellent way of leadership through love.

Worship one God as one body (community): 1 Cor 10-11. Paul assumes that much of the connective tissue to establish the community relationally has been created through the prior learning experiences. He has used the Corinthians’ questions as context for experientially guiding them toward embracing the new community boundaries, dismantling the incumbent relational hierarchy in favour of leveled relations toward one another whilst maintaining a priority of honour toward Christ. He has recast love as the pivotal enabler for new community and offered a new paradigm for leadership.

Paul’s focus now is to guide the community in remaining healthy and vibrant. To that end, chapter ten might be read as a strategy for combating the greatest threat to the new Patron-client system, allegiance to a god other than their one true God. Using participation in idol feasts as context, Paul now addresses the issue of idolatry and, consequently, apostasy.

⁴⁹¹ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 40.

⁴⁹² Clarke, 128.

⁴⁹³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 4:4881-4995.

⁴⁹⁴ Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 112-118.

Participation in idol feasts inherently exposed the Corinthians to demons. Paul vividly reminds the Corinthians of the Israelite experience in the story of the golden calf (10:7), pointing to the ease with which the Israelites had so colossally failed God. Given such risk and consequence, Paul assures the Corinthians that God will give them a way through this challenge (10:14-22). Naturally, they are to *flee* from idolatry, given that there can be no compromise or participation in both ‘cups’ (those of Christ and of the demons) and that, indeed, the two are mutually exclusive. God’s ‘way through’ relies on the strength of their unity with Christ (10:16-17) and superior fellowship, or *koinonia*, within their new community.⁴⁹⁵

1 Cor 11:2-16 is difficult and seems somewhat inconsistent with Paul’s theme of redressing social stratification. Witherington and Keener both agree that Paul seeks to correct the use of head coverings whilst praying and prophesying in Christian worship.⁴⁹⁶ Keener presents the discussion as one of varying perspectives on sexual modesty by the female constituencies within the new community. Witherington concludes that Paul is addressing inappropriate practices for both men and women whilst prophesying, arguing that they may be trying to bring in Jewish or Roman customs.⁴⁹⁷ Reconciling the specifics that cause division is less critical here than to recognise Paul’s guidance for re-establishing unity within the worship experience. Witherington creatively proposes that distinctions according to the creation order, maleness and femaleness, should be honoured and celebrated. Therefore, gender-differentiating head covering customs should be embraced during acts of worship in which the custom represents deference and respect for the God to whom both men and women belong.

All meals were opportunities to gain or show social status (11:17-34). Those of higher status might eat first, eat better food, or sit in a more select location. The Corinthians were bringing these same customs to the communion celebration. Paul reminds them that the Lord’s Supper is an expression of worship, sacred in time and occasion, that commemorates the new and ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. As such, given all members of the community are equal in Christ, there is certainly to be no differentiation in treatment during the event. Given its sacred nature, the meal should be conducted with

⁴⁹⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 4:5221-5350.

⁴⁹⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 5:5615; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, Kindle e-reader book, ch3:1305-13.

⁴⁹⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, epistolary prescript:1995, argument 6:5998.

order and reverence.⁴⁹⁸ Here again, Paul establishes the primary hierarchy, God and Christ above men and women, who are equal and mutually interdependent but both entirely dependent on God (11:12).⁴⁹⁹

Re-casting the community vision: 1 Cor 12-14. Thus far, Paul has given a series of learning experiences and correctives that are intended to thoroughly shape the new community: its outer perimeter, its appearance and identity to the outside world, its relational fabric amongst the Corinthians, and its core worship expression. With each experience, Paul guides the transformation of the Corinthian community from the old social stratification and patron-client structure to the new Patron-client system where all are equal in Christ. Throughout, Paul seeks to change behaviors and, in doing so, revises the core values that shape the community. Chapters 12-14 are not just a continuation of the transformation learning experiences but a summation of all prior experiences to describe the new community, not as he did in chapters one and two by appealing to familiar cultural concepts but now by amplifying the four essential paradigms that define the new community. Taken as a single pericope, chapters 12-14 present community through a new understanding of the body, the agency of the Spirit, the necessity of love, and the importance of order.

Firstly, Paul appropriates a common body metaphor and inverts its meaning (chapter 12).⁵⁰⁰ Conventional understanding was that the weaker parts of the body were to honour the stronger or more public parts. Here Paul insists that the weaker or more vulnerable members of the body are to be given greater honour and protection in order to create and maintain unity. Throughout the letter, Paul repeatedly uses body examples and imagery in the learning experience. At the beginning of his applications (sexual misconduct in chapter 5), the body context emphasizes a self-centered focus of understanding the body and the disregard for the bodies of others. Now at the end of the learning experiences, Paul has brought the Corinthians to a radically different understanding of the body: 'body' is now understood as a wholly integrated entity of many bound to Christ and to one another through Christ.⁵⁰¹ Simultaneously, he emphasizes the essential uniqueness of each member, reflecting the necessity and value of diversity within the body.⁵⁰² For Paul, this body is both unity and diversity. Above all, it is a supernatural entity; just as the human body has a path

⁴⁹⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 6:5828.

⁴⁹⁹ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 38.

⁵⁰⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 7:6072-6082.

⁵⁰¹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1055.

⁵⁰² Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 36.

to redemption, so too there is a redemptive purpose and path for this corporate body (chapter 15).

Secondly, Paul again emphasizes the essential role of the Spirit by ensuring that the Corinthians understand that it is the agency of the Spirit and not the agency of humankind (12:7, 11) that assigns and causes the manifestation of the gifts according to the needs of this new body. His insistence on referring to the gifts as *charismata*, grace-filled, and not *pneumatika*, spiritual capabilities, ensures that the Corinthians cannot take credit for developing the gifts.⁵⁰³ Pairing these statements along with earlier commentary in chapters one and two, no aspect of this community can exist or function without the presence and intentional work of the Spirit.⁵⁰⁴

It is not uncommon in rhetorical dialogue to interject a digression within the argument in order to bring attention to the importance of the message. The interjection typically focuses on presentation rather than specific content.⁵⁰⁵ In his third community paradigm, Paul proposes that agape love is the necessary context for all actions and behaviours within the community (1 Cor 13). Building on the ‘love builds’ theme from chapter 8, Paul does not expect the Corinthians to employ a form of human love, but rather Spirit-given, self-sacrificial love that edifies and enhances the other. For this new community, we are bearers of God’s love by means of his Spirit. It is not gifts, knowledge, power or status that defines the community identity (13:3) but rather this unconditional, self-sacrificial love that can undermine the divisive enmity conventions of the culture.

Within this critical foundation for the community, Paul does not miss the opportunity to model the way as a ‘servant leader’.⁵⁰⁶ Through a verb transition to first person singular from second person plural, he points to his own behaviors as examples for how the Corinthians should act and respond.⁵⁰⁷

In chapter 14, the Corinthians appear to have been excessively using prophecy and tongues as a way to promote themselves within the community. The need for status and honour is clearly deeply ingrained within their psyche. The excessive use of the gifts and need for self-promotion was causing substantial disorder and division within worship. As

⁵⁰³ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 37.

⁵⁰⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 7:6118.

⁵⁰⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 7:6326.

⁵⁰⁶ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, Kindle e-reader, 1061, 1878.

⁵⁰⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 7:6351.

his fourth community paradigm, Paul institutes a protocol that promotes order and intelligibility as a priority for how gifts may be used.^{508 509}

He continues to align behaviors so that believers are built up. Now for the first time, he turns the community focus outward to non-believers, stressing that only through intelligible, ordered communication can the non-believer be challenged, convicted and converted. Paul mandates consideration for the ‘other’ within the community but also establishes the goal of inclusion. By ensuring that community worship is understandable, non-believers are invited into and able to fully participate in the gathering and consequently experience the revelation of Christ by the Spirit.

6.5.3 Summary: The Adaptive Leadership Process

Paul has moved the Corinthians through a tremendous amount of cultural territory. He has masterfully guided them through a series of learning experiments, each designed to expose the contrast between the cultural community and the new Christian community. Every experiment highlights a change in behaviors and, more critically, a shift in the underlying values that shape the community. The experiments are profoundly relational in design, reinforcing the critical function of the relational fabric within the community. From this series of experiences, Paul expects the Corinthians to extrapolate the learning to all other community contexts and relations. Throughout this leadership process, Paul has sustained a ‘holding environment’ intended to make the transformation less traumatic. He has used familiar concepts such as the patron-client system, the household setting, and the rhetorical language style that simultaneously facilitates cognitive comprehension and diminishes a key barrier to adoption. For many of the Corinthian constituents, the new community is compelling in that it offers greater freedom. For the most challenged constituents, those of higher status, especially men, there is the incentive and opportunity for a superior leadership role that certainly does not carry the status and glory that they were used but that is imbued with the power and presence of the Spirit that brings life and vibrancy. Finally, there is the promise that God has made a way through the challenge of transition, with the presence of the Spirit and also with the supernatural koinonia fellowship of the new community. All of these holding environment elements offer comfort in themselves, but when taken in the context of Spirit-filled, personal salvation experiences, they are surely compelling motivation to reject the familiar paradigm in favour of something

⁵⁰⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, Kindle e-reader book, argument 7:6579-6591.

⁵⁰⁹ Banks and Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership*, Kindle e-reader, 36.

far more excellent. Of course, the transition journey is far from over, given what we know of 2 Corinthians and the challenge to Paul's leadership. Nevertheless, it's doubtful that Paul could have done much more from a leadership perspective to enable the community. At the end of the day, this community, as with any community, solely thrives through its members' individual relationships with Christ and with one another through the Spirit.

6.6 Final Observations on Christian Community Leadership

It is evident that whilst conventional leadership, such as the transactional or transformational approach, is sufficient for secular organizations, Christian community leadership must yield to the Spirit to the greatest extent possible if it is to be truly effective. Clearly this is not a profound revelation. However, the innate creature tendencies of our humanity require a leadership method that continually diminishes the potential for a single individual or even small group of individuals to establish themselves as the sole and unique recipient of the Spirit's direction for the community. Servant leadership, when executed with integrity, naturally brings the appropriate beliefs, values and actions to the leadership role. Notwithstanding this servant leadership foundation, Paul's adaptive leadership intervention to the Corinthians exposed a necessary experience that strove to break the community free from its incumbent practices, even those practices that were Christian in nature. Not surprisingly, Christian leadership must also be fluid in nature and expression, existing with a servant posture to serve and support but always ready and able to pioneer and lead the community into new territory. The hybrid servant-adaptive leadership method is essential for an effective Spirit-led organic community. Despite intentions to sustain continuous receptivity to the Spirit's lead, the impact from inertia and desire for convenience will inevitably seep into the community causing it to become less effective. Community leadership must be equipped and ready to intervene in community life in order to break apart structures such that the Spirit can continue to freely move.

The final chapter of this project draws together the perspectives on the functions of the Spirit leadership in organic community (chapter 4), the shape and nature of the organic community that develops from the Spirit's leadership (chapter 5) and the leadership method for this community (chapter 6). Integrating these perspectives completes the challenge model to the *Activate* community. Comparing this model to *Activate* answers the final question raised by the case study, what are the implications for the *Activate* small group

system and other community models discussed in chapter two from incorporating a pneumatological core that guides and shapes all aspects of a community?

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: INTEGRATING A PNEUMATOLOGICAL CORE WITHIN THE ACTIVATE SYSTEM

At the outset of this project I referred to a study that offered over 90 distinct definitions for community and a conclusion that the only consistency among them is that the heart of community represents ‘social relations connecting people’.⁵¹⁰ Said another way, within any community, Christian or otherwise, is Heifetz’s ‘humanity coming together in life’, in which participants implicitly and intangibly create a system of structure, culture, and language and a suite of norms that condition how they live and relate with one another. This system inevitably facilitates living in a form of harmony where the likelihood of experiencing loss resulting from change, a loss that is always perceived as painful, is minimized. Inherent to this organizational system is a self-reinforcing dynamic that causes it to do whatever it can to sustain its status quo, to resist change.⁵¹¹ I contend that this self-reinforcing dynamic is the driver behind the community formation systems such as *Activate*. However unintended, this systemization is at the core of why Christian community becomes ineffective so quickly after its inception. More often than not, Christian community can resemble a local social club, abounding with well-intentioned charitable programs and only minimal expectation for God’s presence and miraculous power to reside within it and empower it to reach the neighbourhood. This expectation, that Christian community can truly be a vessel for God’s presence such that it is effective in its Gospel mission, has been the focus of my research.

I have employed Fiddes method of integrated ecclesiology to explore the question of how to enhance the effectiveness of the *Activate* community system. The project began by discussing experiences between God and participants within the *Activate* Small Group system. These experiences showed that whilst community formation followed a relatively straightforward process, the resulting community failed to deliver the promised growth in participation and spiritual maturity. The discussion raised a number of questions aimed at exploring how and whether the *Activate* system could and should be enhanced by integrating a pneumatological core within the system in order to improve community effectiveness. Fiddes’ second step compared and challenged the *Activate* experiences with contemporary and biblical community models in order to identify enhancements. Fiddes’ third step,

⁵¹⁰ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 19.

⁵¹¹ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 50-54.

creatively developing a theoretical model of enhancements to community practice was developed from this challenge process. The fourth and final step in Fiddes' method is to identify relevant enhancements that can be tested and evaluated to produce more effective community.

The review of biblical and contemporary Christian community trends suggested that when the Holy Spirit was invited to form and shape community, the resulting Spirit-led, organic community could be highly effective in terms of mission and experience when compared to contemporary systems-based approaches. In this final chapter I discuss how values and practices of this organic community model can be incorporated within the *Activate* system. Specifically, I address the final question of the discussion: What are the implications for the *Activate* Small Group system from incorporating the pneumatological core in order to form a hybrid of the two approaches to community formation? The motivation for this question develops from the basis that there is widespread receptivity and adoption of systems-based Christian community approaches. To entirely dismiss the contribution and value of this approach is naive. Instead, I consider how these incumbent systems can be enhanced by integrating a pneumatological core, in order to make them more effective vessels for the Spirit's work in furthering the kingdom mission.

To answer this final question, I briefly summarize insights from the prior questions. I then develop my response to this final question by proposing revisions, derived from the nature of Spirit-led organic community, to the core *Activate* mindsets that define the *Activate* community. Using these revisions, I present a feasible configuration for a hybrid community that employs beneficial *Activate* processes whilst also allowing the Spirit to move fluidly and creatively in order to shape and guide the community. I conclude the chapter, and the project, with a closing perspective on the critical value of the contribution that this hybrid community can make to furthering the kingdom.

7.1 Key Insights Raised by the Activate Case Study Questions

7.1.1 Activate Case Study

Whilst the *Activate* community appealed to numerous contemporary cultural paradigms that are both secular and faith-based in nature, its system and structure both explicitly and implicitly inhibited the establishment of effective community. The system implicitly invites and allows participants to lean into their preference for human convenience and comfort by creating an environment of simple conformance to the rules

and process. As a result, participants can fully satisfy *Activate* criteria with no contemporary input and engagement from the Holy Spirit who can shape and direct the community for maximum effectiveness. My contention is that by inviting the Spirit to formatively shape Christian community through individual participants and relations, the community can become fully effective in terms of its missional and relational purpose. Building from this perspective, I concluded chapter one by asking a series of questions aimed at exploring 1) how this community contrasts with communities such as those developed from systems such as *Activate* that are popular in contemporary congregational life today; 2) how an effective, pneumatologically-shaped, organic community could be expressed; and 3) if there could be a hybrid expression that leverages the strengths of both.

7.1.2 Contemporary Christian Community Themes

A review of a diverse range of community formation models revealed that that no single model has consistently delivered effective community. This finding is significant for community expressions such as *Activate*, where effectiveness is perceived as almost entirely determined by adherence to the system. *Activate*'s system is designed to be successful for life in postmodern contemporary culture. Transitioning from this culturally appealing expression to a contextually relevant and effective community must overcome two forces: the friction of human nature that continually prefers self over others and a system structure that prioritizes and reinforces this cultural form.

Whilst *Activate* may be an extreme example of systems-based community formation, numerous similar examples of structure and system were observed throughout the contemporary community models. In parallel, there was an inevitable endorsement of the critical role of the Spirit for effective community expressions. The weight of evidence toward these two perspectives reinforces the value of exploring the nature of a community wholly shaped and guided by the Spirit as a superior and more effective expression of community.

7.1.3 New Testament Communities

Dunn's and Esler's work on early Christian communities highlights the presence of both scenarios: the development of institutional community systems and the presence of the Spirit in charismatic community formation. Whereas the contemporary community review reflects diverse, systems-oriented approaches that inevitably rely on the Spirit to enable effective community, the New Testament community review shows that these communities

began as Spirit-initiated, charismatic, household-level expressions that over time, given increasing participation and participant desire for convenience, gave rise to institutional community structures that were sustained by human process and convention. Reliance on the Spirit decreased as familiarity with the community structure and expression increased. Critically, with this diminishing reliance, there were fewer expressions of supernatural faith. Viewed longitudinally, *Activate*, along with other contemporary systems-based approaches to Christian community, appears as the next ‘logical refinement’ of community formation. The risk within this refinement trajectory is that room for the Spirit’s engagement is increasingly diminished, and with it the possibility for truly effective community.

Effective community in the early Christian era prioritized the development of a fabric of ekstasis-oriented, one-another relationships, or networks. Outreach to surrounding neighbours occurred most frequently by invitation to join through the inclusive relational fabric that spread outward beyond the permeable community boundary. Visually, where New Testament communities originally looked ‘vertically’ to their maturing relationship with Christ in the Spirit, the trajectory over time has resulted in contemporary communities, such as *Activate*, increasingly looking horizontally toward the static system and toward one another within the confines of this system.

The contemporary and New Testament community reviews suggest three overarching observations for community formation and specifically for *Activate*. Firstly, for Christian community to be fully effective in mission and purpose, the Spirit should be invited to shape and guide the community organically through participants. Secondly, there is an inevitable pressure that diminishes the work of the Spirit from human desire for convenience and control. This pressure manifests visibly as structure and process of systems-based approaches, such as *Activate*, in community formation. Finally, a Spirit-led community model has the potential to be effective, provided there are appropriate leadership mechanisms that can maximise the Spirit’s freedom to engage whilst minimising the pressure to create human conforming structures that inhibit the Spirit’s freedom.

7.1.4 The Flow of the Spirit’s Work in and Through Organic Community

Accepting this essential role of the Spirit, question three of the case study asks how and where the Spirit’s focus could be in order for today’s Christian community to be more effective. The insights on original New Testament community and the trajectory toward today’s systems-based community point to a need to invite the Spirit’s engagement in shaping the relational fabric of the community. This relational fabric is the principal vehicle

for meaningful relations with others in the community, for outreach to others beyond the community, and as the context and platform for community oneness or unity.

My response to the question is based on the understanding that the Spirit works uniquely through each individual from the ground up to shape the relational fabric between community participants and between participants and others through relational outreach. The Spirit will use this relational fabric between individual participants to demonstrate relational peace and harmony as a sign of community unity. The Spirit will work with and through those individuals called into community leadership to maximize free engagement and to minimize unnecessary structure. The Spirit shapes the overall community entity through the combined activity in, with and through each participant. This again is a radical departure from the *Activate's top-down* community. Finally, the Spirit may fluidly shift direction and guidance in order to continually optimize community effectiveness. Furthermore, the community has a directional flow outward, from the Spirit at its core through members, both as leaders and as participants, toward others. This again is contrary to the *Activate* flow where focus, activities and engagement all tend to move and orient themselves toward the centre of the community.

7.1.5 The Nature of Human Response in Organic Community

Responding to this pneumatological core, the behaviors and activities of community participants shape the overall visible expression of community for its participants and for those observing the community from the outside. For participants, the community consists of a myriad of unique experiences derived from living with Christ and with one another in relationships. For those beyond the community, the community is the aggregate expression of the participants, their activities, and their relations that is both attractational and a life-giving contrast to the surrounding environment.

Effective organic community appears as a diverse range of individual activities and experiences, directed by the Spirit, uniquely tailored to each participant's life context. The central emphasis of each activity or experience is a demonstration of life in relationship with Christ and with others. Acts and experiences are numerous, diverse, spontaneous, small in impact, and likely less visible to the community at large and to those beyond it. The resulting community is one of continual relational flow, always practically outward toward others within and beyond the community and simultaneously postured inward toward Christ. Unity or oneness within the organic community is exhibited through the relational fabric, a growing coalescence in beliefs in Christ and the Christian faith for participants that prompts

an increasing coalignment as participants increasingly align their decisions and responsive actions with the Spirit's purpose.

7.1.6 The Necessary Role of Leadership in Organic Community

Leadership must serve in two critical capacities that facilitate the Spirit's leadership outward to and through participants. Their principal role is that of providing servant leadership to the community where leaders engage with participants as an equipping function. This involves helping participants hear and discern the Spirit's guidance for their unique contexts and daily activities and for their relational interactions within and beyond the community. Implicit within this approach is the responsibility to sustain a fluid and flexible community that is continually responsive to the Spirit's leadership. This leadership approach directly contradicts *Activate's* leadership, which is primarily transactional in approach with some values-based transformational input. The second leadership capacity, equally critical but leveraged less often, is the use of the adaptive leadership process that intervenes and disrupts the norms and implicit behaviours of the community in order to introduce new, Spirit-informed values and behaviours. This second approach is especially relevant when recognising the inevitable self-preserving human dynamic that tends to create the structure and process found in *Activate*-like systems.

Despite *Activate's* structure and process, it's important to recognise that *Activate's* system is a derivative of the human desire for convenience. *Activate* simply sanctions and enables the innate human desires. Given this, *Activate* may still provide value for the community by serving as a model and example for various functions within community provided it's clear that it is not the sole expression for community. Utilizing *Activate* in this capacity places further demands on leadership to ensure that the community does not become complacent or dependent by continually resorting to the *Activate* model instead of actively seeking the Spirit's guidance for contemporary and specific direction.

7.2 Hybrid Community: Integrating a Pneumatological Core Within Activate

At this point, it may seem that systems-based community formation models such as *Activate* are almost entirely incompatible with a Spirit-shaped organic community and that community developers are faced with a decision to choose one or the other approach: either a systems-based approach that is easier to implement and control but ultimately less effective, or an organic community that requires continual engagement with the Spirit, is

more complex to facilitate, but has the potential for greater effectiveness. Responding to the final question in the case study, I consider the implications for the *Activate* Small Group system from incorporating a pneumatological core in order to form a hybrid of the two approaches to community formation such that this hybrid community becomes relationally and missionally effective.

7.2.1 *Activate* Mindsets⁵¹²

The *Activate* system consists of a series of mindsets or paradigm shifts that define the form and nature of the community experience. The paradigm shifts are intended to break conventional expectations and norms for Christian community formation in order to establish a community expression that is relevant and attractive to non-believers in contemporary culture. As I've discussed, whilst the *Activate* community appears highly relevant for today's environment, it fails to facilitate effective Christian community on many dimensions. The organic community framework that I have developed demonstrates a version of community that can enable Christian community to be an effective witness of the Gospel. Given the widespread deployment and receptivity of systems-based approaches to community, it's helpful to ask whether a pneumatological core can be integrated within the systems approach in order to facilitate a more effective witness. This approach allows useful components of the system to be salvaged whilst also providing room for the Spirit to operate. In this final discussion, I review the specific *Activate* mindsets and develop revisions to them in order to integrate the pneumatological core that would reproduce elements of the organic community that support the Spirit's purpose.

Activate mindsets can be classified by four themes: strategy, leadership approach, enrollment process, and the small group experience. Each mindset is reviewed and followed by my proposed revisions. As context for these revisions, my overall approach for revising *Activate* is to position the system as a beneficial vehicle for enabling community in places but that is not the entire or required vehicle for the community. To that end, revisions reflect the idea of embedding a sensitivity and receptivity to fluidity, relationship, and diversity within the mindsets such that the Spirit can shape the community on all levels.

⁵¹² Searcy & Kerrick, *Activate*, 27-108.

7.2.2 Activate Strategy

The overarching strategy for *Activate* should remain largely unchanged. Beneficially, the mindsets are relatively well defined for a community framework that allows the fluidity and diversity of the Spirit's leadership whilst simultaneously benefiting from process and structure that helps participants meaningfully engage in the community.

Activate's core strategic mindset is to be a church *of* small groups rather than a church *with* small groups. This enables, encourages and allows the congregation to fully engage with small groups. This is accomplished by removing the temptation from competing events, programs and ministries. There should be no mid-week service, prayer meetings, worship practice, etc. All outreach, service, and ministry activity should occur as a function of a small group experience. This facilitates the goal of achieving 100% participation in small groups.

No meaningful revision is needed here. The emphasis on the importance of community through only small groups importantly reinforces the value of the relational fabric as the principal context for community and outreach activities and removes time-based conflicts, allowing participants to fully engage with the community.

The second strategic mindset states that small groups should ideally run on a 10-12 week cycle, following the cultural cadence of simply doing life. The mindset appeals to the value and effectiveness of the stress-release concept, often experienced when alternating between periods of work or stress and periods of rest or release. This stress-release dynamic creates opportunities for deeper spiritual and relational growth with others compared with an environment where people live in continual or constant stress or rest. For the United States, this stress-release effect has been modeled on the academic semester or trimester calendar, with small groups running through two or three cycles a year. With each new cycle, the small groups should be entirely reconstituted with new leaders, members and focus. Engagement with the system occurs when people, especially men, are more likely to engage if there is the promise of a short-term commitment that has a clear beginning and end. A by-product of this cadence is the opportunity for small groups to have more topics, greater diversity in the topics, and more opportunities for leadership development experiences.

Here I propose a 'both-and' revision. The value of the stress-release semester cadence can be especially attractive to newcomers to the community who may want to know that a graceful exit is available should they decide to leave the community. However, for some within the community, as was the case for a life group that had long term relationships

in the case study, the opportunity to continue with a life group beyond the semester time frame should also be possible. For groups that extend the meeting calendar beyond a semester, leadership should encourage ongoing discernment regarding the Spirit's guidance for the longevity of the group.

The third mindset recommends the use of a systematic approach that begins a 3-4 month cycle of planning, logistics and organization prior to the beginning of each small group semester. Envision implementing the system as a 'flywheel' that enables easy, efficient repeatability. This should allow the planning team to focus on future system enhancements at least several cycles in advance. Implicit within the flywheel implementation is the expectation that results are initially slow to materialize but then proceed with increasing momentum. When the flywheel is operating at maximum pace and efficiency, there should be full participation and continually deepening spiritual growth.

No revision is needed here. The flywheel approach to triggering and initiating the next season of small groups provides a straightforward and transparent process for launching small groups. The approach is efficient and allows community leadership to focus on facilitating the Spirit's guidance relative to the content and context of the small groups rather than the infrastructure for enabling them.

7.2.3 Activate Leadership

The greatest revisions to *Activate* occur with the expectations for leadership. Following the Spirit, leadership must reverse the flow of activity and focus within each small group from the uniform directives to pursue programmed activity that draws people to the centre of the church to equip each participant for unique relational engagement outward beyond the boundaries of the community. Leaders must also become far more than simple apprentices, developing a basic pastoral and equipping capacity that enables them to meaningfully guide those within their group or to direct them to other resources that enable participants to more fully follow the Spirit's direction. This is a radical shift in expectations for leadership compared to *Activate*.

The first leadership-oriented mindset recommends that the entire team of church staff should be immersed and involved at all times rather than assigning the small group ministry to a single staff member who executes the ministry as a component of the greater church environment. Additionally, the Lead Pastor must be the greatest evangelist and advocate for the system, continually referencing and promoting participation through the pulpit, in teaching and through conversations with attendees.

No revision is needed here. Again, this mindset can helpfully reinforce the value and importance of the community fabric given endorsement and advocacy from the entire leadership team.

The second leadership mindset suggests that the community become comfortable with leaders who are apprentices rather than experts. Assuming a highly structured system and frequent coaching and facilitation of small group leaders, allow and invite individuals who have little to no experience to become leader-facilitators of the small groups, following Paul's approach of inviting young leaders to develop by following him as a role-model. After a few hours of basic training, help novices to develop as leaders through highly structured small group experiences. Essentially these young leaders follow instructions instead of requiring deep experiential learning in order to navigate their role. Secondly, provide coaches who regularly interact with these young leaders on a weekly/bi-weekly basis. Finally, trust God to provide the leaders and allow them to select the topics and types of groups.

This mindset requires substantial revision. Firstly, leaders must develop as servant leaders rather than the apprentice administrators that *Activate* proposes. Leaders must develop a capacity to hear and follow the Spirit's guidance for the overall community and simultaneously align that guidance with the Spirit's guidance to and through each participant. Secondly, servant leaders work with each participant to equip them for their unique needs and calling. They should pay specific attention to enabling each participant to discern the Spirit's direction for their life situation, to form healthy relational engagement, and to explore the fullness of freedom and creativity from life in the Spirit. Thirdly, leaders should develop and maintain a narrative and language that tells the story of the Spirit working in and through the community and that amplifies the essential DNA of an organic community: impact, fluidity and uniqueness. There is clearly a significant leadership requirement for this community, especially as the community initially turns from a pure systems-based approach to this hybrid. The importance of developing leadership teams, or a matrix approach to leadership, rather than a sole or hierarchical leadership format becomes increasingly appropriate to reduce leader fatigue and burnout. Team leadership can also help younger leaders develop skills and capacities on a number of dimensions, such as pastoral, equipping, and administration by serving as disciples to more experienced leaders.

Finally, it's likely necessary to deploy an adaptive leadership intervention process at the outset of the shift from systems-based community to this hybrid in order to disrupt the operating norms that have been established and reinforced by the system. Whereas servant

leadership facilitates the directional flow from behaviors to values, where the Spirit's leadership prompts behavioral activities that reinforce essential values and beliefs, the adaptive leadership process begins by identifying the values that inhibit sign-giving activity and receptivity to the Spirit's lead and then guides individuals and the community into activity that disrupts these source values in order to substantially shift the community toward greater effectiveness as a Christian community. In this situation, leadership must itself re-orient its posture from humble servant facilitator to courageous pioneer. This intervention process would focus on equipping participants to hear the Spirit's direction for community life and outreach and to explore Spirit-enabled freedom and creativity for fulfilling the Spirit's direction and for developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Seeding this awareness within each participant and inviting them to relinquish the cultural and convenient processes that they have autonomically followed requires strong mature facilitation but is a necessary step to disrupting normative, ineffective community patterns.

The final mindset suggests that the cumulative effect of this apprenticing process and the semester-defined time frames for each small group cycle is that leaders will naturally multiply themselves, which in turn will multiply small groups, thereby spurring growth in the overall church as a result.

This mindset will naturally evolve given that it's a derivative of the prior perspective on the nature of leadership. With the hybrid community, there is a need for a large number of leaders to serve the community. Servant leadership requires significant investment in the development of each leader, requiring time and focus in order for mature leaders to develop. Consequently, if community participant growth is predicated on the number of available leaders, the pace of growth is likely to be substantially slower, leading to smaller communities in absolute size. However, these smaller communities will tend to experience a deeper relationship with the Spirit and with one another that leads to greater effectiveness.

7.2.4 Activate Enrollment Process

Similar to the flywheel semester cadence for launching small groups where only minor revisions were required in order to facilitate the Spirit's shaping, few changes are required here. The enrollment process provides a simple, engaging and transparent engine for promoting small group participation. The process requires little customization for each small group semester. This consistency and simplicity is also a helpful tool for participants, especially newcomers to the community, to evaluate and discern how and where they are led to connect with the community.

The first enrollment mindset recommends the use of marketing techniques such as high profile, time-bounded, promotion campaigns that leverage creative and diverse engagement techniques for a concentrated timeframe prior to the beginning of the semester. Place a heavy emphasis on encouraging promotion and enrollment in order to maximise participation. Finally, set quantifiable metrics and goals for each phase of the process, such as engagement and participation, in order to measure performance and provide a basis for improvement initiatives.

The core enrollment process needs little revision. I suggest expanding the metrics used to define community success from the suggested basic participation levels to include metrics that reflect relational depth, creative forms of relational outreach, and change in community behaviors over time that can provide a sense of relative movement in the breadth and depth of the community and its relational fabric.

The final enrollment mindset, appealing to the culture that makes engagement as frictionless as possible, small group commitment should be similarly frictionless. To the greatest extent possible, deploy a one-step sign-up process such as online sign-up, catalogs, small group table, etc., in order to maximise participation and engagement. As with the previous mindset in this category, no revisions are needed here.

7.2.5 Activate Small Group Experience

The results from removing *Activate* system constraints that imposed structure and uniformity upon participants and from the intentional equipping and enabling for each participant to follow the Spirit's unique guidance manifest most extensively within the small group experience. Here is where community unity or oneness is most visibly observed as relational peace, increasing coalescence in belief in Christ and co-alignment in activities that increasingly reflect the Spirit's signature. Logically, if this Spirit-constituted relational peace is not evident within community, then the Spirit is not present within the community and the community fails to be an effective witness. Conversely, it is therefore the life-giving mediating presence of the Spirit that results in a community whose very expression and presence is holy and miraculous.

The principle small group configuration mindset suggests that groups should be designed to focus and accommodate the non-believer rather than the believer. The small group experience should appeal principally to the non-believing attendee. Consequently, the experience is more likely to resonate with the non-believer's reality of contemporary life rather than an inwardly focused Christian faith with its esoteric language and practices.

Small group ministry should be located on the margins of the congregation, inviting visitors or occasional attendees to step into more regular engagement with the congregation, to consider intentional participation and ultimately membership. The goal of the system should be to achieve 100% participation by the congregation.

This mindset seems to almost dismiss the importance of maintaining a reference to Christian faith, suggesting that greater value comes from postmodern, shallow, relational engagement that would become attractive to attendees over time. The mindset appears to operate on a horizontal level of human relations, rather than recognising the value of ekstasis-kenotic relations that occur only through vibrant relationships with and through Christ. Small groups that are following the Spirit's guidance as a group and as participants will find themselves located where the Spirit can have greatest effect, whether it be at the margins of the congregation engaging non-believers or in the heart of the congregation engaging entirely with other believing participants. Trusting the Spirit for whom to relate to within and beyond the community, appropriating training on healthy relational development and following the Spirit for the nature of the relational engagement yields a very different relational fabric compared to the transactional interaction that occurs in *Activate's* weekly, 90-minute program format. The quality of this fabric will be substantially constituted by the reality of life in relationship with Christ. The nature of these relationships most profoundly shapes each participant's sense of identity and belonging in the community. Additionally, these relationships, especially with others beyond the community, should present an attractive and inviting contrast to surrounding communities that are modeled on contemporary culture and influences.

The next mindset indicates that small groups should require at least 12-15 people in attendance in order to create an environment for healthy, sustainable, social relationships. This level of attendance is intended to offset the challenges of conventional groups, typically with 5-7 regular attendees, which may be difficult to lead, may experience relational friction, and can often be uncomfortable for newcomers.

This requirement should again be relaxed. Higher attendance levels inhibit the possibility for meaningful relational development and diminish the possibility for the Spirit to demonstrate the reality of living with Christ. Equipping for participants in developing healthy relationships recognises the possibility for discomfort due to only a few attendees and provides tools for diminishing the discomfort.

The final mindset in this category recommends that participants expect new friendships to form rather than intimate relationships. The small group environment should

not be used for intimate relational development. Rather, the experience should be used to identify and initiate friendships, to lay a basic foundation of connection. The authors discuss the value of the four types of space that can shape spiritual growth (public, social, personal, and intimate), advising participants to expect relations in every space but most readily and comfortably in the social space. They recommend holding small groups in social spaces within independent locations such as cafes, libraries, sports clubs and homes, rather than church buildings, that will allow relations to develop in a non-threatening and spontaneous manner and without expectations of intimacy.

In terms of the nature of relationships, this mindset again seems overly restrictive. Whilst nascent friendships are certainly a possibility, more intimate friendships should be equally anticipated and, given the Spirit's nature, even expected. Again, the goal here is to make room for the Spirit to form and shape friendships rather than constrain them to a certain level of quality. The use of the four types of space is helpful for addressing relational discomfort by creating safe spaces for connection.

7.2.6 Describing the Hybrid Community

Concluding this response to the question of the implications for *Activate* if the pneumatological core could be incorporated in order to create the potential for more effective community, three types of revisions become evident: firstly, to remove or diminish *Activate* constraints; secondly, to invest extensively in developing leaders as servant leaders; and, thirdly and most critically, to invite and allow the Spirit to shape the fabric on all levels of the community. I suggest that introducing these themes into the *Activate* mindsets can provide the room and release for the Spirit to move in and through the community in order to become more effective. In essence, the structure of *Activate* recedes into the background of the community, becoming the enabling mechanisms that facilitate the community operating infrastructure whilst leaving the Spirit to interact and enable participants, their relations and the overall community expression.

At the risk of redundancy, I conclude my response by presenting a final description of this hybrid community, beginning first with the experience for participants and followed by the community expression observed by those beyond the community.

The community experience for a participant is one of fluidity, informality, and, frequently, evolving engagement, both with those within community and those beyond it. Participants experience an inner holy coalescence in Christ, being continually drawn by the Spirit into deeper relationship with Christ and, through Him, with each other as becoming-

persons. This coalescence amplifies the experience of freedom and joy through the mutual awareness that all members are concurrently maturing toward the same truths. As tangible evidence of this maturation, relational peace becomes increasingly evident. Effective community strives to live primarily in the present-moment arena of the Spirit so that the Spirit-ordained relations are contemporaneously accessible. Logistically, community is likely small in number, physically proximate and resident within its mission-field neighbourhood. Finally, community defined by relationality as its essential witness conducts daily life at a pace that is likely far slower than its context in order to foster and facilitate the quality of its relational fabric.

Given this continual engagement with and through the Spirit regarding with whom to develop relations, the observed community is identified by minimal exclusionary ‘boundary’ conditions. Instead, ‘boundaries’ are permeable, exuding the profoundly attractive qualities of the Spirit within clay human vessels. As each participant prioritizes and follows the Spirit’s lead, there is a co-alignment of diverse activities that are reflective of life in Christ. Led by the Spirit, effective community is a prophetic and redemptive contrast to its surrounding neighbours at all times. As such, Christian community neither perceives the culture as irrelevant nor embraces it so as to be absorbed by it. Effective Christian community is continually moving into the reality of Spirit-enabled Kingdom freedom, where participants’ lives experientially reflect the limitless potential of life in Christ. As such, the community does not react or respond to the culture in some perceived adversarial fashion; instead the community evolves and moves *through* the culture.⁵¹³ Consequently, from an observed perspective, as the culture evolves, the community similarly evolves to point anew toward freedom. Its movement is not in lockstep with the culture, but is asynchronous, presenting a contrast that is one step behind, ahead or to the side of society, so as to reflect the freedom of life in Christ. The capacity to exist as this asynchronous contrast necessitates not only fluidity in form but also the willingness to live and respond contemporaneously, hearing and following the Spirit for relevant expressions of life with Christ that continually contrast to their evolving context. This final observation regarding the nature of community engagement with its surrounding culture becomes all the more critical given Newbigin’s opinion that there is almost no internal guiding system for evaluating values, opinions and beliefs within the citizenry of western culture.⁵¹⁴ As such, we individually have minimal

⁵¹³ Greenwood, *Being Church*, chap. 6:1300-1337, Kindle.

⁵¹⁴ Franklin, "Missionaries in Our Own Back Yard," 161-190.

capacity for recognizing and identifying truth. A community entity that continually and relevantly points toward the freedom of truth in Christ is therefore essential.

For practitioners, a final step remains to test these proposed practices within a local community. I recommend a stepwise protocol that tests unique clusters of revisions in order to understand their contribution to community effectiveness. Testing should begin at the leadership level by implementing presence-based, servant and adaptive leadership practices. This provides the freedom for the Spirit to creatively and freely shape the overall formation strategy in addition to shaping the relational fabric. Further clusters of revisions are then tested, evaluated and revised as the leadership team determine. The process should be iterative with numerous feedback loops and critically should allow time for fully transformed practices to mature within the community experience.

7.3 A Closing Perspective

Community is easy. Christian community is even easier given the potential for common values to create identity and belonging. This is even more so the case when structure and processes are built to facilitate self-serving convenience and comfort. In reality, these are communities built on systematised human nature. They are rarely effective in achieving its Gospel mission.

Effective Christian community is not at all easy. It requires worshipful humility, is relationally hard, fraught with personal risk and frequently uncomfortable given its inability to provide a safe, stable refuge away from the world. And yet, when effective, this is the community whose very expression and presence is holy, miraculous and essential for God's purpose. If we are to participate in this holy experience, then it begins with our understanding and recognition that Christian community is profoundly sacred and that our participation is an act of worship. We must set aside the deeply embedded perspective that community is simply a basic operating paradigm for believers, a means to an end that is as much an artifact of tradition as it is a convenience. Rather, our participation in Christian community is an expression of reverence toward Christ that can be nearly as significant, substantial and revelatory as partaking in the Lord's Supper.

From this reverential posture, participation is as a dance with the Holy Spirit, our ever-present Lover, Provider, Equipper and Enabler. Participation is not the autonomic, transactional fulfillment of a set of instructions directing us to robotically follow the Spirit, to produce relationships, and to avoid systemic expressions. Rather, participation occurs one worshipful step at a time, as a single step is given and enabled by the Spirit and as the

next step, intended for the next moment, remains entirely unknown to us until the fulfillment of this current step in this current moment.⁵¹⁵ This participation requires the exercise of daily faith to follow the Spirit and, perhaps more challenging, daily faith to wait on the Spirit. It requires trusting for and anticipating a reality that is entirely beyond our capacity and capability to realize. If we will dance with the Spirit in this fashion, then Christian community can truly become the fragile clay vessel through which God's presence powerfully and purposefully moves.

⁵¹⁵ Mary Louise Dell'Olio, L.C.S.W., B.C.D., in discussion with the author, September 10, 2001.

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