

Becoming a Transformative Community: Intra-Connecting the Parish Church and the
Community it Serves through the Principles of Sacred Hospitality

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ABSTRACT

The breakdown in relationship between rural parish churches and the wider communities in which they serve is one contributor to the high level of decline within the Anglican Church of Canada. While many emphasize that parish churches must change if they are to be relevant within their context, so too must transforming parishes retain their unique Christian identity. The issue is not *if* this should happen, but rather *how* parish leaders might encourage rural parish churches to become more open to change, without giving up their Christian identity. The purpose of this thesis was to propose revised practices that would enable rural parish churches to become more open to change and transformation so they might find ways to reconnect with the wider community in which they exist, while maintaining an authentic Christian identity.

The methodology was based on Richard Osmer's four-task hermeneutical spiral for practical theology and research. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to explore the clergy and lay leaders' experiences of leadership interventions for addressing the issue of parish decline within the Stormont Deanery of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. Data was gathered through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, as well as parish documents detailing parish histories and community consultations.

The results showed that the introduction of Sacred Hospitality principles within the life and leadership of the parish can be effective in helping parish churches become more open to change and transformation in ways that are faithful, and enable them to move towards becoming Transformative Community. Included in the final recommendations are considerations for clergy formation, pastoral and theological implications, as well as a resource for parish leaders.

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Introduction

Most research begins with a problematic situation that the researcher wishes to address. The breakdown of relationships between the rural parish churches within the Deanery of Stormont, and the wider communities they serve had contributed to significant decline within the parish. While the consensus among the deanery clergy was that something must change, questions remained about how to do so in an effective way. How could the parish churches change in ways that allowed them to be relevant within their ministry context, without sacrificing their identity as a Christian community?

This thesis is the product of a passionate search for possible solutions to address the issue of parish decline within the rural parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa. The topic of this thesis arose after several clergy gatherings within the Stormont Deanery where the clergy leadership identified similar challenges regarding the apparent decline within the parishes, and expressed an uncertainty as to the causes, and possible responses to this problem.

Ministry Context and Problem

In 2006, I was ordained as an Anglican priest and began my ministry with a two-year training term as the Assistant Curate of Christ Church in Bells Corners. In 2008 the Bishop of Ottawa appointed me as the new Incumbent of the Anglican Parish of North Dundas. Before my arrival in the parish, I met with the Bishop to get a sense of what he was hoping to see happen within the parish during my incumbency. I had just finished my inaugural position at Christ Church and with all the experience in programming that comes from being in a wealthy, stable,

and well attended urban church, I felt confident that I would have the skills needed to address the hopes and concerns that the Bishop had for this next parish.

Over the course of that lunch meeting, I went from feeling confident to realizing I was greatly underprepared for the task at hand. Despite the training experiences I had at Christ Church Bells Corners, none of them translated into the skills needed to deal with the issue of parish decline and death within rural churches.

The Bishop described a parish that had spent more than twenty years moving towards amalgamating four separate congregations into one unified parish church. The process of amalgamation had, over the years, resulted in tension within and between congregations. Attendance was considered to be low. The perceived change of North Dundas was one of a community transitioning from a group of tightly knit, deeply interconnected rural groups to a “bedroom community” for those who worked in the city of Ottawa, and this made an impact on the relational ties between the parish churches and the village communities. The parish was facing the consequences of decline at a crucial moment in their history as the amalgamation was only partially complete. Further compounding the problem was a church plant build project, which no longer had the internal resources nor the external relationships with the wider community to be completed. Moreover, the Bishop hoped that the new parish priest would bring new life and new ministry to the parish.

In 2015, the Bishop of Ottawa asked me to relocate. Given my experiences within the Anglican Parish of North Dundas, he wanted me to go to the Anglican Parish of South Dundas as it was experiencing similar problems. It appeared that parish attendance and finances were in significant decline, and there were issues regarding the relationships between the three parish congregations, as well as the relationships between the parish church and the wider

community. He felt that South Dundas represented significant community growth potential for the Anglican Church through the development of strong relationships to ensure sustainability.

In a similar fashion to North Dundas, South Dundas began as a stable and sustainable rural parish with healthy finances and attendance in three separate congregations working together to minister to the community. For the past ten years, the parish had been experiencing a steep decline in their attendance and finances. There was tension between the three congregations, and consequently the relationship between the parish churches and the wider community had suffered. The hope was that together, the parish and I could find a way forward to develop healthy relationships both within the congregations, and with the wider communities that the parish served. In tandem, we needed to find a way to create social and financial sustainability within the parish.

In 2017, our regional Archdeacon asked me to meet and talk with the clergy and lay leadership of our Deanery of Stormont. The other parish churches within our deanery were experiencing problems within their own ministry contexts that were very similar to North and South Dundas: decline in attendance, financial difficulty, and little to no relationship with the wider communities they served. During the conversation with the clergy leaders, it was made clear that all of us had felt inadequate in addressing these issues. None of us had received any training teaching us how to engage with these problems. Both our seminary training and our curacies in urban parishes had provided no experience or formation that helped to address the issue of decline in rural parishes.

My involvement in each of these three leadership intervention sites raised a series of questions for both myself, and my colleagues: If this is happening to us, is it happening elsewhere? Why is this happening? Is there an effective way for leaders to address the issue of

parish decline? What has been keeping parish churches from making changes before now? What kind of leadership and community models might be well suited to address the issue of decline within our current context?

This thesis project is the record and reflections of my participant-observer journey of leadership through the three separate intervention sites. Over the following chapters this thesis will outline some of the possible causes for parish decline and the barriers that rural parishes face when wrestling with the issue of decline. A parish church framework that is capable of navigating the issue of decline will be described as Transformative Community, and a model of leadership intervention that assists parish churches to become a Transformative Community is explored through the project hypothesis: That by introducing the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life and leadership of a parish church, the parish may become more open to transformation.

Sacred Hospitality is at the heart of this thesis. The term Sacred Hospitality can be used to mean a number of things. For example, Pastor Lanny Peters uses the term to describe the transforming experiences of hospitality he and his group encountered while on an inter-faith pilgrimage to Morocco.¹ The term, used in this thesis, refers to experience and insights of Benedictine practitioners of inter-faith dialogue and hospitality. Specifically, with regards to this thesis, the term refers to the four principles of hospitality and dialogue that emerge from their shared experiences: *rootedness*, *respect*, *invitation*, and *openness*. These principles are described and explored in terms of concepts and practices throughout this thesis.

¹ Peters, Lanny. "Sacred Hospitality: Christian Youth on Pilgrimage in a Muslim Land." *Review and Expositor* Vol. 105(1) (2008). Pp 93-113.

Research Problem

Within the Deanery of Stormont, churches are in various stages of decline. The relationship between the parish church, and the wider communities that it served, appears to have decayed. The symptoms showed themselves in the form of declining finances and membership within the parish church, as well as the collective community doubt as to the relevance of parish churches in the region of Stormont. This raises two significant issues for both the parish church and the wider community. First, as described by the Mayor of South Dundas, “Rural communities depend on volunteers for community programming, and social outreach. Much, if not most of our volunteers come from our faith-based communities. Without the churches to volunteer, we’d be hard pressed to continue the level of community service that we currently have.”² Secondly, from the perspective of the parish church, the loss of local churches could very well result in a form of spiritual trauma to members of the faith. As Associate Professor Dr. Edward Kruk describes:

Spiritual wounding is, essentially, the violation of the sacred or spiritual core in human beings, harm experienced at the deepest level of one’s being. This assumes, first, that a “spiritual core” exists in human beings, and this core can be damaged by external conditions; and second, that such damage amounts to a spiritual wounding that leads to a “spiritual affliction.” When one’s life is damaged or destroyed by some wound or privation, due to others’ actions or negligence, deep wounding may occur that, in a sense, goes beyond physical harm, psychological torment and social exclusion, but is contained in all of these. The state of spiritual affliction transcends all other forms of suffering, and induces an inertia such that those experiencing the condition are typically viewed as responsible for their situation, and the social conditions that lead to spiritual harm are largely ignored.³

² From a conversation with the Mayor of South Dundas at a church fundraiser, 2019.

³ Kruk, Edward. “Spiritual Wounding and Affliction: Facilitating Spiritual Transformation in Social Justice Work.” University of Windsor. *Critical Social Work*, 2006, Vol 7, No 1. Accessed July 23rd, 2019. URL: <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/spiritual-wounding-and-affliction-facilitating-spiritual-transformation-in-social-justice-work>

The loss of parish churches meets this definition as, in rural communities, the lives of faithful people are deeply woven into the life of their parish church. The negligence of the wider community in supporting the existence of the parish church can be viewed as the wider community being “responsible” for the loss of the parish church in rural communities. From the Christian perspective, the damage and spiritual wounding that can come from the loss of a spiritual home, such as a physical church or temple can be traced back to the Hebrew Scriptures when the Hebrew people struggled with the destruction of the Temple as it had a direct impact on their spiritual wellness and identity:

By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.⁴

The loss of parish churches within rural communities will have serious impacts to both members of the parish church, but also to the well-being of the wider community.

Methodology – Practical Theology

This is a Doctor of Ministry thesis. There are a variety of Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) programs in seminaries and faculties of theology throughout North America. According to Tim Sensing of Abilene Christian University, the Doctor of Ministry purpose is to “improve the practice of ministry for persons who hold the M.Div. degree and have engaged in ministerial leadership...the heart of D.Min. programs is the intent that projects serve the church, develop

⁴ Psalm 137, NRSV.

ministerial practice, and be applicable to other practitioners in the field.”⁵ This D.Min. project relies on the resources and methods of practical theology. Practical theology is focused on solving a problem by deepening understanding of the context, other voices, perspectives, and literature on the subject, and then finding a way to change practice within that context so that communities can be vital and vibrant once more. The D.Min. is an inquiry into Practical Theology.

Practical Theology cannot be reduced to problem-solving. It is better defined as discernment as to where God’s Spirit is active and at work in the subject of research; in this case, in the context of the ministry interventions. This project presented a problematic situation with which to engage, and the parish churches within my ministry context seemed resistant to change. Because of this, they lost the vital relationships between themselves and the wider communities they served to be relevant, sustainable, and life-giving within their context. This project was not about gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge; it was about gaining insight so that the real-life experience and practice of my ministry context could be changed in meaningful and effective ways. At the same time, this project was not just about personal change and transformation, likewise, it was about the transformation of the parish church. The community and I learned together, and as one of us was changed, the other could not help but be transformed as well. It was truly an “interdependent process”⁶ that allowed for mutual transformation between leadership and community.

⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2011), xiv-xv.

⁶ Eloy Anello, Joan Hernandez, May Khadem, *Transformative Leadership: Developing the Hidden Dimension* (Houston: Harmony Equity Press, 2014), 58.

The interplay between my specific ministry context, and the wider insights of theology, philosophy, leadership development, organizational systems, and the concepts of hospitality helped the parish churches to explore the possibility of being communities of theology and transformation.⁷

Research Question

At the heart of this research was a desire to know if the leadership interventions that took place across Stormont Deanery helped the parish churches become more open to change and transformation. Specifically, did the introduction of Sacred Hospitality principles within the life and leadership of the parishes involved help them in becoming more open to transformation? If so, could a framework be developed from the insights of those who experienced interventions to guide other rural parish church leaders? The interventions took place in the Anglican Parish of North Dundas, the Anglican Parish of South Dundas, and the Eastern area of Stormont Deanery. This project grew out of a wish to understand the possible causes of parish decline, and the deterioration of relationships between the parish church and the wider community. This thesis worked towards gaining insight into some of the causes of these problems, and exploring possible solutions. The interventions within each of the sites had already begun when this project started. Because of this, this project's focus was to investigate the results of interventions that had already happened, or were in the process of occurring.

⁷ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do about It* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1-2.

Reflexivity and Bias

Before the project is described, it is important to reflect on what might have been assumed, value-wise, throughout the project itself. This is the process of reflexivity, as defined by Ann Cunliffe, “Questioning what we, and others, might be taking for granted – what is being said and not said – and examining the impact this has or might have.”⁸

At the self-reflexive level⁹ there were a number of subjective values that I brought to this project. With my experience within the church, as well as having a parent who is a parish priest, my value system has been shaped to assume various things about parish life. I am someone who assumes that parish members will be regularly active, and deeply engaged within the life of the church. I assume that the church is a high priority within the life of its members. Because of these things, I assume that theological reflection and integration are a regular practice for church members. Finally, similarly to how Cunliffe describes, I have an, “intersubjective ontology: a way of thinking about who we are in the world that is based on the belief that we are not separate individuals...but we are always in relation with others...”¹⁰

At the same time, I also belong to an institution that makes some assumptions. This requires some critically-reflexive¹¹ thought as to what might be impacting this project. The Anglican Diocese of Ottawa is an institution that seems to make several assumptions about its membership: that a diocesan value of “we” is shared by members of the diocese; that concepts of

⁸ Cunliffe, Ann. “On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner Redux: What Does It Mean to *Be Reflexive*.” *Journal of Management Education* Vol. 40(6) (2016). Pp 741.

⁹ Cunliffe, Ann. “On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner Redux: What Does It Mean to *Be Reflexive*.” *Journal of Management Education* Vol. 40(6) (2016). Pp 741.

¹⁰ Cunliffe, Ann. “On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner Redux: What Does It Mean to *Be Reflexive*.” *Journal of Management Education* Vol. 40(6) (2016). Pp 742.

¹¹ Cunliffe, Ann. “On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner Redux: What Does It Mean to *Be Reflexive*.” *Journal of Management Education* Vol. 40(6) (2016). Pp 741.

“what it means to be Anglican” are shared by parish members; and that the current structures and leadership models are capable of maintaining healthy, reciprocal relationships between the institutional church, and the people within the parishes.

These assumed values have influenced this thesis project in two important ways. I gave a heavy focus to literature that embraces the values of deep membership participation, and a common identity as a collective. As well, I focused on literature and leadership interventions that promote open systems. The alternative, or an argument for closed system communities, was not explored in any great length.

While these elements do not invalidate the research, they should be kept in mind when interpreting, and considering the results.

It is also important to be transparent about the biases that I, as participant-observer, bring to this project and the interventions within the deanery. By bias, I simply mean that my life experience will have developed certain lenses through which I see the world, and these need to be transparently named, and bracketed, so that I may engage the data as objectively as possible.¹²

As a “cradle Anglican” whose mother is also an Anglican priest, I have always felt at home in the church, specifically the Anglican Parish of South Dundas. After my parents’ separation, my mother and I attended this parish, where we were able to begin the healing process after our family split. It is the very place where I made several deep and lasting friendships, and also the place where I first encountered evangelical Christianity. These experiences have led to me having a deep attachment to the parish church. Now, as a full-time

¹² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (California: Sage, 2013) 83.

priest, my employment depends on the parish church surviving. These experiential and financial attachments to the parish church mean that I have a vested interest in the church finding a way to overcome decline.

My exposure to evangelical Christianity was not always a positive one. I appreciated the emotional connection it introduced me to with regards to faith, however I had several extremely negative experiences with the social and theological conservatism that came along with that group within the parish. These experiences allowed me to develop a deep passion for ensuring the Church would always be a safe place for people on the margins. However, it also developed another bias within me: I struggle to respect conservatism, especially evangelical conservatism both socially and theologically. I feel that it is a worldview based on fear, and that fear limits the acceptance and hospitality needed to bring about the Kingdom of God. Fear leads to death, not life. Because of this, the sources of wisdom selected for this project do not take into consideration the reflections of conservative evangelical authors who have looked at the problem of decline to any large extent.¹³

Finally, I consider myself to be an optimistic agnostic. Because of this, I instinctively gravitate towards the voices of social sciences as an authority over the voices of theology and tradition. Because of this, I needed to be intentional around my engagement with the theological voice within this project to make sure it was given the space needed for a D.Min. project.

I chose to engage this project through the lens of a Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, Richard Osmer. His framework of the hermeneutical spiral¹⁴

¹³ For example, Rick Warren has several publications around parish and personal development, see Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Every Church Is Big in God's Eyes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995)

¹⁴ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 11.

and the use of language in his seminal book on practical theology synthesize the complexities of deep theological thought and practice, such as the four movements of the late theologian Don Browning,¹⁵ and present them in a format and language that can be understood and appreciated by many of the people in parish churches. In making the material more accessible, Osmer makes it possible for people living within the ministry context to enter fully into the role of communal theological practitioners. At the same time, it encourages those who are comfortable with a traditional academic setting and dialogue to be so familiar with the material that they can speak plainly about it without lessening its depth and impact.

To reiterate, this work is about ministerial practice. In my experience, those who make decisions that impact the people who attend parish churches, and the communities they serve, do so from the position of, “the theology side of the continuum... [between theology and practical ministry]”¹⁶ While the theological perspective is a foundational voice of wisdom for Christian ministry, other voices of insight must be present for effective discernment, such as lived human experience, and insights from other disciplines. Practical theology is interested in ministerial practice, as lived experience and wisdom have insights to share, and the results of our theological decisions have real life application and impact. However, it is not only Osmer’s accessibility that makes his framework suitable. The hermeneutical spiral asks important questions.¹⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, the questions asked by Osmer frame the research project in an effective manner and open avenues of exploration.

¹⁵ When describing Browning’s four movements, Descriptive Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology, and Strategic Practical Theology, to groups at each intervention site, parishioners quickly suggested that the language was confusing or intimidating. The groups were much more receptive to Osmer’s four movements using the descriptors of, “What’s going on? What’s really going on? What should be going on? What do we do about it?”

¹⁶ James D. Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1995) xi.

¹⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one of this project addresses Osmer's first two questions, "What is going on? What is really going on?"¹⁸ The first part of this chapter focuses on the "descriptive" aspect of the "descriptive-empirical" task as it describes the problematic situation through the locally lived experiences of the three intervention sites. The second part of the chapter focuses on the interpretative task as it looks at the underlying causes of church decline through a number of lenses that include the impact of cultural shifts on mainline churches. The concepts of open systems and closed systems are introduced to help uncover why some parish churches find faithful and effective transformation to be a struggle.

Chapter two introduces the frameworks of Sacred Hospitality and Becoming Transformative Community as a way of understanding and interpreting the leadership interventions. As Osmer explains when describing the Interpretive Task, "skillful map readers must learn to choose a map that is suitable...".¹⁹ Sacred Hospitality will be described in detail as it will be the map that invites us to move toward becoming Transformative Community. The framework of Transformative Community as an "open system", that is faithful to the Christian tradition, and open to revelation through reciprocal relationships with the communities it services, will be presented as a goal towards which parish churches should strive. The concept of transformative leadership will also be explored as a way for practitioners to be effective leaders within this community framework.

Chapter three details leadership interventions within the parish intervention sites. Each location will be examined separately: North Dundas, South Dundas, and East Stormont. The

¹⁸ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

interventions themselves were part of my ongoing leadership within these ministry contexts, and not specifically designed as part of the research project. For this project I wanted to discover if my interventions had helped to enable each of parish communities to become more open to transformation so they could move towards becoming Transformative Community. Here the research question becomes clear: Does the intentional introduction of Sacred Hospitality principles within the life and practices of rural parish churches help them move towards becoming Transformative Community? And if so, how might these principles be introduced into further leadership interventions?

Chapter four presents the research method and design selected to answer the research question itself: did the leadership interventions helped parish churches become more open to change and transformation? It details the responses of the participants as they describe their experiences of the leadership interventions, and their insights on the interventions' effectiveness with regards to helping the parish communities become more open to transformation. The method takes a phenomenological approach when interpreting the data provided by the participants through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. While this section emphasizes the "empirical" element of the descriptive-empirical task, it is still very much a part of deep, priestly listening. The responses of the participants constitute an important part of the descriptive-empirical task as described by Osmer.²⁰ It is by being attentive to what is going on, or has gone on within the lives of the participants from each intervention site that viable options for parish leaders may begin to surface.²¹

²⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

²¹ Ibid.

Chapter five will combine the insights from the lived experiences of the participants, the insights from various disciplines, and the wisdom of the Christian tradition into dialogue with each other. This will address Osmer's third question, "What ought to be going on?"²², also known as the normative task. It is here that the project will engage in what Swinton and Mowat call "mutual critical correlation."²³ This is the bringing together of "an interpretation of the religious experience and the contemporary situation in a way that enables both to engage in critical and potentially transformative dialogue."²⁴ In this chapter I chose to use a model of theological reflection as laid out by the Whiteheads. While Osmer does discuss the bringing together of different lenses and perspectives with regards to discernment, the Whiteheads provide a more concrete and specific style of doing so. In their view, the three specific voices are Christian tradition, experience, and culture. These are the same three lenses which were used for this thesis project, and so it seemed appropriate to use a method of reflection that clearly named the use of those three lenses.

Chapter six addresses Osmer's final movement, the pragmatic task: "What do we do?"²⁵ Using insights from the leadership interventions themselves, as well as the wisdom from other disciplines, several recommendations will be made through the lens of theological, pastoral, and practical implications. These suggested changes will impact the levels of parish churches, diocesan structures, and seminary/training institutions.

²² Ibid., 11.

²³ John Swinton, Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006) 74.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

In conclusion, I propose that the findings of this research show that there is value, such as encouraging parish churches to become more open to transformation, in embodying the principles of Sacred Hospitality within parish leadership interventions.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have strived to honour theological integrity, respecting the voices and insights of other disciplines, and the lived reality of parishioners within the ministry context. This work seeks to offer a way forward for parishes and practitioners who are searching for an antidote to parish decline, so that it can be addressed in ways that meet the changing needs of each generation while allowing the parish church to maintain an authentic Christian identity.

Chapter One – Context

“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’”²⁶

Introduction

As described in the introduction, I have been working with rural parish churches since 2008, and moreover, parish churches that were experiencing both a decline in financial resources and parish membership, to the point where parish church ministry and presence was no longer sustainable. During that time, my work with three intervention sites resulted in several questions related to the topic of parish decline: Is this problem happening elsewhere? What are some of the causes of decline? What can parish churches do to address the problem of decline? What are the obstacles that prevent parishes from effectively addressing the issue of decline?

In this chapter, Osmer’s first movements of the hermeneutical spiral will be described, and the questions raised by participant-observation within the three intervention sites will be explored. In this chapter the emphasis of the descriptive-empirical task will be on the descriptive portion. The two elements, descriptive and empirical, will be separated in order to allow for the goal and structure of this research project. The second element, empirical, will be the task of chapter four, as the empirical data gathered is the experiences of participants. It is empirical data, but it is also the place for deep listening and attentiveness.

To begin the process of attentiveness, the intervention sites themselves will be explained in detail. The problem of decline will be described from the wider perspectives of the Anglican

²⁶ Luke 21: 5-6, NRSV

Church of Canada, as well as the perspective of mainline churches within North America. Three authors will be used to demonstrate the social changes that have paved the way for change within a Western context, and the potential causes for decline. Moreover, some of the ineffective attempts to address these social changes will be examined, as they give insight into obstacles and barriers to effectively navigating these social changes. Finally, a different option for navigating social change will be presented, and an alternative framework for parish churches will be proposed.

What's Going On? – Osmer's First Movement

Before any viable solutions can be proposed, more information must be gathered. This chapter looks at the issue of parish decline through a number of lenses to find what is really going on with respect to parish decline. This is not empirical, but rather, descriptive. The empirical element of this movement will be discussed in chapter four.

As discussed in the introduction, this project is rooted in practical theology, and as such, follows the hermeneutical circle of Osmer.²⁷ This first step of information gathering is what Osmer refers to as the “descriptive-empirical task.”²⁸ Simply stated, we need to be mindful of “gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.”²⁹ How and why information is gathered matters. As Osmer says, pastoral leaders do not just gather information to solve a problem.³⁰ They are engaged in deep pastoral listening to the concerns and experiences of members of the community they serve.

²⁷ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

This question [what's going on] lies at the very heart of the descriptive-empirical task of practical theological interpretation. Yet it is important to view this task as broader than gathering information in the face of problematic or crisis situations...It has to do with the quality of attentiveness congregational leaders give to people and events in their everyday lives. This is helpfully explored in terms of a spirituality of presence.³¹

This is precisely why the gathering of descriptive information is the task of this chapter, while chapter four will look at the data from the participant experience. While their experiences are empirical research data, the data is also their personal experience, and as such should be given proper attentiveness. The manner that community members, especially congregational leaders, are attentive to one another matters. A spirituality of presence requires the leader to relate to others:

...with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness. Such attending opens up the possibility of an I-Thou relationship in which others are known and encountered in all their uniqueness and otherness, a quality of relationship that ultimately depends on the communion – creating presence of the Holy Spirit.³²

This level of attentiveness is not always easy to accomplish consistently. Distractions, deadlines, or business can take the best intentions of spiritual presence and derail them into simply being a task to accomplish or rushing to judgement.³³ While this may seem like a regular but minor issue in the life of congregational leadership, it is essential that the congregational leader put every effort into making sure that parish members have their full and deep attention. Osmer asserts the importance of this first task in the hermeneutical circle:

Ultimately, the descriptive-empirical task of practical theological interpretation is grounded in a spirituality of presence. It is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. This poses certain challenges that congregational leaders must face up to...Struggling with these kinds of issues lies at the heart of a spirituality of presence. It is a matter of opening ourselves to the forming and transforming Spirit of God who remakes us in the image of Christ within his body.

³¹ Ibid, 33.

³² Ibid, 34.

³³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

Unless we first learn to attend, we cannot really lead.³⁴

In this section, the context of each intervention site will be explored, in detail, through the task of Osmer's first movement.

Context

The study of ministry took place within Stormont Deanery (Anglican Diocese of Ottawa). Three intervention sites were involved in this project: the Anglican Parish of North Dundas (Winchester, Chesterville, South Mountain, Crysler), South Dundas (Morrisburg, Iroquois, Riverside Heights), and the "East Stormont Consultation" (Long Sault, Cornwall, Lancaster, Maxville, Hawkesbury, Vankleek Hill). It should also be noted that I served as the Rector of both North Dundas (2008-2015) and South Dundas (2015-Present).

North Dundas Site

In 2008, I was sent to the parish of North Dundas, a community with a population of just over 11,000 people, most of whom are senior citizens. It is predominantly a farming community; however, it is also becoming a "bedroom community" for those working in Ottawa. It is worth noting that generally speaking, the population of North Dundas is born and raised within the territorial boundaries, and individuals do not pursue further education after high school.³⁵

Before my arrival, I was given a mandate from the Bishop of Ottawa to complete the amalgamation process that had started several years prior. By the end of the late 1980s, the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Statistics Canada. 2017. *North Dundas, TP [Census subdivision], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed April 20, 2020).*

parish leadership began to discuss what it might look like if the parish was reduced from four congregations (Winchester, Chesterville, South Mountain, Crysler) and merged into one building that offered ministry to the whole parish. This idea became even more prevalent after the church in Crysler was vandalized, and subsequently demolished in the early to mid 1990s. However, the process stalled as several parishioners from each congregation disagreed on the proper way forward. Some felt that all the buildings should be sold and a new building constructed, giving a fresh start for everyone. Others felt that their current church building would be a perfectly fine place for everyone else, so parishioners should flock to one and leave the unused buildings to be sold. This fed into a long-standing competition between two of the villages who often felt that “the other village” was treated with preference. Because of this, the idea stalled until the arrival of The Rev. Brian Kauk in the mid to late 1990s.

For the next decade, the parish slowly decided that South Mountain and Chesterville would close. South Mountain went first and then sold the property. Chesterville closed their doors but never got around to a deconsecration service. Upon my arrival in 2008, there were two remaining buildings (Winchester and Chesterville). Funds had been set aside from the sale of South Mountain to begin the new project, and the congregation was anxious due to the tension of an unfulfilled goal. They seemed exhausted by the emotional drama that had played out within the congregations with regards to competing villages, and were uncertain as to what the next steps should be. They were stuck, and needed to find a way to become unstuck. Time was running out. The Bishop was very clear that this needed to be solved in an efficient manner, as the number of attendees had diminished due to parish deaths, and some members had left as a response to their churches being closed. The parish needed to create a vision and direction that could be embraced by the congregation and supported by the wider community. However, the

relationship between the parish church and the wider community had stagnated, begging the question: what did the wider community of North Dundas need from their church?

South Dundas Site

I was sent to the parish of South Dundas in 2015. During my meeting with the Bishop, he explained that South Dundas was having similar problems to the parish of North Dundas, and given the outcomes of the North Dundas project, he asked that I go and see if a similar leadership intervention might be helpful in their current predicament. When I arrived, I discovered that the parish had already started some of their own internal assessment work. With the recent retirement of the previous rector, the parish decided to sit down and have an honest conversation about their experiences and hopes.

In the 15 years prior to my arrival, the parish had gone through three priests. The first had left after a short time due to family struggles. The second left after two years because of his theological disagreement with the diocesan stance on same sex blessings. The third had come in with a mandate to “just love the parish,” however, it didn’t end up being an easy time together, and so the Bishop “invited” her to retire. During the tenure of the third priest, the parish brought in a counselor to work with the congregants who were struggling. Feedback from the parish revealed that the first two clergy implied their removal from the church was baseless and at the will of the Bishop. As for the third priest, several parishioners reported having felt bullied. It was also felt as though members of the congregation had developed “toxic” and destructive behaviours inside and outside of the church that were causing some major social problems.³⁶

³⁶ In one instance the head of the parish Pastoral Care Team was heard to be describing the details of someone’s private pastoral challenges in a very loud voice what at a public restaurant, while that other parishioner was at the same restaurant! I received this information from a detailed report from the churchwardens upon my arrival.

For their internal assessment, the parish put together a *Dreams to Reality* research team that gave the parish space to discuss what their hopes for the future were, what they wanted to see in the parish, and what their priorities and values were. This internal consultation resulted in the development of a parish vision/mission statement of “Exploring Faith and Serving the World God Loves.” The parish named that their three priorities for the community were liturgy, education programs, and outreach to the wider community. As they remembered what researcher and president of LifeWay Christian Resources, Thom Rainer, calls “the good old days,”³⁷ they recalled a time when the music programs, and well led, creative liturgies drew a Sunday attendance of over 200 people each week. They remembered when their education programs were attended by 50-70 participants from their own congregation, from other churches, and people with no religious affiliation. As well, they remembered how effective and robust their outreach programs for the wider community had been. The thing is, the memories were accurate.³⁸ With this in mind, and with the hopes that the successes of the past might provide much needed insights for the faithful discernment of the future, the parish created a *Dreams to Reality* Taskforce to further explore a way forward for the parish.”

Dreams to Reality Research and Results

The taskforce began to meet shortly before my arrival and their work described several issues that began between the past parish clergy and the parish itself. Parishioners did not feel

³⁷ Thom S. Rainer., *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 18.

³⁸ Confirmed by diocesan statistical returns and parish notes from the clergy team at the time.

welcome or safe within the church. Volunteers felt unappreciated, and at times, bullied. Consequently, this led to a breakdown in worship,³⁹ education programs,⁴⁰ and community outreach⁴¹. There were also times when the parish priest refused to let certain programs run in the church, which compounded the situation. The parish issues, as just described, created a setting where the relationship between the parish and community had deteriorated significantly. Without worship that resonated for the members, people left the parish and new members stopped coming. As education and programming lost quality, or stopped altogether, people began to meet in each other's houses, or simply found other places to go to meet their spiritual needs. Without the volunteer support to provide quality outreach programs, the wider community moved on to other sources of support. During this time, repeated attempts to give feedback to clergy leadership about the damage that was happening were either ignored or strongly opposed. It became a closed community with no space to heal or change. The parish had moved from an open and welcoming community, to being, what Rainer describes as "a fortress."⁴²

In 2015, the parish was attempting to choose a direction for the parish church to move towards; to determine the necessary changes (renovations, staffing, liturgy, etc.) that would be required, and what sort of ministry it could offer. In short, it was looking to find a way to respond to the consequences of a stagnant parish life, and its diminished role within the wider

³⁹ New worship leaders were not offered training on how to lead worship effectively. Veteran worship leaders were no longer scheduled to lead worship. As well, the praise band of 12 members was reduced to one person as others left because of the conflict within the church.

⁴⁰ Adult education programs such as Alpha, Living the Questions, Via Media, etc. were stopped altogether. Outside members were no longer invited to collaborate on what kind of education programs would be offered.

⁴¹ Aging and illness removed some of the primary outreach leaders. The outreach that remained, Martha's Kitchen, moved from being a drop in lunch for those in need, to being more of a social club where you needed to know someone to be invited. The new leadership ran the lunch club as a restaurant, and not an outreach meal. This resulted in the cost of food skyrocketing, and depleting the finances to provide outreach tools such as groceries, counseling services, etc.

⁴² Rainer., *Autopsy*, 27.

community. The parish was stuck between wanting to move forward and revitalize; however, it did not know how to do so, nor how to manage the social and emotional baggage it had accumulated over the years. In order to become unstuck, the parish needed to think and act differently than it had done in the recent past.

East Stormont Deanery Site

In January 2017, the Regional Dean and Archdeacon of the Deanery of Stormont asked me to facilitate a conversation with five parishes in the Eastern part of the deanery (Long Sault, Cornwall, Glengarry, Hawkesbury, and Vankleek Hill). For several months leading up to this request, the rectors of these parishes had been discussing the similar experiences and contexts within their parishes. The number of parishioners were declining. Finances were at a level that could not sustain the buildings or ministries for much longer. Even in the cases where the local communities were seeing positive development in population and community services, the churches had been unable to find a way to tap into these potential new resources.

Cornwall is considered to be one of the oldest churches in the diocese, and in the country. They spoke about having a long legacy of being the hub of the community, a place of traditional Anglican worship, and being a place of outreach for those in need. They also spoke about their current financial struggles given the cost of their building, the sharp decline in their attendance, and the cost of staff for the parish.

Long Sault is considered to be a “newer” church. They were built after the flooding of the St. Lawrence Seaway (1954-1958)⁴³ and were intended to be the Anglican presence within the

⁴³ The impact of this flooding cannot be overestimated. The loss of community villages, homes, farms, cemeteries, and landmarks has left a wound that community members still talk about today. It also instilled a deep distrust of institutions, and the possibility of change being a positive thing.

new town. They had been sustainable both financially and within their ministry. However, as the development of the wider community had grown stagnant, and social changes came into play, they were now running a deficit and wondered how long they could survive.

The parish of Glengarry was made up of the communities of Lancaster and Maxville. In the early 2000s they became one parish as “an arranged marriage”⁴⁴ that was set up by the Bishop. For the first five to seven years, things worked well. Finances were solid. Attendance was good. Community ministry was effective. The winds of change began to blow when several different clergy came and went during a short period of time. This, combined with the decline of the village of Maxville, resulted in the churches no longer attracting the same number of new members. Some major parish families had died off or moved. Some of the clergy did not offer the same community ministry that the others had. With all of this, the parish believed they had six months left before they would have to close their doors. To top it off, Lancaster is incredibly isolated, finding itself in the middle of a summer campsite, on a service road next to the 401 highway.

While Hawkesbury and Vankleek Hill are two parishes that are geographically close together, joining under one roof would prove difficult due to the amount of “history” they have with one another. With the rise of the Francophone community in Hawkesbury, and the subsequent decline of the Anglophone community, the Anglican Church was not seeing the same level of giving or attendance as it once had. As the rector of the parish and deanery Archdeacon described, “We are known as L’église Anglaise.”

⁴⁴ Turn of phrase from their rector at the time.

When asked about their “line in the sand,” they vehemently expressed wishes to save their church buildings and congregations, but had no idea how to revitalize their communities or connect their parish ministry with the communities around them. For Lancaster, the issues seemed to stem from too many parish funerals and a secluded location. Cornwall suffered from a membership in freefall, financial decline, and an unmanageable building. Others struggled with the change of social demographics, and were unsure how to reconnect with the new reality. In the quest to find a way forward, they were immobilized by a plethora of difficulties.

The Diocesan Context

The parish interventions explored in this project did not happen in a vacuum. While the parishes within the deanery were exploring paths for the future, the Anglican Diocese of Ottawa was engaged in a similar project. In 2013, The Ven. Dr. Peter John Hobbs began a diocese-wide project called *Embracing God’s Future*.⁴⁵ It was in response to problems spanning the diocese bore striking similarities to the parish problems being observed within the parishes of the Deanery of Stormont. His question was, “What is God’s dream for the church?” and it attempted to consult, from a grassroots parish level, in order to find a way forward. It looked to answer questions such as “Who are we called to be?” and “What are we called to do?” The results of the project revealed that the church was called to be rooted in God, grounded in a biblical, sacramental and liturgical tradition, diverse and open, to courageously embrace change, to be in relationship with the world, serving collaboratively, and loving God and neighbour.⁴⁶ In terms of

⁴⁵ http://media.wix.com/ugd/7084d2_f8b214a5288f47fa81511ec1e262ac1b.pdf,
<http://www.ottawa.anglican.ca/EGF.html>

⁴⁶ http://www.ottawa.anglican.ca/EGF2014/Section-4-Embracing-God_s-Future-A-Strategic-Roadmap-for-the-Diocese-of-Ottawa.pdf

action, *Embracing God's Future* states that the diocese is called to embrace new ways of being church.⁴⁷ This means tackling “issues with buildings, engaging the world, being people of lifelong formation, practicing hospitality, and having open and transparent communication.”⁴⁸

While it is important to understand what is taking place in the specific local context of the intervention sites, determining if similar issues are occurring elsewhere is also significant. If so, what impact does the work of other bodies, at the level of the Diocese, have on the daily life and perspective of the local parish? In order to gather data for the *Embracing God's Future* project, the diocese spent significant time consulting with lay people across the diocese. Parishioners were able to give their feedback and insight through group meetings that were held in each deanery. These meetings were parish events where parish leadership would either record the feedback from participants, or collect it via online surveys. The clergy of the diocese were also involved in a “clergy day” where they engaged in the same data gathering process.

It is important to note this, as the diocesan work to develop a new vision and mission for the diocese could very much impact the work that was already going on at the parish level. It also shows that given the outcomes of the *Embracing God's Future* project, there was a strongly supported preference to work towards change, be outward focused, and embrace church transformation. If the options available were either transform or isolate, the Diocese very clearly chose change over isolation.

Canadian Anglican Context

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

With the experiences encountered within the intervention sites, questions began to emerge about how wide-ranging the problem of decline might be. In 2019, the Anglican Journal printed an article that described information on the topic of decline that the Council of General Synod (CoGS) was wrestling with. The opening paragraphs are straight to the point:

The Anglican Church of Canada's first reliably-collected set of statistics since 2001 show the church running out of members in little more than two decades if the church continues to decline at its current rate, the Council of General Synod (CoGS) heard Friday, Nov. 9. "We've got simple projections from our data that suggest that there will be no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040," the Rev. Neil Elliot, a priest for the diocese of Kootenay seconded in 2016 by the national church to collect a new set of statistics, told CoGS.⁴⁹

Today, at the national level, the Anglican Church of Canada is struggling with similar concerns to our rural Deanery of Stormont. In early 2020, the Anglican Journal printed another article that suggested these problems were not new for the national church, and went one step further by giving an "end date" to the national church if the problem of decline was not effectively addressed:

According to Elliot's report, the data are the first 'complete and mostly reliable' set of statistics collected by the church since around 2001. In a November presentation to CoGS, Elliot asserts that the data shows the church running out of members in little more than two decades if it continues to decline at its current rate. 'We've got simple projections from our data that suggest

⁴⁹ "Wake –up call: CoGS hears statistics report on church membership decline." The Anglican Journal, November 9th, 2019. January 16th, 2020. <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/wake-up-call-cogs-hears-statistics-report-on-church-membership-decline/>

that there will be no members, attenders or givers in the Anglican Church of Canada by approximately 2040,' he said.⁵⁰

A similar observation has been articulated by Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby, who writes, “Viewing religion across Canada these days is like viewing devastation after some tragedy has hit. It’s as if a fire of secularization has devastated much of what, through the early 1960s, was a flourishing religious forest.”⁵¹ According to Bibby, between 1945 and 2000, church attendance across Canada dropped by approximately 35%.⁵² The findings at the national level suggest that not only is the problem of decline an issue across the country for Anglicans, but that there is an urgent need to address this problem.

What’s Really Going On? – The Interpretive Task

Questions around parish church challenges are not new. However, if we are to find a way forward and develop solutions to the problem, we must first understand what is really going on, and why. It is at this point that we enter the second movement of Osmer’s hermeneutical circle, the interpretive task.⁵³

As Osmer describes, “Our primary goal in the interpretive task is to draw on theories...to better understand and explain particular...situations.”⁵⁴ This practice of gathering information to

⁵⁰ “Gone by 2040?” The Anglican Journal, January 6th, 2020. January 25th, 2020.
<https://www.anglicanjournal.com/gone-by-2040/>

⁵¹ Reginald Bibby, *Resilient Gods* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2017), 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 79.

⁵⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 113.

be able to expand the ability of human capacity for thought and insight has always been part of the Christian practice. Osmer points out:

There has long been a link between the life of the mind and the spiritual life in the Christian tradition. It was no accident that monasteries were the great protectors of the liberal arts tradition of classical education after the fall of the Roman Empire. They gathered books to form libraries and served as centres of teaching and learning, and their greatest theologians portrayed intellectual growth as an integral part of the spiritual path to God.⁵⁵

The inclusion of other disciplines and fields of study as we try to interpret what is really going on within our problem at hand is essential. In this next section we will explore how widespread the problem of decline is, as well the potential causes of this problem.

What Underlies the Situation?

In order to put forward any kind of effective response towards the problems associated with decline, we need to know why it happens in the first place. In this section the social changes that occurred within the Western world will be explored so a fuller understanding of why decline at this time in history can be understood.

The Western Perspective – A Philosophical Lens

In order to better understand what is really going on with respect to general church decline, this study considers the unique changes in Western society in the last 500 years through a philosophical lens. Solutions to change resistance cannot be accurately developed until we have a clearer understanding of what has changed, and the impact those changes had upon parish churches. This thesis will draw upon the insights of authors that have explored the questions

⁵⁵ Ibid, 81.

around why this type of change has occurred. The works of authors such as Canadian philosopher and Professor Charles Taylor, as well as those of Professor and Pastoral Theologian Elaine Graham, address some of the reasons for these changes.

In his book, *A Secular Age*, Taylor asks the foundational question to begin to understand the problem at hand: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God [500 years ago]...while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”⁵⁶ To answer this question, Taylor makes a distinction between those who state that they believe in God versus those who state that they have no religion, or have at least left behind formal Christianity.⁵⁷ The reason for this distinction is that, while many may have left formal and organized religion behind, many people in the West still declare a belief in God.⁵⁸ As he describes:

Some of this shift is reflected in the rise in numbers of those who declare themselves to have no religion. But that doesn’t account for the substantial number of those who declare themselves still to believe in God, and/or to identify with some church, even though they stand at a much greater distance from it than the “diffused” Christians of a century ago. For instance, their views are more heterodox (God is often conceived more like a life force), and they no longer participate in many of the rites of passage, e.g., baptism and marriage...In other words, the falling off, or alienation, from the Church and from some aspects of orthodox Christianity has taken more the form of...” Christian nominalism”.⁵⁹

My own experience within 15 years of ministry resonates with what Taylor is describing here. Many of those who do still come for pastoral conversation and guidance have their own concepts of God, and how God interacts with their personal lives and within the world. It very often seems like an amalgamation of spiritual concepts from various religious traditions that can be found in a pluralistic society. To support this, it is worth noting that in the formal life of the congregations

⁵⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press, 2007), 25.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 520.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 520.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 520

within the leadership interventions, there were often baptisms and funerals for people who were not regular attendees or contributors. While not regular members of the congregation, these people very much claimed the building as “their church”.

Taylor describes that there have been three major changes over the span of the past 500 years, which have impacted the relationship between people and the Church: a movement from enchantment to disenchantment,⁶⁰ a change in social pressure to conform to a specific religious identity,⁶¹ and the emergence of a secular society.⁶² Each of these major changes has contributed to our current situation.

Enchantment to Disenchantment

Approximately 1500 years ago, the world was a very different place. How people understood the world, and its workings, is in stark contrast to modern thought and expectations. As Taylor states:

People lived in an “enchanted” world...The enchanted world in this sense is the world of spirits, demons, and the moral forces which our ancestors lived in. People who live in this kind of world don’t necessarily believe in God, certainly not in the God of Abraham, as the existence of countless “pagan” societies shows. But in the outlook of European peasants in 1500, beyond all the inevitable ambivalences, the Christian God was the ultimate guarantee that good would triumph or at least hold the plentiful forces of darkness at bay. Atheism comes close to being inconceivable in a world with these features.⁶³

What has vanished is the human belief that these positive or negative outcomes can be attributed to some sort of spiritual force within the world. In the 1500s, “God” was the force between negative and positive outcomes, whereas by the 19th century there were alternatives available;

⁶⁰ Ibid, 25-26.

⁶¹ Ibid, 42.

⁶² Ibid, 3.

⁶³ Ibid, 25-26.

people could choose to believe in options such as the developing answers from natural sciences, but as Taylor describes:

...people can be influenced towards one or the other, partly in terms of their views of science...for instance, when a naturalistic materialism is not only on offer, but presents itself as the only view compatible with the most prestigious intuition of the modern world, viz., science; it is quite conceivable that one's doubts about one's own faith, about one's ability to be transformed, or one's sense of how one's own faith is indeed, childish and inadequate, could mesh with this powerful ideology, and send one off along the path of unbelief, even though with regret and nostalgia.⁶⁴

With more advances by the natural sciences, and a social context that presents these discoveries as the only option for truth and discovery, it is understandable that how people viewed "God" and the role of the supernatural within the world shifted.

Social Expectations

The second change that Taylor describes revolves around the use of social pressure to conform to the religious belief and practices of the time. During the enchanted time of the 1500s, with the goal of the common good at the forefront, there was a high level of social pressure to conform to "orthodoxy".⁶⁵ As Taylor describes:

So we're all in this together. This has two consequences. First, it puts a tremendous premium on holding to the consensus. Turning "heretic" and rejecting this power, or condemning the practice as idolatrous, is not just a personal matter. Villagers who hold out, or even denounce the common rites, put the efficacy of these rites in danger, and hence pose a menace to everyone...As long as the common weal was bound up in collective rites, devotions, allegiances, it couldn't be seen just as an individual's own business that he break ranks, even less that he blaspheme or try to desecrate the rite. There was an immense common motivation to bring him back into line.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid, 28.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 43.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 42.

With the movement from an enchanted time to a disenchanted time, the pressure to conform is no longer a compelling reason. The well-being or common good of the community does not rely on the compliance and participation of each member to a specific religious orthodoxy. When social pressure is no longer a major motivator to participate in a specific religious way, people become free to make their own choices.

A Secular Time

The third change is that the modern era has entered a secular time. While the word secular can have a number of different meanings and definitions, Taylor defines “secular” as, “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”⁶⁷ Belief now has many options available, and there is no longer massive social pressure to adhere to any one specific option. Furthermore, there are limited or no consequences for the options that are chosen.

With this understanding that many people in the West have not stopped believing in the concept of God, and the fact that society now offers multiple options for people of spirituality and faith to choose from, we could ask: If people of faith can choose anything, why aren’t they choosing to come to churches on Sunday mornings?

Part of the answer to that question lies in the change from a modern world to a time of postmodernity. Elaine Graham describes this shift as a time of uncertainty; the philosophical mood of postmodernism is one in which we live. As she states:

Contemporary Western society has been characterized as one in which there is no longer a consensus of values. The assumptions and criteria by which Western science, politics

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

and philosophy have been guided for the past two hundred years, associated with the ideals of progress, humanism and reason have been discredited by critical voices which emphasize fragmentation, pluralism and scepticism...The philosophical mood of postmodernism is one of scepticism towards any notion of an eternal, metaphysical human nature⁶⁸

The work of Taylor and Graham provide a philosophical lens through which to view part of Osmer's first two questions around what is (really) going on with regards to the death of parish churches: the western world, and the expectations of its inhabitants, has changed.

This western philosophical lens helps bring understanding to why churches are dying off and encourages exploration of the reactions from institutional churches to these social shifts and changes. Many churches greeted this new time with fear-based reactions. A number of churches rooted themselves in an identity of rigid orthodoxy, and a desire to return to "the good old days": when life, and faith, was clear - black and white, and belief in sacred truth was absolute and universal. In a social context of skepticism and questioning, organizations and groups that become more rigid and inflexible may be able to "rally the troops" and retain like-minded people, but they will not be able to attract new members, or retain relevancy in the wider communities in which they find themselves. In a postmodern age, every viewpoint has an element of self-interest attached.⁶⁹ In rigid and inflexible communities, self-interest can threaten the safety and security of like-minded groups if that self-interest differs from the fundamental norms and beliefs. As well, institutions who rely on a "grand narrative" and a "one size fits all" approach, will find existing in a time where "grand narratives" have collapsed difficult on the best of days.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 1.

⁶⁹ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

However, as Graham claims, not everything about this postmodern time is “bad news” for the Christian church. Another element of postmodernity is a resurgence and yearning for the Sacred.⁷¹ Just as Taylor described, people are still interested in the concept of God and the Sacred. However, with a culture of fragmented values, and a number of options for spiritual people to choose from, it is not as straightforward for the Christian church nor the person of faith as it once was. Graham suggests that part of this rests on the fact that most theological work in the postmodern era has focused on philosophical and systematic theology, leaving the world of practical and pastoral theology largely ignored.⁷² Graham wonders:

Although the nature of Christian theological formation in a postmodern context has occupied some philosophical and systematic theologians, little interest has been shown from within the discipline of pastoral, or practical, theology. Yet the strategic question of what sources and norms inform purposeful Christian practice – in church and world – is as problematic as the purely philosophical implications of postmodernity. In the face of the collapse of the ‘grand narrative’ of modernity, what values may now inform purposeful Christian action and vision? Do Christian truth-claims make any coherent sense amidst the multiple narratives of the public domain? Can Christian communities respond to changing values and competing worldviews and construct a self-understanding that will sustain them through the challenges of the new millennium? These questions all concern the nature of Christian presence in the world, informed by traditions and conventions of faith, yet seeking anew to respond to the challenges of human need and ultimate value.

What is needed at this time is an examination and transformative praxis of the Church. It is only then that faithful Christian practice can find a way in a fragmented and pluralistic world.⁷³

Before we look at how churches should have responded to these social changes, it is important to look at how they did respond as the changes took place. Mistakes can be a helpful source of

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 3.

information, and it is with that in mind that we begin to explore how responses to a changing world played out in the life of the parish church.

The Ecclesial – Theological Perspective

While a philosophical lens from a Western perspective can provide some important insights, it does not tell the full story. It is also important to take a close look at how institutional churches responded to these changes to explore the origins of the issues leading to the slow death of the parish church.

On this smaller scale, from a Roman Catholic perspective, cultural anthropologist Gerald Arbuckle describes various challenges of our time:

Various members of the Church's hierarchy are so insistent on theological and apostolic orthodoxy or conformity within the Church that it is not the open society as desired by Pius XII, Vatican II and the statements of John Paul II. There are well-orchestrated attempts to restore the Church to the cultural ghetto or opposition-to-the-world mentality of the pre-Council times. Restorationism is an ill-defined, but none the less powerful, movement within the Church towards the uncritical reaffirmation of pre-Vatican II structures and attitudes in reaction to the stress resulting from the theological and cultural turmoil generated by the changes of the Council and the modern world at large...As long as this state of affairs exists there is what Pius XII above refer to as 'a fault, a weakness, a sickness' within the body of the Church.⁷⁴

One of the responses to the social and cultural changes, despite the perceived move of the Vatican II council towards openness, was to become closed off to differing thoughts, opinions, or theological diversity. Those who practiced restorationism were immersed in a church that believes "culture" to be "of the world", and that it should have no place in shaping the life of the church.

⁷⁴ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3-4.

These challenges are not limited to the Roman Catholic Church. From a Protestant standpoint, theologian John Cobb Jr states:

Our churches are sick. Statistical projections indicate that this is a sickness unto death. “Death” should not be taken literally. Great institutions rarely disappear without a trace. But we are moving from a situation in which we were not long ago thought of as “mainline” churches to one of marginality. To survive at the margin there is a danger that we will so change our character that what has been valuable in our churches will disappear. That is the ‘death’ that is to be feared.⁷⁵

However, while Cobb Jr. clearly states that the church is deathly sick, he adds another layer to the causes of the problem at hand. Not only are parish churches failing because they are unwilling to change, but a lack of passionate commitment among members makes navigating a time of change and conflict extremely difficult. Cobb Jr. states:

As a group and on the whole we are lukewarm. We do good things. We serve real needs of real people. But we inspire no passion. We no longer even call for primary commitment to the gospel that we purport to serve. We are quite content if, among the priorities of our members, Christian faith comes in third or fourth, after family and employer and nation perhaps. We accept still lower rankings from many of our members with little complaint, glad for the small favor of occasional attendance and financial contributions.⁷⁶

It is from this space that a church will be unable to accomplish much more than the already established patterns and routines. It will also be unable to understand the needs of the community from the perspective of faith, let alone make changes to ministry in order to meet them. The parish church is in survival mode, and that is not a healthy position from which to make major changes.

⁷⁵ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do about It* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1-2.

⁷⁶ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 3-4.

There are some commonalities in observing both the Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives. It appears there is a struggle where churches feel that their parish must choose. It can either stay “loyal to the faith” but be out of touch with the wider community, or it can engage with the wider community but risk upsetting its orthodox parishioners. Through this project, as described below, I have discovered that this does not need to be the case. It does not have to be an “A or B” situation; it can be an “A and B” situation. It is very possible to engage the wider community and culture while still maintaining an authentic Christian identity. Also, when looking to identify a “main culprit” among the causes of declining vitality and relevancy of parish churches within their community, Rainer sums it up in a clear fashion:

The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as a hero. They held on more tightly with each progressive year. They often clung to things of the past with desperation and fear. And when any internal or external force tried to change the past, they responded with anger and resolution: ‘We will die before we change.’ And they did.”⁷⁷

As the problem of decline becomes more fully understood, it appears that, to put it in straightforward terms, the western world changed dramatically over the span of several hundred years. In response to these changes, the needs of the people, and the type of relationship communities needed with their parish churches, changed as well. Parish churches seemed to respond in two general ways: they either resisted the changes of the world and became insular institutions that saw cultural change and diversity as a threat, or they embraced the changing culture to such an extent that they lost their core identity as a theological community that inspires passion. To focus on the primary cause, resistance to change and an unwillingness to let go of a golden-aged past leads to decline and death within the parish church.

⁷⁷ Rainer., *Autopsy*, 18.

At the same time, the church must maintain its identity as a theological community so that it does not become lukewarm, and can continue to inspire passion within the hearts of its membership.⁷⁸ The question then becomes: can a parish church be open to transformation alongside the communities it serves, while at the same time maintaining an authentic identity?

Embodying an inherently Canadian Protestant perspective, Reg Bibby adds other elements to consider with respect to church decline. From his research, he claims:

Two factors appear to have been central. The first key factor was a shift in immigration patterns. During the last few decades of the 20th century, Mainline Protestants in particular saw their immigration pipelines largely dry up. The Mainline Protestant immigration void was not filled up via births. Something had to give, and it did. The second key factor was the changing mindsets of Canadians, led by the Baby Boomers. Many began to see old things in new way – placing unprecedented importance on themes including diversity, gratification, and input.⁷⁹

With a lack of natural inflow of immigrants to prop up church numbers, the parish church found themselves needing to address the values and concerns of the people already in their midst. As the value systems of the Baby Boomers began to change society, the church's response had an important impact. As Bibby describes, "...any religion that didn't champion flexibility and freedom could expect to see its market share shrink."⁸⁰ At the same time, an institution that embraced change could struggle as well. The ability to maintain a unique identity and purpose was essential to this process. If not, as Bibby points out, "...religions that aligned themselves with social changes ran the risk of becoming indistinguishable from culture and...failing to tell the world something that the world was not already telling itself."⁸¹ With this observation we see the challenges that both Arbuckle and Cobb Jr. state above. Refusal to change leads to decline

⁷⁸ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 3-4.

⁷⁹ Bibby, *Resilient Gods*, 17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

and at the same time, embracing change without maintaining a unique identity also leads to an uninspired community that in turn, cannot inspire people to join and participate. Both challenges, the refusal to change and the need for a unique identity, can be viewed through the lens of organizational change as we search for a way forward.

Organizational Change

Senior MIT lecturer Otto Scharmer points out that we live in a time of “institutional failure”.⁸² As he describes:

Across the board, we collectively create outcomes that nobody wants. Yet the key decision makers do not feel capable of redirecting this course of events in any significant way. They feel just as trapped as the rest of us in what often seems to be a race to the bottom. The same problem affects our massive institutional failure: we haven’t learned to mold, bend, and transform our centuries-old collective patterns of thinking, conversing, and institutionalizing to fit the realities of today.⁸³

The church is simply one institution, among many, that is struggling with the problems of decline and death. The world changed, as well as the needs and expectations of the people living within wider communities. Because the church was either unwilling or unable to transform and adapt, it continued to produce products and outcomes that were no longer of interest to the wider community. Because of this disconnect, the wider community had no need to maintain relationships with parish churches and they fell away as a result.

For Scharmer, the institutions that we see failing are generally founded within two structures of functioning: premodern traditional, and modern industrial.⁸⁴ Given only two options, when the modern structure fails, the default is to then look at older models, or solutions

⁸² C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U* (Oakland, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2016), 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

from the past, and revert back to an older time. Scharmer puts forward that this way of operating is not the best way forward when there is a major change in social norms, values, ethics, and expectations.⁸⁵ Instead he proposes a shift towards a deeper and more creative source; something that brings people together to engage the power of their “authentic self”.⁸⁶ This allows people and organizations to work out of their greatest potential.

To accomplish this, people and organizations need to be willing to discard the singular, kneejerk ideology of basing solutions on past lessons, and instead be open to learning from the emerging future.⁸⁷ This requires a willingness to understand the current patterns of operation, and then intentionally break those patterns so new ones may emerge. To do so, Scharmer argues that people and organizations need to be aware of their “blind spot”, that is, “...the place from which we operate when we do something.”⁸⁸ This blind spot is the place from which all of our actions and decisions flow. Instead of having our place of action be rooted within the past, and thus repeating old patterns, organizations must be open to developing a place of action that is able to learn from the future; one that is emerging, or “presencing” as Scharmer names it.⁸⁹

In order to tap into this emerging future, Scharmer likens the process to being skilled at farming a field. Each field has two places to focus: the visible portion above the ground, and the invisible portion below the surface.⁹⁰ Scharmer states that social fields are similar, and that the social field is the “grounding condition” out of which emerges the things that become visible to us.⁹¹ Should the person tending to the field only focus on the topsoil, be it literal or figurative,

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁹¹ Ibid.

then they are not able to anticipate what the soil's needs will be, because they cannot see what is coming from the invisible section. In order to make effective choices and changes that are life giving to the field, the practitioner needs to be able to see what is coming from the non-visible section of the soil. To accomplish this, Scharmer states that there needs to be, "...[a] strategic leverage point for intentionally shifting the structure of the social field..."⁹² To find this point, the practitioner, or organization must work on cultivating the topsoil of the social field by putting their lever at the point of contact between the visible topsoil and the invisible soil beneath. This is the point of leverage and pre-sensing. In an ever-changing world, parish churches need to have the ability to see what is coming on the horizon. It is this ability to sense what is coming, or pre-sense, that allows a parish church to adapt and transform in appropriate ways to engage the ministry needs as they develop.

Organizational change expert Margaret Wheatley also speaks of the challenges facing organizations in a changing world. An unwillingness to change, adapt, and transform in the wake of social change results in dying organizations. Stagnant bodies do not maintain life. As Margaret Wheatley discusses:

Why do so many organizations feel lifeless? Why do projects take so long, develop ever greater complexity, yet too often fail to achieve any truly significant results?...Why does change itself, that event we're all supposed to be "managing," keep drowning us, relentlessly making us feel less capable and more confused? And why have our expectations for success diminished to the point that often the best we hope for is endurance and patience to survive the frequent disruptive forces in our organizational lives?⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 9.

⁹³ Margaret J. Wheatley., *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in A Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006) 3.

While Wheatley is discussing organizational change in a broad sense, what she describes seems remarkably like what Arbuckle and Cobb Jr. have each articulated in their own way, especially regarding institutional Christianity. In this case, the Anglican Church can sometimes get in our own way when it comes to exploring perceived problems. As Wheatley describes:

Organizations lack this kind of faith, faith that they can accomplish their purposes in varied ways and that they do best when they focus on intent and vision, letting forms emerge and disappear. We seem hypnotized by structures, and we build them strong and complex because they must, we believe, hold back the dark forces that threaten to destroy us. It's a hostile world out there, and organizations, or we who create them survive only because we build crafty and smart – smart enough to defend ourselves from the natural forces of destruction.⁹⁴

Wheatley's description of a lack of faith within the organization brings to mind those who responded so passionately to going back to the pre-Vatican II way of life, or as Taylor described, to the enchanted world of the 1500s where everything seemed predictable and understandable.⁹⁵ Here the institution is used as a fortress that, with enough effort and stubbornness, just might be able to withstand the tidal wave of change in a postmodern world. One of the problems with this kind of an organization is that the "problem" of change is not going away. It cannot be outlasted. Clinging to a fortress model institution will only make the outcome of death even more certain.

According to Wheatley, many of the systems in the western world have been structured around this fortress way of thinking.⁹⁶ As she describes:

Many of the organizations I experience are impressive fortresses. The language of defense permeates them: in CYA memo-madness; in closely guarded secrets and locked personnel files; in activities defined as "campaigns," "skirmishes," "wars," "turf battles," and the ubiquitous phrases of sports that describe everything in terms of offense and defense. Many organizations feel they have to defend themselves even against their employees with regulations, guidelines, time clocks, and policies and procedures for

⁹⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25

⁹⁶ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 18.

every eventuality.⁹⁷

Our organizational structures are built as self-protecting fortresses. It is no surprise that this way of building systems would make its way into our ecclesiastical organization.

Wheatley suggests that this is based on a level of fear that institutions seem to embody in their structures.⁹⁸ Several centuries ago, much like we heard from Taylor, the world imagined itself in a much different way. Wheatley describes this forgotten reality:

Three centuries ago, when the world was imagined as an exquisite machine set in motion by God – a closed system with a watchmaker father who then left the shop – the concept of entropy entered our collective consciousness. Machines wear down; they eventually stop... This is a universe, we feel, that cannot be trusted with its own processes for growth and rejuvenation. If we want progress, then we must provide the energy to reverse decay. By sheer force of will, because we are the planet's intelligence, we will make the world work. We will resist death.⁹⁹

Closed, fortress-like organizations are based on an energy of death. By being so closed off, they leave no room for new life to enter in, which goes against the natural order of life. These moments of tension, instead of being moments where death and decay take hold, can be moments of creative and life-giving energy. As Wheatley continues to describe:

Life is about creation. This ability of life to create itself is captured in a strange-sounding new word, *autopoiesis* (from Greek, meaning self-production or self-making). Autopoiesis is life's fundamental process for creating and renewing itself, for growth and change... A living system produces itself; it will change in order to preserve that self. Change is prompted only when an organism decides that changing is the only way to maintain itself.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid, 18.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 19.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 20.

Systems that are closed off have no room for the natural process of change and transformation to enter in and bring new life; this is part of why organizational systems do not survive. Systems that are open can harness the creativity needed for new life and rebirth. When it came to the intervention sites of this project, the findings showed that the communities that clung to rigid, or closed definitions of community were the ones to lose their buildings and die off. In contrast, the communities that opened themselves up to receiving feedback and creative ideas from the wider community were able to discover new ways of being a parish church, and foster the hope of new life within the parish. Now, lest someone worry that this is simply a sophisticated attempt at arguing for an “anything goes” solution within the church, it needs to be pointed out that Wheatley makes an important point about identity:

There is another important paradox in living systems: Each organism maintains a clear sense of its individual identity *within* a larger network of relationships that helps shape its identity. Each being is noticeable as a separate entity, yet it is simultaneously part of a whole system. While we humans observe and count separate selves, and pay a great deal of attention to the differences that seem to divide us, in fact we survive only as we learn how to participate in a web of relationships. Autopoiesis describes a very different universe, one in which all organisms are capable of creating a “self” through their intimate engagement with all others in their system.¹⁰¹

As Wheatley describes, it is quite possible to be an open system, which can transform and bring about new life, while still maintaining a unique identity. There is no need to fear that by becoming open to the influence of other “systems”, the unique identity of an organization, specifically a Christian church, will be lost. It is quite possible to be open to others and still have an authentic Christian identity. At the same time, the willingness to be open and actively engaging to the wider community allows an organization to “cultivate the soil” and enter the pre-sensing that Scharmer describes. The insights of Scharmer and Wheatley are important. While

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 20.

there has been dramatic change and decline within the mainline Anglican Church in Canada, hope is not lost.

While detailing the dramatic decline of mainline churches, sociologist Reginald Bibby also points out there are fascinating things happening that give room for hope and exploration. Not all Canadian churches have experienced such sharp decline.¹⁰² Evangelical Protestant churches, as well as some Roman Catholic dioceses have not had the same problem with decline.¹⁰³ As well, non-Christian faiths are growing in membership across Canada.¹⁰⁴ Bibby suggests that part of the reason for this is a surge of immigration coming to Canada, and that immigrant population can result in Christianity, as well as other religions experiencing “explosive growth”, if they are able to open themselves to the immigrant population and their needs.¹⁰⁵ In order to position themselves to benefit from this potential growth, the Anglican Church within Canada, and its parish churches, need to be open to welcoming people from other cultures and countries. They also need to be willing to become invested within the lives of an immigrant population. The ability to connect with the wider communities that it serves is essential for the parish church if it wishes to address the problem of decline.

Conclusion

¹⁰² Bibby, *Resilient Gods*, 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 4.

In this chapter we began Osmer's two initial movements to understand the perceived problem of decline, and to expand an understanding of why decline is happening to parish churches. The literature discussed seems clear: open systems bring in life; closed systems die off. Or, as Bibby so succinctly describes:

In light of such findings, one is hard pressed to escape the conclusion that the problems of organized religion in the post-1960s were tied, in large part, to the fact that Canada's groups too often did a poor job of responding to the changing family roles and needs of Boomers. As a result, most people continued to place a measure of importance on faith and retain their psychological and emotional ties with religious traditions. But, on weekend, sizable numbers found better things to do with their time.¹⁰⁶

If a parish church wishes to be a vibrant community in a postmodern world, then being open to transformation through relationships with other members of the wider community organism is essential. This creates parish churches where members can develop a deep level of passion and commitment.

The problem of parishes being resistant to change, with regards to finding ways to address the challenges of being church within a postmodern culture is an important one. To fail in this mission equates to the parish risking stagnation and dying off. This would result in spiritual trauma for the communities of faith, and an added burden of community outreach falling on already strained secular community agencies. This chapter highlighted the need for parish churches to be open to transformation, but also maintain an authentic Christian identity.

In the next chapter a literature review of the concepts and principles of Sacred Hospitality will be explored. The work of Christian monastic communities, that have engaged in inter-religious dialogue since the 1960s, holds some important insights into how leadership

¹⁰⁶ Bibby, *Resilient Gods*, 32.

practitioners might approach this challenge. The leadership interventions within each of the three sites worked to promote openness, while maintaining Christian identity. The principles of Sacred Hospitality serve as a basis of understanding for these leadership interventions. While the concepts of Sacred Hospitality have been founded within the lives and experiences of monastic communities, we will also be looking at Christian Hospitality from the wider angles of history and practice outside of the monastery. With this approach we will have a chance to look at hospitality through both broad and specific lenses, which will allow us to better shape useful principles into finding a possible solution and change in practice to address the problem at hand. Finally, we will explore in detail the framework of Transformative Community.

Chapter Two – Theoretical Foundations

Either we discover again and anew the neighbor in flesh and blood
or we are heading toward a disaster of cosmic proportions,
as the word itself indicates (dis-astrum).¹⁰⁷

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the problem of parish decline from several perspectives: western philosophical, ecclesial-theological, and organizational change and development. A major factor, with regards to the problem of decline, is an unwillingness, or inability for parish churches to change and adapt in ways that respond to the changing needs of the current culture and time. Some communities and ecclesial bodies tried to be so open that they lost their unique identity, and the ability to inspire passion within their membership.¹⁰⁸ Others adopted a fortress model ecclesiology and became so resistant to change and culture that they turned into a closed system, and were not able to effectively respond to feedback from the wider community.¹⁰⁹ Fears around remaining relevant to the wider community, or maintaining an authentic Christian identity, seem to be the driving forces in the two directional decisions. It is this fear that impedes potential for parish churches to transform in ways that are effective. In order to be open to effective and faithful transformation, parishes need to find a way to move past their state of fear. It is only at this point that parish churches can cultivate the social field, so that they can make intentional choices with respect to the emerging future.

¹⁰⁷ Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1999), xv.

¹⁰⁸ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3-4.

This chapter will explore Christian hospitality, and specifically the principles of Sacred Hospitality, as a framework to help parishes move from a state of fear to a state that is more open to effective transformation. Christian hospitality, specifically Sacred Hospitality, has been faithfully navigating the practice of engaging “the other” in ways that are open, while maintaining Christian identity from the time of Jesus’ ministry until our current day. This chapter will describe a general history of the Christian practice of hospitality, and take an in-depth look at the Benedictine tradition of Sacred Hospitality. Finally, a framework for a parish church that seeks to embody the principles of Sacred Hospitality within its structure and ethos will be described and presented as Transformative Community. This chapter is both a literature review on the topics of hospitality, revelation, and ecclesiology as well as a presentation of what a parish community could resemble when the ideals and principles are built into the structure of the parish church.

Much of the work of Sacred Hospitality has been lived out in a monastic setting, either between monastic communities, or monastic communities living these principles out in the world. However, before we discuss the specifics of monastic hospitality practices, we must start at the beginning of the story.

Hospitable Communities

Principles and guidelines for hospitable communities are not only evident in the field of monastic communities. In fact, as Christine Pohl describes:

For most of the history of the church, hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also a recognition

of their worth and common humanity.¹¹⁰

This history invites the question, “...if hospitality to strangers was such an important part of Christian faith and life, how did it virtually disappear?”¹¹¹ As Pohl suggests, the answers to this question are “multiple, fascinating and often ironic.”¹¹² While hospitality began as an intimate way of encounter and care for and with strangers, as time went on, the element of intimate connection with strangers began to dissipate.¹¹³ Institutions such as hospice, hospitals, and hostels took of the practice of providing care for those in need, but there was not the same level of intimacy that there was previously. There was an element of detachment settling in.

As the Middle Ages began, hospitality had become separated from the direct and intimate care of persons in need, and was, “reserved for those of equal or higher rank.”¹¹⁴ Hospitality was no longer about assisting those in need (especially those who could never repay you), and instead was about welcoming people of power so that you (or your institution) may find power and privilege because of the welcome that was offered.

For this reason, many of the stories of the ancient practice of hospitality have almost completely disappeared. However, while we may not know all of the intimate details of how these societies wrestled with issues of transcending social divides, distribution of resources, recognizing the dignity of all, or having healthy boundaries despite being welcoming, we can, by looking at the successes and failures that we do have access to, learn something about how we

¹¹⁰ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999) 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

can reclaim Christian hospitality as a way of being Christian community in our current time and place.¹¹⁵ Pohl states that:

“The contemporary church hungers for models of a more authentic Christian life in which glimpses of the Kingdom can be seen and the promise of the Kingdom is embodied. More than words and ideas, the world needs living pictures of what a life of hospitality could look like...A community which embodies hospitality to strangers is ‘a sign of contradictions, a place where joy and pain, crises and peace are closely interwoven.’ Friendships forged in hospitality contradict contemporary messages about who is valuable and ‘good to be with,’ who can ‘give life to others’ Such communities are also signs of hope ‘that love is possible, that the world is not condemned to a struggle between oppressors and oppressed, that class and racial warfare is not inevitable.’”¹¹⁶

As Pohl reflects on a world that is becoming more disconnected with its neighbours, she quotes Philip Hallie: “the opposite of cruelty is not simply freedom from the cruel relationship, it is hospitality.”¹¹⁷ It is not enough to be set free from an oppressive relationship. It is essential to also be welcomed into a loving and supportive one. However, finding welcoming entry points is not always easy.

The contemporary values of our current time can be a threat to even the most basic forms of hospitality.¹¹⁸ As Pohl describes:

“When most of us practice hospitality, we typically welcome those with whom we already have some established bonds and significant common ground. Hospitality builds and reinforces relationships among family, friends, and acquaintances. Yet even this most basic form of hospitality is threatened by contemporary values, life-styles, and institutional arrangements which have helped to foster the sense that we are all strangers, even to those to whom we are related.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Pohl, *Making Room*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁷ Phillip Hallie, “From Cruelty to Goodness,” *The Hastings Center Report* 11 (1981): 26-27, cited in Pohl, *Making Room*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 13.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

From Pohl's assertion, we can conclude that authentic practice of Christian hospitality is also counter-cultural. When we do manage to truly offer hospitality to strangers, there is more that happens than just a simple interaction. There is a connection that occurs between the stranger, ourselves, and a space that holds meaning and value. In that space the stranger is safe and respected. It is a space where not only acceptance is possible, but even friendship. The stranger is invited into the life-giving connection of relationship.¹²⁰

If Christian communities are to recapture the practice of hospitality, then there is a challenge to be faced. As Pohl describes:

Abstract theological reflections on hospitality and welcoming the 'other' are presently popular in some academic and pastoral circles. It is crucial that these discussions include making a physical place in our lives, families, churches, and communities for people who might appear to have little to offer. Hospitable attitudes, even a principled commitment to hospitality, do not challenge us or transform our loyalties in the way that actual hospitality to particular strangers does. Hospitality in the abstract lacks the mundane, troublesome, yet rich dimensions of a profound human practice.¹²¹

For some this may sound frightening, and to an extent it should. Hospitality is not a safe or secure way of life. Or as Pohl states, "Practicing hospitality always involves risk and the possibility of failure, but there is greater risk and loss in neglecting hospitality."¹²² To support this, Pohl quotes Dorothy Day's reflection on her time at Catholic Worker houses: "Mistakes there were, there are, there will be...The biggest mistake, sometimes, is to play things very safe in this life and end up being moral failures."¹²³

¹²⁰ Pohl, *Making Room*, 13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Dorothy Day, quoted in Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1987), 40. Cited in Pohl, *Making Room*, 14.

In order to recapture this concept of Christian hospitality, we must first recover its origins and how it was practiced in the early days of Christianity. Hospitality was a “fundamental moral practice” within the ancient world.¹²⁴ As Pohl describes, “Hospitality assured strangers at least a minimum of provision, protection, and connection with the larger community. It also sustained the normal network of relationships on which a community depended, enriching moral and social bonds among family, friends, and neighbours.”¹²⁵ It was within this reality that a Christian concept and understanding developed in the beginning stages of the church. In a combination of Hebrew understandings of hospitality, “that associated it with God, covenant, and blessing”, and, “Hellenistic practices which associated it with benefit and reciprocity”, Christian communities chose to develop hospitality practices outwardly, towards those whom society would deem the weakest, or at the very least, those able to reciprocate the offer.¹²⁶ So deep was this concept of hospitality to “the least of these” that Pohl describes Lactantius, the tutor of Constantine’s son, criticizing philosophers who used hospitality to garner favour and advantage in contrast to the Christian practice of extending hospitality to those who could not give advantage or favour¹²⁷:

Ancient church leader Jerome also challenged the clergy of the time, “let poor men and strangers be acquainted with your modest table, and with them Christ shall be your guest.”¹²⁸ This meant offering a level of kindness to strangers that one might usually reserve for people of close relationship status such as family members or intimate friendships. Much of this was based on the teachings of Jesus which seemed to directly challenge the conventional concepts of hospitality and push them even farther. In Luke 14:12-14 and Matthew 25, we see this at work.

¹²⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 17.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

We see Jesus' instruction to not invite friends or kinsmen or rich neighbours to banquets lest they try to pay you back.¹²⁹ Instead, invite those who cannot repay: the poor, the maimed, etc. As well, there is Jesus' teaching that when hospitality is offered to the hungry, thirsty, strangers, etc., it is to Jesus himself that those things are offered.

From the history and theology of the early Christian community, we see the importance of hospitality within the Christian faith. It was very different in contrast with the hospitality offered by conventional social norm. While the world said hospitality could help you better your standing in life, Christian hospitality was about giving to others so they could better their lives. Pohl describes that, in both ancient and modern Christianity:

Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith. One of the key Greek words for hospitality, *philoxenia*, combines the general word of love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (*phileo*), and the word for stranger (*xenos*). Thus, etymologically and practically, in the New Testament, hospitality is closely connected to love. Because *philoxenia* includes the word for stranger, hospitality's orientation toward stranger is also more apparent in Greek and in English.¹³⁰

Loving the stranger as a family member or close friend, or loving your neighbour as yourself, was central to the early church's concept of hospitality.

Our contemporary scenario is not dissimilar to that of the early church. As Pohl illustrates:

...like the early church, [we] find ourselves in a fragmented and multicultural society that yearns for relationships, identity, and meaning. Our mobile and self-oriented society is characterized by disturbing levels of loneliness, alienation, and estrangement. In a culture that appears at times to be overtly hostile to life itself, those who reject violence and embrace life bear powerful witness. People are hungry for welcome but most Christians

¹²⁹ If not otherwise noted, all biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹³⁰ Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.

have lost track of the heritage of hospitality.¹³¹

What Pohl describes here resonates with my own experiences with parish ministry. There was a time when the parish churches within the Deanery of Stormont had strong relationships with the wider community. However, as the needs of the community changed, and the parish church did not adapt to meet those changes, the relationships began to dissolve. As the relational gap grew, and resources started to appear to be in jeopardy, parish churches began to be more invested in the needs of those already attending, and those who might be able to provide for the church.¹³²

With the relationships dissolving, the wider community began to find alternate ways to have their needs met and no longer looked to the church to do so. Yet, the members of both the ecclesiastical and local communities seem to recognize that this broken relationship between the church and the wider community was not a good thing. Over the past 10 years within the deanery, there have been countless times when members of the wider community have expressed their concerns around church decline, strongly suggesting some form of mutual lament at this loss of relationship.¹³³

In order to address this reality, the church must recapture hospitality as part of its identity. Not just in abstract thought and discussion, but in tangible practice. It must do so by extending welcome in a way that a stranger would feel welcome to enter a place, or a

¹³¹ Pohl, *Making Room*, 33.

¹³² In my own time in South Dundas I can remember when a wealthy member of St. John's, Iroquois was allowed to chair a spontaneous congregational meeting (while I was on holiday) so people could hear his concerns, while at the same time, the congregation voted against changing the family service time to accommodate several new families and were not interested in hearing about their concerns.

¹³³ Field Notes from various occasions (church closings, meals in public, etc.). On a regular basis, members of the wider community that had stopped attending church, or had never been to church, commented that it was sad to see the churches close and wished there was a way to change that reality. They also discussed how meaningful their memories, or the experiences of their family had been when they had been involved with the church.

community, that otherwise would not immediately inspire that feeling inherently.¹³⁴ However, as discussed earlier, the church of our current context is struggling. There are those eager to embrace the changes of a postmodern age (but may not know exactly how to do so), and those who are terrified and resistant to change. Parish churches are not always the safest place for strangers to enter, as there can be deep levels of conflict and chaos within the parish. We arrive at our next question: how can the parish church prepare itself so it can engage with the “strangers” in its midst? How can parishes become places of hospitable welcome, and not chaotic conflict?

Pohl suggests that, despite some experiences, a low number of community meltdowns are inevitable.¹³⁵ The problem is usually based on the types of responses that community members make when questions are raised, or decisions made that deviate from the norm. This would seem to be consistent with what Arbuckle and Cobb Jr. have described above. As the philosophical and social framework of the western world changed, the responses of some church members to those who were different, or who had different ideas, were received as hurtful, just as the changes themselves seemed to put the values of the “traditional members” at risk. As each received and responded in unhelpful ways, walls were built, relationships suffered, and a divide was constructed between people. Pohl suggests that there are four important practices for Christian communities if they are to become, or remain healthy in the face of challenge and change: promise keeping, truth telling, gratitude, and hospitality.¹³⁶

Promise keeping is rooted in the age-old saying, “your word is your bond”. Being faithful, or keeping your promises, is not always associated with faith or theology, and yet, it

¹³⁴ Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 39.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

should be. As Pohl writes, “But the God we worship and serve is one who has made promises to us, lives in a covenantal relationship with us, and is faithful even when we are unfaithful.

Promise-making, promise-keeping, fidelity, and commitment are central to how we relate to God and to how God relates to us.”¹³⁷ Promises provide a structure for relationships and community.

It may not always be obvious that they are at work, but we certainly notice when one of them collapses. Promises are what make space for trust to be developed and expectations to be formed. When we make and keep our promises, we become people and communities of integrity.

Deception can corrupt a Christian community very quickly. As I think back on some of the struggles the various parishes had when they were trying to discover new ways forward, many of them became even more difficult because members were not telling the truth to one another.¹³⁸ As Pohl, quoting Aquinas, points out, “It would be impossible for men to [sic] live together, unless they believed one another, as declaring the truth one to another.”¹³⁹ While it is sometimes assumed that truthfulness is about being able to tell people something they might not want to hear, the reality is that it is much bigger than just that element. Truthfulness is a way of life. It means, as mentioned above, keeping the promises we make. It means not just speaking truth, but also living truthfully. It is also important to note that truth should always be spoken with love. Truth should help build up, not tear down.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Christine Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 62.

¹³⁸ As I am writing this paper, our head of pastoral care has discovered that several parish members left the congregation because after each council meeting, they would go from house to house and share a very different version of events than what had actually taken place. Conveniently these stories of “altered reality” seemed to support exactly what they had been hoping for as an outcome. We never would have found out if one of the main culprits had not accidentally handed out a letter she had written as part of her council report. It had gotten caught between the papers and was never noticed during photocopying.

¹³⁹ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 113.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

“Cultures of complaint” spread through communities quickly and impact everyone.¹⁴¹ This is why developing communities of gratitude is so important. Communities of ingratitude tend to notice everything that is wrong, lacking, and not good enough. This kind of culture can quickly sap energy from everyone involved and can also start to break down relationships. Communities of gratitude, on the other hand, seem much more able to notice things that are good and beautiful.¹⁴² People are honoured, members feel blessed, and they are motivated to be part of God’s blessings for others. As well, there is a deepening of faith as suddenly there is more “testimony to God’s faithfulness” within the community.¹⁴³

For Pohl, communities of hospitality draw these practices together.¹⁴⁴ Communities that can do this find ways to access the gifts each member brings, create a desire to belong, and members feel they are of worth and value for who they are. These communities realize that they, “...are incomplete without other folks but also that they have a ‘treasure’ to share with them.”¹⁴⁵ The Christian life, and by extension, Christian community, must have hospitality at its centre. It is wrapped up in how, “...we respond to the welcome that God has offered and replicate that welcome in the world.”¹⁴⁶ This practice of hospitality is indispensable to any community that is looking to strengthen their internal social and spiritual relationships, and equally for those looking to reach outwards and engage with the world around them.

Sacred Hospitality

¹⁴¹ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 18.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

As mentioned above, there was a time when Christian hospitality was the expected norm for Christian communities. However, over time, those expectations and norms fell away from regular practice. The re-emerging practice of hospitality as a way of life for the Christian church is a relatively new concept. It was first proposed at the time of Vatican II, when the Roman Church acknowledged that the world had changed, and a new way of being Christian in this world needed to be developed.¹⁴⁷ Professor Fabrice Blee describes:

Within the space of several decades the dominant Catholic attitude toward other religions has progressed from an exclusivist regard, captured in the saying “outside the church, no salvation,” to an expression of welcoming and openness in response to the plea of John XXIII as the Second Vatican Council to see in cultural and religious pluralism a sign of the times (Kairos), the locus of an invitation to humanity to be reconciled to the divine mystery.¹⁴⁸

Interestingly, the event that caused the negative backlash and inspired the restorationist¹⁴⁹ response that Arbuckle describes was also the event that contained a solution for the struggles to come.

The theology of this project is rooted in the principles of Sacred Hospitality. Sacred Hospitality was chosen as it captures the essence and principles of Benedictine practitioners of inter-religious dialogue. Benedictine communities have been practicing hospitality in ways that help to build understanding and relationships between Christian monastic communities and members of other religious communities. This way of being Christian offers a path to build relationships between parish churches and the wider community. In this regard, the wider community is seen as “the other” within the practice of dialogue. As well, these principles

¹⁴⁷ Fabrice Blee, *The Third Desert: The Story of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

address the needs of parish churches struggling with change in two ways. The first is that, as explained above, there is concern for some Christians that being open to the wider community and culture will result in the church losing their Christian identity and value.¹⁵⁰ Sacred Hospitality is a Christian way of life, and so using the principles of Sacred Hospitality keeps us within the realm of Christian identity. Secondly, the principles of Sacred Hospitality naturally lend themselves to the open framework of Transformative Community which will be described later in this chapter.

Sacred Hospitality is, first and foremost, hospitality practiced within a spiritual and interreligious context. It is a way of life that believes reconnection with one's neighbour is of the highest importance. As philosopher and theologian Raimon Panikkar describes, "Either we discover again and anew the neighbour in flesh and blood or we are heading toward a disaster of cosmic proportions, as the word itself indicates (dis-astrum)."¹⁵¹ While some may see humanity as living in a "global village", there is also the observation that much of our interaction with one another takes place in a world of "artificial screens", privacy, and privilege.¹⁵² As Panikkar describes, "we constantly run up one against the other, but we hardly have time to find our neighbor – because we do not find ourselves, being too busy with 'business' of all sorts."¹⁵³

While we may very well spend quite a bit of time around other people, we very rarely make connections in which we are able to truly engage with our neighbour. Because of this, many of our interactions with one another remain within the realm of rational or sentimental encounters. This means we are only left with the options of *doctrines and opinions* or *sympathy*

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1999), xv.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

and antipathy.¹⁵⁴ In other words, these perfectly normal forms of encounter are dialectical in nature.¹⁵⁵ They are an interaction between two people, however they are not enough, by themselves, for full human connection. To complete the recipe, dialogue and encounter that views each member as more than an *other* is needed. When we engage in encounters that recognize that the *other* actually belongs, in a way, to oneself, we enter into dialogical dialogue where “the ‘thou’ is not indifferent to the I.”¹⁵⁶ It is this type of dialogue that allows us to remove the many labels we often wear or place on others.¹⁵⁷ We reconnect in our shared humanity and step out of the stereotypes of the *other*.

While much of the work in this area has been lived out within monastic communities, there are several principles of Sacred Hospitality that can be incorporated within the way of life of a parish.¹⁵⁸ If a parish is willing and able to create a culture and parish life based on Sacred Hospitality, they will be able to connect with the local community they serve, as well as be connected to the members of the parish. As described above, because of social changes in the Western world and the Church’s response to those changes, relationships were injured, and in some cases, broken. These relationships can help parishes develop identities and ministries that are sustainable and vital to the communities they serve. Parish churches seeking to engage the issue of decline should do so in ways consistent with Christianity, and address the needs of the current culture and context. Sacred Hospitality provides a way of being that allows this adaptation to happen in a way that is respectful and faithful to the Christian tradition.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁵⁶ Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, xvi.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁵⁸ Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, or “MID” is a group of Catholic religious from Benedictine and Cistercian order who work under the support and guidance of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Panikkar describes this way of hospitality as “Intrareligious Dialogue” which is dialogue that after being triggered by the *other*, “catches hold of our entire person and removes our many masks” and allows us to find understanding both of ourselves and the *other*.¹⁵⁹ It does so, because, as Panikkar suggests, “Our relationship with the other is not an external link but belongs to our innermost constitution, be it with the earth, the living beings – especially the humans – or the divine.”¹⁶⁰ In contrast to the restorationist perspective that seeks to build barriers between the Christian faith and a secular world due to perceived differences¹⁶¹, this perspective would invite Christian communities to engage with the secular world, not as competing opponents, but rather as two parts that belong to one another.

Order of St. Benedict monk and past Secretary General of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) Pierre Francois de Bethune uses the language of Interreligious Hospitality, which is an honest desire to encounter and experience those from a different religious tradition while being open to inner change.¹⁶² In his work to engage with Buddhist masters, he acknowledges that, at the beginning, there can be a sense of fear around a potential loss of “personal identity.”¹⁶³ However, the experience itself is described as “stripping away all that is superfluous” and leading to great joy.¹⁶⁴ As de Bethune describes:

Whoever makes a commitment to engage in interreligious dialogue is led farther afield than had been imagined at the outset. Assuming that the experience goes beyond gleaning from other traditions a few disparate elements that might be of us, and if a genuine desire to encounter those who are living witnesses of another religious tradition is present, there

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., xvi, 10.

¹⁶⁰ Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, xvi.

¹⁶¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

¹⁶² Pierre-Francois de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality: The Fulfillment of Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), xiii.

¹⁶³ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

will then be a gradual awareness of inner change.¹⁶⁵

From this perspective, one could see the secular community as being “another religion” that is different when compared to Christian community. While acknowledging the place of potential fear in this way of being, de Bethune speaks from a deep personal experience where this level of encounter resulted in deeply positive outcomes. For those who would fall into the category of Arbuckle’s restorationism¹⁶⁶, or who carry the concerns of Cobb Jr’s “renewal”¹⁶⁷ perspective, de Bethune gives a reminder that transforming encounters with the *other* can lead to results that are full of joy and blessings.

Theologian John S. Dunne describes the phenomenon of engaging another culture, way of life, or religion in a way that informs and influences our own as “passing over and coming back.”¹⁶⁸ He writes:

Is a religion coming to birth in our time? It could be. What seems to be occurring is a phenomenon we might call “passing over,” passing over from one culture to another, from one way of life to another, from one religion to another. Passing over is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion. It is followed by an equal and opposite process we might call “coming back,” coming back with new insight to one’s own culture, one’s own way of life, one’s own religion.¹⁶⁹

Here we see three leaders in this field of Christianity expressing that not only is vulnerable engagement with religious pluralism essential but that it can also be done in a way where there are deeply positive outcomes, all the while remaining deeply rooted within the Christian tradition. As parishes struggle with the problem of dying churches within a changing pluralistic

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 42.

¹⁶⁸ John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1972) ix.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

community, could this way of engagement be extended to the pluralistic community to discover new insights and find possible solutions to the problem?

While each of the authors above describes the experience of engaging the *other* in a different way, there are strong similarities in their experiences and their expression. Through this experience they have articulated a theology that supports the practice of encountering the *other* in ways that may result in mutual conversion, or at least a deepening of one's own personal understanding and faith. They describe a way of life that offers, and receives, invitations to and from *the other*. It requires that participants in this way of life be open to learning about "the other," and if appropriate, open to being changed themselves. At the same time, it appears that the work of the authors listed above has been lived out within the context of monastic communities or originates from the Catholic tradition.¹⁷⁰

Theological support for this way of engaging *the other* can be found outside of the monastic/Roman Catholic tradition as well. From a Protestant perspective, Brian McLaren speaks about how the Gospel has many references to Jesus engaging with "the other" in ways that are mutually beneficial and do not require faithful Christians to be closed off.¹⁷¹ As he describes:

So how do we find a better approach to the religiously other in our quest for a new kind of Christianity? We could begin by a survey of Scripture. We might look at John 1:9; 3:17; and 12:32, not to mention 21:22, where Jesus responds to an inquiry about someone else's spiritual status with, "What is that to you! You follow me!" We could then turn to Paul's Letter to the Romans. In 1:1-29, Paul makes clear that people are never judged based on knowledge they don't have, and that God will bless "those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality."...We could pay special attention to the writings of the prophets...in which Isaiah says that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours (55:8-9). In context, Isaiah refers to God's desire to welcome

¹⁷⁰ Pierre-Francois de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality: The Monastic Tradition as a model for Interreligious Encounter* (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 2002), 54.

¹⁷¹ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 209-211.

outsiders...god's higher thoughts and ways transcend our arrogant, exclusive, low-level religious supremacy and tribalism, and God invites us to transcend as well.¹⁷²

McLaren argues that there are many scriptural references of how faithful Christians should engage “the other” in non-hostile ways, as well as looking at instances where “the outsiders” (Melchizedek, Rahab, Ruth, Syrophoenician Woman, etc.) are more faithful than the religious insiders of their day. To be Christian is to not succumb to religious tribalism, but rather to offer welcome to those we consider “the other”.

The Demands of Hospitality

In my personal experience as an Anglican priest, I have attended several workshops on the topic of hospitality. Most of the time the content of these workshops involved creating name tags for regular attendees, and special tags for newcomers so they could be identified easily and everyone would know each other's name. In one instance, newcomers were given specially coloured coffee mugs during the post service coffee hour so that regular attendees could spot them easily and make sure that they were never left alone. Though well intentioned, the type of hospitality I am putting forward as Sacred Hospitality is different from the practices that I experienced within these workshops. While practical, simple, and well intentioned, the style of hospitality discussed at these workshops essentially consisted of tools to make hosting a newcomer easier for the parish, and accomplished this by making sure that newcomers stood out like a sore thumb. It also assumed that it was the job of *the other* to show up in the safe and familiar spaces of regular members first. It required the newcomer to do all the heavy lifting socially and emotionally. Sacred Hospitality is about who one is, not only what one does.

¹⁷² Ibid.

Sacred Hospitality is rooted in the 15th century saying of Zenrin, “Before the hearth there is neither master nor guest.”¹⁷³ This means not just letting others into our space but allowing ourselves to enter into the space of the *other*. Hospitality is reciprocal, not unidirectional, and it goes beyond a simple exchange of words and language. It “takes place at the level of being”¹⁷⁴ where hearts, not just doors, are thrown open to receive each other.

Sacred Hospitality is so much more than the use of language and the exchange of words that Pope John Paul II, at the end of a stay within a monastery with Benedictine and Zen monks, is quoted as saying:

Your specific contribution to interfaith dialogue does not so much consist in conducting a specific dialogue, for your life is primarily devoted to silence, to prayer and to the witness of the common life, but you can do much through your hospitality to promote an in-depth spiritual encounter. By opening your house and your heart, as you have done over the last few days, you are well within the tradition of your holy father Benedict. You are applying the very beautiful chapter of the Rule on the reception of guests to monks coming from other worlds and a very different religious tradition.¹⁷⁵

Sacred Hospitality is not about waiting in our buildings for others to come and seek us out, only to be handed special name tags and coffee cups in the hopes they will become “one of us”. It is an experience; an opportunity to have two hearts engage in meaningful ways, to welcome and be welcomed, and to move beyond the use of words and debate as the purpose of interaction. Sacred Hospitality is about learning from and experiencing our shared humanity and not about making others fit into our comfort zone, no matter how nice the coffee mugs may be.

¹⁷³ de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 3.

¹⁷⁴ de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

Principles of Sacred Hospitality

Sacred Hospitality is not simply something one practices. It is first and foremost a specific way of being Christian, and a way of life based on several principles. Much of our discussion thus far has been based on the experiences and practices of monastic communities between one another. Because the parish is not a monastic community, it would not be possible to simply take the practices of the monks and impose them on parish life. Instead, we will look at the main principles of Sacred Hospitality as they can be practiced in various contexts. As mentioned earlier in this project, making the material discussed on this topic accessible has been a priority. In order to better facilitate that goal, I have chosen to categorize the various principles, as discussed by the foundational authors, into four distinct categories: *invitation*, *respect*, *rootedness*, and *openness*. The intention of this categorization is to offer a conceptual framework of Sacred Hospitality that is both practical and pastoral for ministry.

Invitation

The primary principle of Sacred Hospitality is a willingness to invite and accept an invitation from *the other* in our midst.¹⁷⁶ As de Bethune explains:

As a precondition to becoming hospitable, it is necessary to experience for oneself the poverty and the risks of being a stranger, to the point of being at the mercy of rejection. The offering of hospitality is a moral obligation' it is indeed the very foundation upon which all morality rests...It is of course obvious that many people experience hospitality by first offering it. There are several doors into this blessed space...Is it not a fact that it is in "receiving" others that the master of the house derives the most pleasure? So much so that the two actions, offering and welcoming, are invariably linked. Welcoming, however, is the more important of the two.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Pierre-Francois de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 122.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

While the name tags and coffee mugs invoked in my early experiences of hospitality might be familiar to practitioners of parish ministry, de Bethune describes an expectation of hospitality that is much deeper, and is rooted in vulnerability. This type of hospitality is an opportunity to meet with those who are different than ourselves with the intention of learning more about what makes us different and why those differences exist. As de Bethune describes, this principle of hospitality touches on some extremely sensitive areas and so there are two laws of invitation that must be remembered: the mystery of hospitality and the love of one who is beyond.¹⁷⁸ It is one thing to be the one who welcomes, however there is a unique experience when one suddenly needs to be the one who receives a welcoming. The one who welcomes does so because they can. There is a power in that position. Similarly, the one who needs welcoming is in a position that lacks power. One is dependent upon the other, someone with more power, resources, or means. French scholar Louis Massignon became a Christian convert because of such an experience in 1907.¹⁷⁹ De Bethune reflects on Massignon's experience of being welcomed by a Muslim family in Bagdad:

The stranger who took me in just the way I was caused me to challenge little by little the assumptions I had built up over time, and to rethink my inhibitions and my attitude toward the respect due human beings. In a reversal of values, he caused me to exchange the quiet self-satisfaction I had experienced as one who possessed material things for the powerlessness of poverty.¹⁸⁰

When reflecting on my own experience within parish ministry, the power of reciprocal invitation was telling. The meetings where each congregation, be it historic or current, were able to come together and be treated as equals were also where the most loving and creative outcomes were

¹⁷⁸ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 120-122.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

produced. It was the people who were unwilling to invite, or be invited that ended up having to give up the most as change happened.

Respect

When hospitality is practiced, both parties can only receive invitations when there is respect for the differences between them. We must give up our desire to “convert” “the other” to our way of thinking. Or as Panikkar describes, we give up dialectical dialogue (using reason to convince the other that my belief is the truth) and we enter into dialogical dialogue (dialogue about subjects between subjects).¹⁸¹ As de Bethune states:

The primary attitude must be one of respect, even friendship. There is no question of judging other believers nor even their religion and their spirituality. Each religion must make its own self-criticisms. But we must learn to discern what is essential.¹⁸²

If we invite with the sole intention of converting our guest to our point of view, we are not practicing dialogue in good faith. With dialectical dialogue, we have two or more people discussing or debating an idea or a topic. Those arguments will be held up to be judged by reason and the best argument and the most reasonable one may “win”. The topic of discussion, and learning about it, is the primary purpose of the encounter. With dialogical dialogue the primary subject of the encounter are the literal “subjects”: the people speaking with one another. The topic simply gives them something around which to engage. For this reason, we must give up our need to convert the *other* because it assumes that they are wrong and we are right. Assuming your partner in dialogue is wrong from the beginning is not only poor dialogue but also hinders

¹⁸¹ Raimon Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), 29.

¹⁸² de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 64.

the ability for either side to break down barriers to understanding one another and connecting relationships.

It should be noted that this is not an easy thing to achieve, especially in our postmodern time. As Charles Taylor states, we live in a time of vast pluralism and there is no significant social pressure in North America to adhere to any specific religious tradition.¹⁸³ As well, as Elaine Graham detailed, the postmodern age is one where there is no longer a universal agreement on values or truth.¹⁸⁴ As the mainline church wrestles with this particular time of transition, which Arbuckle dates around the time of Vatican II¹⁸⁵, it is understandable that some may have wanted to take a moment to say, “Hold on! I need to tell you why my religion is really great!” However, as Panikkar describes, this is the opposite of what Sacred Hospitality requires:

I understand very well the anguish of the modern religious person seeing the wave of ‘unreligion’ and even ‘irreligion’ in our times, and yet I would consider it misguided to fall prey to such a fear by founding a kind of religious league – not to say crusade – of the ‘pious’, or religious people of all confessions, defenders, of the ‘sacred rights’ of religion...If to forget the first corollary [hospitality must be free from apologetics] would indicate a lack of confidence in our partner and imply that he is wrong and that I must ‘convert’ him, to neglect this second point would betray a lack of confidence in the truth of religion itself and represent an indiscriminate accusation against ‘modern’ Man.¹⁸⁶

When confronted with things that are different than what we already believe or have experienced, it can be tempting to try and defend and at times impose our views on others. However, to do so takes us out of the realm of Christian hospitality.

Rootedness

¹⁸³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 43

¹⁸⁴ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 62.

Anyone who would pursue this level of hospitality as a way of life must be a competent, mature, and healthy person.¹⁸⁷ As well, those who participate in this way of life must be well rooted in their own tradition, and be a stable and trustworthy person. It is by knowing our own tradition that we might express its principles in accurate ways to others, and, a level of confidence in our own tradition can keep us from “closing off” during difficult encounters with conflict. As de Bethune describes:

What is important for a healthy spiritual life is important for the practice of dialogue: common sense, realism, humour, personal and psychological maturity, and a solidity of character which will allow the person to react without anxiety to the eventual questioning that the experience can provoke¹⁸⁸

This foundation allows one to fully engage the process without feeling threatened by the questions that those from another tradition or perspective may ask. It is this level of maturity that allows the principle of *respect* to be lived out within dialogue.

Being a participant who has experienced life in a community is different from someone who is equipped to be a teacher about that community. If one is seeking to participate in the practice of Sacred Hospitality, they must be familiar enough with the communal life that they represent so they can articulate a deep and broad understanding while being comfortable with the subtleties of that tradition. de Bethune articulates this by asking, “What would we think of a Hindu who claimed to know Christianity well without having read the New Testament?”¹⁸⁹ In a parish setting, one does not have to only be a qualified representative of the faith to which they belong, but must also be well versed in the social and cultural history, principles, and values of the local context to which they belong.

¹⁸⁷ de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 67

¹⁸⁸ de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 60.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

During my own experiences within the intervention sites of this project, any person who was hoping that their community would open up to change, without first understanding the level of impact of, say, government-imposed change (e.g. an action leading to flooding of the St. Lawrence River) did so at their own peril. Another recurring example would be not understanding the impact that industrial farming had on the generations of family farm owners; this would certainly create unseen landmines when entering dialogue around change. The rural communities in which this project played out have repeated experiences of institutionally implemented change that resulted (in their view) with a loss of physical, emotional, and socially valued elements that, for them, can only be seen as negative. For a leader representing a large organization such as the Diocese of Ottawa, it would be naïve at best to enter this scenario and hope that dialogue around change and transformation would be smooth and simple.

*Openness*¹⁹⁰

While those who engage in hospitable dialogue must give up their need to convert “the other” in the encounter, all parties to the dialogue must remain open to the possibility of their own conversion through this encounter. Panikkar calls this “the challenge of conversion” and describes it so:

If the encounter is to be an authentically religious one, it must be totally loyal to truth and open to reality. The genuinely religious spirit is not loyal only to the past; it also keeps faith with the present. A religious person is neither a fanatic nor someone who already has all the answers. She is also a seeker, a pilgrim making her own uncharted way; the track ahead is yet virgin, inviolate. She finds each moment new and is but the more pleased to see in this both the beauty of personal discovery and the depth of a perennial treasure that the ancestors of the faith have handed down...the religious person enters this arena without prejudices and preconceived solutions, knowing full well that she may in fact have to lose a particular belief or particular religion altogether. She trusts in truth. She enters unarmed and ready to be converted herself. She may lose her life – she may

¹⁹⁰ Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 62.

also be born again.¹⁹¹

In order to be faithful in our present time, we must be open. Religious people are seekers, pilgrims, people on a journey; it is only by keeping our hearts and minds open that an exchange with “the other” can teach us more about our own faith and ourselves. It is also the only way we can be open to being transformed by an encounter. While neither party should feel coerced into conversion, both must be open to the possibility of mutual transformation, because it is in this very scenario that Sacred Hospitality can create the space for the Spirit to do her best work.

It is with these four basic principles that, if lived out, we may find ways to connect with our neighbours. Strangers become companions on life’s journey. It is in this way that we find a way to see each other as human, and not simply labels such as “different”, “stranger”, or “foreigner.”

Possible Concerns with Sacred Hospitality

The principles of Sacred Hospitality can raise some questions and concerns. For those who would fit into Arbuckle’s category of “restorationism”¹⁹² there may be concerns that this level of radical welcome and acceptance could water down “true and orthodox faith”. As de Bethune raises the observation:

The reason that the idea of extending a magnanimous welcome in the religious realm raises such feelings of misgivings is in part due to its novelty. Over the centuries, *communication in sacris*, sharing in the sacred rituals of another religion, or of another denomination, was considered little short of an abomination, and now, all of a sudden, it

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

was being suggested that there be sharing in prayer with ‘heretics’ and ‘pagans’!¹⁹³

Some would suggest this model does not do enough to defend Christianity. Others are concerned that this practice waters down the faith of Christians. It can also be seen as a challenge to some deeply held doctrines and assumptions. Some also believe it is wrong to interpret other religions through the lens of Christian insight.

I would argue that these fears, while understandable, are unfounded. As Panikkar reminds us, this is not meant to be an exercise in defending Christianity, but rather, it is a description of an experience:

Ultimately my aim is not to defend or attack either Christianity or any other religion, but to understand the problem. It is precisely because I take seriously Christ’s affirmation that he is the way, the truth, and the life that I cannot reduce his significance only to historical Christianity.¹⁹⁴

It is also important to say that hospitality and dialogue are not a watering down of faith, the Gospel, or of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is the opposite. Christian thought did not begin in a vacuum; early Christian thought was shaped, molded, and expressed through thought patterns that already existed. Jewish, Greek, and Zoroastrian thought (to name a few) very much shaped how early Christians made sense and expressed their experience.¹⁹⁵

In response to the fear that anything that is not explicitly Christian must, by definition, be satanic or sinful, it is important to remember that the Gospel has several examples of Jesus responding to this fear. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 9, beginning at verse 49 we read:

John answered, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop

¹⁹³ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 111.

¹⁹⁴ Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 86.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

him; for whoever is not against you is for you.¹⁹⁶

As well, the stories of the Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28, Mk 7:24-27) show a moment when Jesus himself opens up, because of a shared experience with this woman, and gains a fuller understanding of how open God expects his ministry to be. As de Bethune writes:

Hospitality is at the heart of the Gospel. It is not just something that is required of us among other obligations; it goes to the essence of any encounter. Even if the word itself is not repeatedly used in the gospel texts, the issue of hospitality is never far absent.¹⁹⁷

Jesus spent his life tearing down the walls of hatred and overcoming the walls that block the way of welcome. He preached love of the enemy and hospitality to those who had a strong fear of strangers and those of other religions, he admired those of foreign faiths, and he tells stories where the hero would be a social outcast.¹⁹⁸ It seems clear: while there were, and are many in the world who would be xenophobic zealots, Jesus was not one. He was the exact opposite.¹⁹⁹

Sacred Hospitality and Christian Identity

The Christian identity is one that is rooted in the idea of welcoming and being welcomed.²⁰⁰ As de Bethune points out, St. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Romans: “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”²⁰¹ The Christian who is able to find a way to experience and see God in the “other” that is welcomed

¹⁹⁶ Luke 9:49

¹⁹⁷ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 127.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁹⁹ Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 93.

²⁰⁰ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 147

²⁰¹ Romans 15:7

may find that in that moment he is also being welcomed by God. That is to say, the one who does the welcoming is also welcomed.²⁰²

The word “gospodi” is used in the Byzantine-Slavonic liturgy as the name to refer to God. It is a word that comes from the same root as the words “host” and “guest”. It is with this image that the familiar icon of the Trinity (as written by Andrei Rublev) can be seen as being all about relationship.²⁰³ In the icon there is no clear sense of who is host and who is guest, as it is God who is our host and guest. This work “becomes the wellspring of all forms of welcome”.²⁰⁴

It becomes more obvious with this in mind that the practice of hospitality does not water down the Christian identity. It is by our encounters with welcome, and being welcomed by the stranger, that our own faith might be deepened as we enter into this way of life that was practised by Jesus himself. When we welcome others as if they were Christ, we move towards being more Christian. It is through the encounter of “the other” that we learn more about the truth and depth of our own faith.²⁰⁵ It is a process that eventually can lead to change and therefore requires a spiritual maturity.

There is a chance that this process will lead to a potential loss of identity, and so the practitioner must be rooted enough to know their authentic self, yet still be open enough to encounter surprise and mystery through the other. If one simply exposes themselves to like-minded experiences, one may find themselves simply repeating old theories.²⁰⁶

²⁰² de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 145.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

As de Bethune and Pannikar have shown us, in order to reconnect with our neighbours in our world of pluralism, we must be willing to follow the example of Jesus and the early church. We must be willing to extend welcome, and be welcomed, so that we may come to see one another as mutual travelers towards Truth. We must also recover the ethos that hospitality is not to be used for personal or institutional gain. It is to be offered and practiced as an experience of God's grace towards those who our society would consider "the least of these", or the strangers in our midst. It is with these encounters that we come to connect, reconnect, and to truly love our neighbours, but also come to know ourselves and our own faith traditions more deeply. As we have seen in the historical and biblical review of hospitality, the concept of hospitality was present before Christianity began. It was ingrained within the ministry of Jesus who pushed the requirements even further than they had been before. It was part of the foundational principles and practices of the early church. Hospitality is at the core of the Christian life. We must critically and creatively reclaim it if we wish to address the problem of decline and offer ministry within our postmodern context.

Transformative Community

The work within the field of hospitality lends some much-needed wisdom as parish churches seek to engage the problem of decline within the communities they serve. The four principles begin to form a conceptual framework within which a parish church might begin to understand how to engage with "the other" in its midst. In this case, "the other" is the local community in which the parish church is situated. However, parish churches are not monasteries. Knowing this, the framework must be flexible enough for parish churches to harness the wisdom

and insights of Sacred Hospitality, and have them embraced and ingrained within the lived realities of parish life. This project proposes Transformative Community for such a framework.

Theological Grounding for Becoming Transformative Community

The insights and principles of Sacred Hospitality call on community members to be grounded in their personal and communal identities, respectful of the experiences and beliefs of those different than themselves, willing to intentionally invite those different than themselves into dialogue, and open to the possibility of transformation through the encounter. These principles, when used to shape a community framework, touch on the theological areas of ecclesiology, revelation, and the relationship between the Church and culture. To address this, Transformative Community draws on the insights of three primary theologians: Cardinal Avery Dulles and his work within the field of ecclesiology, Brian McLaren with his work within revelation theology, and H. Richard Niebuhr and his work within culture and theology.

Ecclesiology

Avery Dulles is well-known for his seminal work on models of church, each of which takes into account the meaning and function of church.²⁰⁷ As he describes:

By its very constitution the Church is a communion of grace structured as a human society. While sanctifying its own members, it offers praise and worship to God. It is permanently charged with the responsibility of spreading the good news of the gospel and of healing and consolidating the human community.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ The five original models describe Church as Institution, Church as Mystical Communion, Church as Sacrament, Church as Herald, and Church as Servant, see Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of The Church* (New York: Image, 2002)

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 196.

Building on his original work in 1974 that proposes five models of church²⁰⁹, Dulles proposed a sixth model in 2014 that draws positive elements of the first five models and builds bridges between them.²¹⁰ As Dulles states:

[The discipleship model] can be seen as a variant of the communion model. It precludes the impression that ecclesial communion exists merely for the sake of mutual gratification and support. It calls attention to the ongoing relationship of the Church to Christ, its Lord, who continues to direct it through his Spirit. The concept of discipleship also builds bridges to the other five models...It illuminates the institutional and sacramental aspects of the Church and grounds the functions of evangelization and service that are central to the herald and servant models. The notion of “community of disciples” is thus a broadly inclusive one.²¹¹

The discipleship model goes back to the time of the late ministry of Jesus and the early life of the disciples when an “alternative society” was developed.²¹² It is a community that requires certain specific values and practices. It asks for deep commitment from its members²¹³ who would offer an alternative way of life in contrast with the values of society that did not seem to be congruent with faithful Christian theology and practice.²¹⁴ In this way, members would become *rooted* in their identity of themselves as a Christian, and the religion they represent. It calls for all members, lay and ordained, to take the task of ongoing formation and transformation seriously as both an intellectual and experiential task.²¹⁵ It is this *openness* to transformation that prevents this model from becoming closed off, however, it is limited in its identity as a contrast society. While knowing itself as being different from society, Transformative Community seeks to relate

²⁰⁹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of The Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974)

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 198

²¹² *Ibid.*, 199.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 203.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

to society in an attitude of mutuality. In other words, it does not simply speak its truth to society. It is also open to hearing and seeing God's activity within society.

Transformative Community invites local culture and context into a relationship so that the community of faith, in every generation, may discover how best to faithfully serve the local area. It seeks this relationship knowing full well that the encounter with culture and context may very well shape and form the Christian church,²¹⁶ while at the same time knowing that it is still possible for the church to shape and form the communities in which it exists. These values have much in common with the Sacred Hospitality principles of *invitation* and *rootedness* that are mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Transformative Community is a community that believes that culture and context may be a source of revelation to the church, and that the church can in turn be a source of revelation to the world. In this regard, Transformative Community believes that revelation is a process that is ongoing throughout time,²¹⁷ and that in each generation the church must listen to the voice of the Spirit, spoken through the current culture and context, in order to continue to offer and live out the church's ancient truth in a way that is effective, relevant, and sustainable - a process of becoming.

As well as inviting the "outside" culture and context into a potential relationship of mutual revelation and truth seeking, Transformative Community develops intentional community expectations for its membership. As Christine Pohl acknowledges, the building of community is

²¹⁶ Cobb Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 42-43.

²¹⁷ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 38-42.

difficult, and there will be times when it is less than perfect, however we can build good communities that are life giving.²¹⁸ She states:

...breakdown could have been avoided. But then, few breakdowns in community are inevitable. In this case, some folks made several poor decisions. Other people responded poorly to the poor decisions. More decisions, more responses, more trouble. Words were exchanged, positions hardened, sides drawn up. Rumors flew, and even when folks knew they were rumors, they repeated them until it was very difficult to discern what had ‘really’ happened.²¹⁹

Members of Transformative Community are expected to embrace the values of gratitude as a way of life (noticing what there is to be grateful for, acting with graciousness), keeping promises (following through on commitments), living truthfully (words and action being congruent), and hospitality (being open and welcoming to “the other”).²²⁰ These values are also lived out within the principles of Sacred Hospitality. It is by holding onto these values, as described by Pohl, that we can engage with the principles of invitation, respect, rootedness, and openness. They allow communities to encounter change and difference in healthy ways that are full of potential for mutual transformation while remaining faithful.

Transformative Community also embraces diversity and sees it as an asset. Too much like-mindedness can result in “groupthink” and get in the way of the community making healthy choices.²²¹ In order to lessen the risk of groupthink, Transformative Community encourages the role of “loyal dissenters” as described in the work of Arbuckle.²²² This is a role that, much like the position of a “devil’s advocate”, intentionally challenges ideas and practices to make sure they are well thought out and reflect the consultation of a vast and diverse number of voices. In a

²¹⁸ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19, 61, 112, 159.

²²¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 112.

²²² Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 2.

community that values an ability to adapt while still claiming a faithful Christian identity, tough questions must be asked and credible answers must be developed in order to make sure that the best possible choices and practices are being actioned. This value lives out the Sacred Hospitality of *invitation*²²³ as described earlier in this chapter.

Finally, Transformative Community also strives to create a passionate commitment within its membership. As John Cobb Jr. describes, “lukewarmness” within the church has had a direct impact on the decline in church membership and church effectiveness.²²⁴ Reclaiming a theologically based purpose for what the church is, and what it chooses to do, is essential to building communities that have deeply passionate and committed members.²²⁵ Since theology has been the professionalized area of seminaries for some time now, local churches have become ill-equipped to take up this element of decision making and reflection within the local community.²²⁶ Transformative Community, engaging the diverse voices from both the internal community membership, the inherited traditions of the church, and the voices of its surrounding culture and context, seeks to discern a theologically based identity and practice that can inspire deep commitment from its membership, and effectively serve the needs of the surrounding community.

Revelation

The foundational underpinnings of Transformative Community are rooted in specific theologies of revelation and the relationship between God and culture. This section will describe the efforts of four theologians whose work has produced important insights into these two areas

²²³ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 122.

²²⁴ Cobb Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 2.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

of study. With regards to the relationship between the Christian faith and culture, the work of Christian ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr, and Principal of Ripon College Martyn Percy will be explored. The work of Brian McLaren will be used to describe the theology of revelation that Transformative Community espouses.

From the opening description it is clear that Transformative Community believes God's revelation to be ongoing throughout time. As time, and the community, moves forward, God reveals what needs to be done in order to move ever closer to bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Brian McLaren describes this model of ongoing revelation as being founded upon much more of an Aristotelian philosophy of "becoming" than a Platonic philosophy of the "ideal state."²²⁷ McLaren, while discussing the topic of Biblical narrative, makes the observation that when we look back on the person of Jesus, or the Scriptural narrative from our current point in time, and through the lives and writings of those who came after the Jesus event (the Pope, Calvin, Wesley, Aquinas, Augustine, Paul, Jesus, John the Baptist...Adam) we aren't seeing the characters, such as Jesus, directly. We see these characters, especially Jesus, through the lens of other people.²²⁸ This sets the stage for Biblical revelation to be seen in a similar fashion to Plato's journey to go reclaim the "ideal state."²²⁹ In terms of revelation, this would mean that God has revealed all that will be revealed. The job of the faith is to reclaim and rebuild that ideal state. This would be part of the supporting theology of revelation that we would see in the "renewal"²³⁰ or "restoration"²³¹ models of community as described by Cobb Jr. and Arbuckle. These models suggest that the church should stand against any input from culture, sciences, or

²²⁷ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 38.

²²⁸ Ibid., 36.

²²⁹ Ibid., 37.

²³⁰ Cobb Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 41.

²³¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

local context. The church should be an insular body that stands in opposition to “the world” because it already possesses the fullness of truth.²³² However, if we choose to start at the beginning of the story (Adam, Abraham, Moses...Jesus, etc.) and read “frontwards” we suddenly have a story that embodies Aristotle’s “becoming.”²³³ So instead of a “perfect world” that needs to be recaptured, we have a story of a good world that is developing and does so in stages.²³⁴ This second model leaves room for the principles of Sacred Hospitality to do their best work. Being rooted within the story so far, being open to change, being respectful of the stories and beliefs of others, as well as intentionally giving and receiving invitation are crucial elements for discovering more about God and revelation as the story unfolds.

For Transformative Community, this idea of revelation as “developing in stages” is central. McLaren roots this model of development and “maturing” in the Scriptural moments of Jesus telling the disciples that the Spirit will guide them into new and unrevealed truths²³⁵, and Paul describing the faithful as maturing from a time when the law was their teacher to a time when they walk freely in the Spirit (Gal 3:23-26).²³⁶

In Transformative Community, the use of reason in the pursuit of discerning what God is saying to the church is assumed, as it is a valid tool to help the church actively engage in the dialogue between new insights and revelation.

Christ and Culture

²³² Cobb Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 41.

²³³ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 47.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ John 16:12-15

²³⁶ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 100.

The classic text by H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, provides another layer to the theological foundation for Transformative Community. Transformative Community finds itself most closely in line with the model of “Christ Above Culture”.²³⁷ Originally written almost 70 years ago, it describes the various ways that Christians interact with culture and make sense of it. Although culture has changed through the years, the models that Niebuhr proposes remain relevant today. This model acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and as such was involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is from this foundation of created nature that culture itself is created.²³⁸ If nature, and by default, culture, is “rightly ordered...to Christ”, then it is impossible for Christ and culture to be separated.²³⁹ This model does not suggest that the values of Christ and the values of contemporary culture are one in the same, nor does it assume that they are always at odds with one another. Instead, it proposes a “both-and” relationship.²⁴⁰ As Jesus Christ is both God and human, culture is also of two natures. Culture is both “divine and human in its origin, both holy and sinful, a realm of both necessity and freedom, and one to which both reason and revelation apply.”²⁴¹ For Transformative Community, this means that there will be part of contemporary culture that possesses the essence of divine truth and revelation for our current context, and there will be times when the community must speak a different truth to the contemporary culture. Unlike other models of *Christ & Culture*, Transformative Community does not assume an automatic response of acceptance, or critique, in its relationship to culture and context. It assumes that by engaging

²³⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1951), 116.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

²³⁹ Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 117.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

with the contemporary culture, church and culture can discern together what is true for their time and place.

Transformative Community engages each lens (revelation, culture, and ecclesiology) through the revisionist model of theology; that is to say, it discerns “truth” in them, as David Tracy describes:

...the light of the new resources made available by further historical, philosophical, and social scientific research and reflection...committed to...the central task of contemporary Christian theology: the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation between the principal values, cognitive claims, and existential faiths of both a reinterpreted postmodern consciousness and a reinterpreted Christianity.²⁴²

Tracy’s seminal work points to the work of practical theology. Theologically, this means that the discovery of what is true is an ongoing process, and what we consider to be true is up for revision as new information comes to light. For Transformative Community, this new information can come through continued study of traditional sources, and through the voice of contemporary culture and context. For this reason, it could very much be said that Transformative Community is a community that is shaped and formed upon the values and process of practical theology, or as Martyn Percy describes, “the argument turns towards arguing for a richer form of practical theology that takes ‘ordinary Christianity’ more seriously and, in so doing, restores some sense of public theology as a critical and yet affirming discourse that is engaged with contemporary culture.”²⁴³

With the above descriptions, one can begin to see how this work seeks to operationalize the philosophical concepts of the work so far. It is a way of viewing community that is well

²⁴² David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* [New York: The Seabury Press, 1978], 32.

²⁴³ Percy, *Engaging with Contemporary Culture*, 5.

rooted within the Christian tradition, and within Christian theology. However, a change in community concept or model is not, by itself, enough to become Transformative Community. This is about change at both a personal level as well as a communal level. How these concepts are lived out by ministry practitioners within the life of a parish is an important piece to helping a parish move from being closed off to a mindset open to transformation. The belief that mutual levels of transformation need to be present within communities looking to transform in faithful and effective ways is a key element to transformative leadership.²⁴⁴ In the next section, the concepts of transformative leadership will be explored.

Transformative Leadership

As mentioned above, this proposed framework of Transformative Community cannot be limited to a change in parish or institutional structure. It must also be about a personal change in leadership. This is an important element within the concept of transformative leadership. As authors Eloy Anello, Joan Hernandez, and May Khadem write:

[M]oving towards a more principle-centred world requires that we integrate two different processes. On the one hand, we need to change our mental models of human nature and modify our individual behaviors accordingly. On the other, we need to change our mental models regarding society, in order to promote new forms of social, political and economic organization.²⁴⁵

With the term “mental model”, the authors are referring to the worldviews that each person brings given their past experiences and perspectives.²⁴⁶ These models frame many of the

²⁴⁴ Eloy Anello, Joan Hernandez, May Khadem, *Transformative Leadership: Developing the Hidden Dimension* (Houston: Harmony Equity Press, 2014), 58.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

perspectives we have, and the new experiences with which we come into contact. They help us to understand and process the world around us. The authors propose the need to change the mental models we already possess with regards to how we behave on a personal level, in addition to how we perceive, and behave within, a wider social framework.

Anello et al. refer to these dual needs of change as “interdependent processes”.²⁴⁷ It is not enough to simply foster “personal transformation” or “social transformation” on its own.²⁴⁸ Both require simultaneous work in order to achieve the desired results. If change is initiated at the level of social structure, but little is cultivated at the personal level, organizational members may resist the change as they feel that change is being imposed upon them.²⁴⁹ At the same time, change that is only facilitated at the personal or grassroots level of an organization may leave members frustrated because the organizational culture and structure is incapable of supporting and sustaining the desired change.²⁵⁰ Anello et al. suggest another option:

...if we exchange divisive mental models for a conceptual framework based on the potential for human nobility, we will recognize the unique contributions that each person can make to the well-being of all. We will see a holistic relationship between the person and society and a reciprocal interaction between the welfare of each individual and his impact on the good of the whole. We will recognize that enduring change will demand that we work on both fronts simultaneously.²⁵¹

In this model of leadership, the good of the individual and the welfare of the whole must both be of significant value and pursuit. Anello et al. state that the three primary functions of a group when trying achieve a particular purpose are:

1. To accomplish the tasks and objectives for which it was created;

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Anello, Hernandez, Khadem, *Transformative Leadership*, 59.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

2. To create and strengthen unity among its members;
3. To develop the capabilities of its members.²⁵²

While the first task may seem obvious, it is also important to remember that the effectiveness of the group very much depends on the second and third functions.²⁵³ Groups who work within a sense of unity often achieve more than groups who do not have a sense of unity.²⁵⁴ As well, groups who have a larger pool of capabilities and competencies are more able to contribute to the achievement of goals within the institutions or organizations that they participate.²⁵⁵

In order to facilitate the development of a community where both institution and individual members both share in the work and benefits of mutual transformation, such as the proposed Transformative Community, a model of community leadership must be chosen intentionally. Anello et al. discuss the dominant models of leadership that are used within groups: authoritarian²⁵⁶, paternalistic²⁵⁷, know it all²⁵⁸, manipulative²⁵⁹, and democratic²⁶⁰. In their discussion of these five dominant leadership models, they acknowledge that, while each may have varying levels of effectiveness with regards to meeting the three primary functions of a group, none of them are able to achieve the goals of all three functions. The first four models of leadership have shortcomings that Anello et al. describe:

Although outwardly there are many differences between these four modes of leadership, in all four the leader attempts to dominate the group by controlling the process of decision-making, whether it be through the force of authority, care, knowledge, or manipulation...the purpose of maintaining control through domination serves an

²⁵² Ibid., 61-62.

²⁵³ Ibid., 62.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 63.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 64.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 68.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 71.

egotistical need for power. As a result, none of these styles of leadership are effective means for achieving the three primary functions of a group.²⁶¹

While the authors acknowledge that the fifth model, democratic leadership, “takes a number of steps in the right direction”, it is not complete in its ability to meet the three primary group functions, and is very much vulnerable to manipulation and abuse.²⁶²

Anello et al. propose a new conceptual framework that they believe can meet the three primary functions of a group: *transformative leadership*.²⁶³ The authors detail this style:

...an approach informed by evidence and ethical principles and based on the development of capabilities. This is an integrative model that seeks to generate a culture of collaboration based on shared moral values, ethical principles and scientific evidence, motivated by the search for truth and for mutually beneficial solutions.²⁶⁴

This model encourages the participation of all members, striving to unite group members as they work together to achieve goals and engage problems in ways that aim to discover ethical and inclusively beneficial alternative solutions. It is in this description of the conceptual framework that we begin to see how the mutual transformation of individual members in tandem with that of the structure of the group itself yields a potential benefit. This is leadership that embodies the framework and ethos of Transformative Community.

Transformative leadership is the strongest candidate for faithful and effective leadership frameworks for those who seek to empower Transformative Community. Transformative leaders actively seek out truth and integrate those learnings within their life and practice. They pursue not only personal transformation but social and structural change as well, and they attempt to do

²⁶¹ Ibid., 69.

²⁶² Ibid., 78.

²⁶³ Ibid., 79.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

this by empowering others within the group to expand their own capacity for leadership through supportive relationships and the sharing of power. As the leader is changed, the community is changed, and therefore the structure is changed all in the pursuit of noble truth and ethical community development.

Conclusion

In this chapter Christian Hospitality has been explored from the long view of history and Christianity across the spectrum. This chapter also examined the specifics of Sacred Hospitality in the form of principles developed through the lived experience and discipline of Benedictine monks as they engaged in dialogue with people from different religious traditions. The framework of Transformative Community was described as a model of community that engages with the modern day culture surrounding the parish church in ways that seek to discern God's call to the church in every age so that the church is able to transform in ways that are faithful, life giving and sustainable. Finally, the concept of transformative leadership was described and proposed as the most appropriate approach to leadership for enabling the development of Transformative Community. The theories and frameworks explored in this chapter, specifically those of Sacred Hospitality, serve as a basis for describing and understanding the leadership interventions that will be outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter Three – Leadership Interventions

Introduction

The last chapter detailed the literature around the history of Christian hospitality and took a more focused look at the principles of Sacred Hospitality that originated from Vatican II. The concept of Transformative Community was introduced and the values and principles for the conceptual framework of transformative leadership were explored. It is important to note that contrary to most D.Min. projects, this one does not include the leadership intervention as part of the research design; however, as noted below, the specific leadership interventions become the subject of the empirical research described in chapter four.

This chapter describes the interventions for each of the three ministry sites. While the main observational landscape of this thesis is attending to how parish churches struggled to address the issue of decline, there is also the element of the diocesan Bishop (and other diocesan leadership) sending a parish priest to specifically help parishes cope with and address the issue of decline. The leadership interventions were part of a mandate from the Bishop and the parish leaders within the research sites. This is very different than exercising leadership interventions with the intention of having the results measured for a research project. In each of these intervention sites the hope was that leadership interventions, shaped by the principles of Sacred Hospitality, would help parish churches become more open to change and transformation.

As each intervention site is examined, it is important to remember the wider context of the Anglican diocese during these interventions. In chapter one, the Diocese of Ottawa was exploring possible changes and transformation to deliver its ministry. The expectation was that parishes would evolve as needed; however, my main motivation was to help parishes move

forward not only to survive but to rediscover and reclaim their mission and identity in the changing landscape. For the purpose of clarification, each intervention site is a specific geographic area within the Deanery of Stormont. At each site, a number of intervention endeavours were used to help parish churches move in the direction of faithful transformation. Throughout the interventions, I collected “field notes” to keep a record of observations, questions that arose throughout the process, as well as reflecting on successes and challenges. These were used, almost as a journaling process for me at various times. These field notes helped me to remember my thoughts, actions, questions and reflections at each of the interventions sites with the hopes that ongoing reflection could lead to greater insight and successful outcomes.

North Dundas Site

The leadership intervention in North Dundas was the first and least intentionally structured of all the interventions. I was new to the role of the parish priest, and had taken a directed reading course that introduced me to the concept of Sacred Hospitality. I began to explore how this concept might be helpful for helping the parish move forward. The interventions themselves played out over the span of my seven years of ministry in that location, however the interventions involving Sacred Hospitality began in 2012, as a way to address the parish response to a community consultation session around the needs of the wider community and the development of the church.

In the Fall of 2012, the parish organized a “Community Leaders Consultation,” where community leaders from outside of the congregation were invited to discuss the needs of the

community, their perception of the church within the wider community, and how the church might respond to the needs within the wider community. At this point, the concepts of Sacred Hospitality had not been introduced into the parish. The consultation was an idea that had been discussed at Diocesan annual Synod the year before. The decision to intentionally invite those from outside of the parish church to share their experiences and thoughts attempted to introduce the Sacred Hospitality principle of “*invitation*.”²⁶⁵ The idea was that the only way the community could collect information about what the wider community needed, and what their perception of the church was, was to ask them directly. While the primary principle at work here was that of *invitation*, the participants in the meeting were assured that their feedback would be received openly as the parish had a genuine desire to hear insights that might help them move forward. With this, the principles of *respect* and *openness* were also assumed as being present during the gathering. This turned out to be an inaccurate assumption.

Unfortunately, after the consultation, the parish was resistant to applying the collected insights to the visioning and decision-making process. There were questions as to why people who did not attend the church should have a voice with regards to the decisions that needed to be made. At this moment, the parish seemed entrenched with an ethos of “restorationism.”²⁶⁶

As a leadership response, the Sacred Hospitality principles were introduced into the regular life of the community through preaching and education programs to start. For example, the Revised Common Lectionary provided an almost-weekly opportunity to engage with at least one of the four principles. To reference the previous chapter, the theme of hospitality occurs regularly in the Gospel. For example, a baptismal sermon was intentionally crafted and adapted

²⁶⁵ de Bethune, *Interreligious Hospitality*, 122.

²⁶⁶ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

to reflect the diverse congregation and their guests, when visitors from a variety of faith backgrounds (including no previous faith background) and some who had intentionally left their faith due to negative experience attended. As that sermon describes:

The thing is, I actually think this is a fantastic scenario to be in [a baptism liturgy with a diverse group of attendees]. It gives the church a chance to practice a new form of hospitality (that doesn't insist on conversion and judgement...or superstition), and it gives people from the outside world a chance to (hopefully) feel welcomed within the church community...for who they authentically are.²⁶⁷

Another example cited was an Easter sermon that occurred when local tensions were high due to a perceived risk of terrorism. The fear being felt within the local community began to target the Islamic faith as being a heretical religion. I decided to use the Eastertide sermon time to address elements of community intolerance or indifference:

If we can allow ourselves to remain humble and open...if instead of judging others who are different...we decide to listen openly with respect...and allow ourselves to share our truth in turn...we may find that even though we think we might have explored the depths of truth...that there really are many other mysteries to uncover...and way more to God than we ever expected.²⁶⁸

These types of sermons encouraged the parish to consider how the notion of hospitality, particularly the principles of Sacred Hospitality, are rooted. It also encouraged the parish to accept others as they are while reassuring newcomers that they should be accepted as their authentic selves. Upon reflection, these small paragraphs introduced the principles of respect, invitation, and openness into the liturgical moments of the parish.

Furthermore, adult education programs allowed the parish to intellectually engage with the principles of Sacred Hospitality and consider them in more detail. After being exposed to the

²⁶⁷ Field Notes, Sermon preached on January 2nd, 2014. For this, and other sermons used as part of the leadership intervention, see Appendix H.

²⁶⁸ Field Notes, Sermon preached on Easter 6, 2014. See Appendix H.

principles themselves through preaching and adult education programs, participants wanted to see how they might apply to their “real life” struggles within the parish. There were discussions around what it meant to be *rooted* at the local, diocesan, national, and historic levels of Anglican Christianity. This led to a weekend retreat, during Holy Week, where the parish looked at each of the principles and then wrestled with how well they engaged each of them in their private and communal lives.²⁶⁹ Some of that exercise involved telling the story of who they were as a parish and what their local history was. Questions were then asked about who they were as an Anglican community in the larger picture. *What did it mean to be part of the Anglican Church at the diocesan, national, or historical level, and across the longer history of the Anglican Church?* As well, the community talked about how they felt about new people moving to the village or attending the church. *What were the locals’ expectations with regards to new people? How were these new people welcomed into the village or the church? What might it be like for new people to be received in that way?* The group also discussed what their community’s cultural expectations were and how they intersected with the teachings of the faith around welcoming strangers.²⁷⁰ Finally, after much discussion, the group agreed that it might be important to speak with people who did not regularly interact with the church community and see if there were any insights into the direction the church should be heading.²⁷¹ They decided the best way forward would be to get some insight into the experiences and needs of those outside the parish church and revisit the answers that had been given to some of these questions.

It was at this point that education days on the hospitality concepts were held separately from the initial Holy Week retreat. The hope was to expose as many members of the parish to the

²⁶⁹ See appendix G for an outline of the retreat.

²⁷⁰ Field Notes, Holy Week Retreat, Spring 2013.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

ongoing conversations around Sacred Hospitality and parish development. Parishioners who could not attend previous sessions would now have another opportunity to be present. These education days were condensed versions of the Holy Week retreat where participants were taught about the four principles, and began to reflect on how those principles were, or were not, lived out within the parish. Each session began with participants telling their version of the parish church story, followed by an invitation to widen that understanding by considering the diocesan, national, and historic lenses of being Anglican.

During the consultation, the wider community suggested that what North Dundas really needed was a fully functioning community centre so that there would be affordable rental space; a place where families could gather to celebrate weddings, birthdays, etc. Also, local businesses and care facilities needed a place to run workshops and training days. In short, they wanted a place that would be able to draw communities together in shared celebrations and community development.

Following the consultation revisit and even more discussion about how much impact “non-members” should have on the decisions of the church, the parish decided that instead of rebuilding a “traditional” church building that would work with the local foodbank, they would build a modern building that could serve as a community hub. As one parishioner described, “With this new building concept, even if the Anglican Church ceases to be in the next 50 years, this building can keep serving the needs of our community for decades to come.”²⁷²

One of the fascinating observations, was that this time, when the “key” members tried to move away from the community suggestions, other parishioners would ask questions like, “Does

²⁷² This comment was made by the Rector’s Warden at one of the final parish visioning meetings.

that reaction fit into what we learned about Christian hospitality? We are supposed to be a Christian church and community, aren't we?" This is a very different experience than Cobb Jr.'s fear of non-theological communities.²⁷³ These questions suggest an intentional use of the theological lens when reflecting on the behaviours and values of community members.

In the end, the parish agreed to use the information gathered at the consultation as a meaningful source of discernment with regards to the direction the parish should develop.²⁷⁴ While the plan had originally been to develop a church building that helped to support the local food bank, the parish was now willing to consider the wider community's call to develop a community centre style building.

At the beginning of 2015, the new building of St. Clare's finished construction. Its final cost was \$1.5 million. From its opening to the writing of this thesis, the community use of this building has brought in enough revenue to pay off approximately \$9000 of the mortgage per month. Congregation numbers have since doubled, from 35 people per Sunday (at the beginning of the intervention) to approximately 70 people. The new members seem to be made up of several groups: people who had never been to the church before but felt part of the community because of the consultations, people who had left the church previously but felt moved to return and see the new product, and young families that felt that the new building was able to meet their family needs. Some of the returning members had originally left because of the tension that building closures and amalgamation had created. Others had left as a protest against the Chesterville church closure.

²⁷³ Field Notes, parish council meetings, Fall of 2013.

²⁷⁴ It is important to note that, up until this point, the parish was adamant about building a new church that could house a larger Foodbank for the area. All other ideas were dismissed. It is also important to note that several of the "key" members of the parish had been working for the local Foodbank for almost a decade.

South Dundas Site

Shortly after the opening of St. Clare's in North Dundas, the Bishop deployed me to the parish of South Dundas in 2015. With the recent outcomes of the amalgamation and new build in North Dundas, the Bishop was hopeful that the similar problems of decline and resistance to change in South Dundas could be addressed. Using the experience from the previous parish, I was beginning to formulate a more structured approach to the way I wanted to help the parish move forward, and this meshed well since South Dundas has already started its own internal reflection and data gathering process. They called the process *Dreams to Reality* and it intended to allow the parish to tell the story of who they have been, where they wished to be, and what some of the challenges have been in allowing them to accomplish their goal. Looking back, this alone played a significant role in beginning the parish's work on their *rootedness* and the ability to practice *respect* around differing experiences. Upon reflection, this was a significant difference from the North Dundas intervention where there had not been an opportunity provided for the community to do their own *rootedness* work. Had North Dundas started with *rootedness*, and not the consultation invitation as a first step, the process and responses may have been more positive.

After reviewing the work that the parish was already doing, I felt the next steps would be:

- introduce the *invitation* principle into the intervention;
- bring the data produced by the community consultation to the attention of the parish;
- introduce the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life of the community through preaching and education series;
- facilitate a four-week education and discussion series that explored why people stopped coming to church, and how the problem of decline might be addressed;
- provide several opportunities for the data, principles, and experiences of the community to be discussed alongside of each other by the parish council, and the wider congregation.

Given the experience within North Dundas, this intervention was shaped around a consultation with the community leaders, who consisted of representatives from the local food bank, hospital, public schools, municipal government, police services, hospice, and Meals on Wheels. The consultation made it clear that the relationship between the parish church and the local community had stagnated. Furthermore, the stagnation had not only occurred between the parish and the wider community, but also between the members of the parish and the parish leadership. Where the wider community once felt very involved in the life and ministry of the parish, even if they were not members (or even religious), they now felt unwelcome and shut out. Where many outsiders had thought of St. James as “their church,” they now felt disconnected. Where the outside community had seen St. James as the place where everyone was welcome and a crown jewel in the community, it was now either seen as a toxic and closed off place or forgotten entirely.²⁷⁵ The relationship and connection with the local community that the parish had in the past, and wished to have again, was not the one that the local community leaders saw them as having at this time. As well, with such a significant decline in parish membership, it showed that there was a breakdown between parish leadership and the members of the congregation(s).²⁷⁶

The local community described to the parish how it saw both the church as well as the needs of the local community. The consultation suggested that the parish needed to keep a church plant within Morrisburg because “that’s where the greatest need is.”²⁷⁷ Morrisburg has a

²⁷⁵ Field Notes, Community Consultation, Fall 2015.

²⁷⁶ The parish almost had to have Diocesan interventions because nobody in the congregation would agree to be a Warden for the parish.

²⁷⁷ Feedback from the community consultation about the level of poverty within Morrisburg.

significant population who struggle with poverty issues. With limited access to transportation, any community support programming must be accessible to those without motorized transport. The group also articulated a need for a place for community arts and experiential programming. With a cut in funding for arts programs within the local school, kids that were not naturally athletic had little to no access to accessible arts programs given the level of poverty in the area. The group also stated that St. James was a beautiful building that, with some minor changes, would be a perfect venue for the community to host artistic events: concerts, theatre, coffee houses, and specialty dinners, to name a few.

The struggle for the parish, at that time, was that the initial plan had been to sell St. James in Morrisburg and move the congregation to St. John's in Iroquois. St. John's was a much newer building that cost significantly less to heat and maintain. Built in 1958 after the flooding of the St. Lawrence Seaway, St. John's was constructed to house about 150 people for worship and had a hall and kitchen on the same floor. It would meet all the needs of the existing congregation, however, it would mean giving up the outreach programs to the lower income community in Morrisburg as transportation and mobility were challenges for its population.

Over the next several months, the parish councils of each of the three points of South Dundas (Morrisburg, Iroquois, Riverside Heights) discussed what should be done. I facilitated these meetings given my role as Rector of the parish.

St. John's congregation in Iroquois was adamant that their building was the best choice to lower the cost of operations and preserve the current congregational practices.²⁷⁸ It was acknowledged that this could cause difficulties with those who needed support programming and

²⁷⁸ Field notes, parish council discussions, 2016.

had no transportation options, but the priority was to take care of the people who were members of the church first.²⁷⁹ Not only that, but if the rest of the parish came to Iroquois, then parish issues around attendance and weekly offerings would be solved.

On the other hand, the congregation of Holy Trinity in Riverside Heights was very open to receiving the information from the community consultation. They could understand the need for a building in Morrisburg so that people could have access to programs and services. That being said, even though their own building was beginning to put a significant financial burden on the wider parish and their weekly attendance and financial offerings were very low, they had no interest in giving up their building and coming together as one congregation in Morrisburg. Morrisburg was welcome to do what they needed, but they would either keep their building as is, or find other churches to attend if their building was closed.²⁸⁰

At the same time as these parish council discussions were taking place, the parish experienced additional interventions such as a preaching series²⁸¹ and education programs around hospitality and the new realities of postmodernity. I led each of these interventions.

To begin, during the season of Advent in 2015, each Sunday sermon looked at the elements of a healthy community as detailed by Christine Pohl: promise keeping, truth telling, gratitude, and hospitality.²⁸² The parish also hosted an education program, by Phyllis Tickle, that discussed the changes of a postmodern time and how the church might engage with these changes.²⁸³ The program itself described a 500 year cycle where the church dramatically changes

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ This included an Advent sermon series where one principle of Sacred Hospitality was introduced each week.

²⁸² Pohl, *Living into Community*, 6.

²⁸³ Field notes, Lent 2016.

and adapts to meet the needs of a new time. Participants were told that during this time, they would need to let go of some of elements of the church, however, there would still be room to hold on to elements that had the deepest meaning for the Christian community.²⁸⁴ Similar to the experience of North Dundas, the “fortress” mentality started to recede. It was put forward that St. John’s and Holy Trinity should be the churches to close, and that proceeds from the sale would be used to further develop ministries at St. James, Morrisburg, and community ministries throughout the parish. There were several voices of opposition, primarily from Iroquois and Riverside Heights.²⁸⁵ However, many voices within both of those congregations began to ask the theological questions about how they should make decisions. *Did threats, or choosing their own preferences over the needs of the poor and vulnerable sound like the message of Jesus?* This seemed to be a turning point as, in the end, the parish vestry²⁸⁶ voted to sell St. John’s and use the proceeds to develop further ministry. While Holy Trinity had originally stipulated that “if one of us goes, we both go”,²⁸⁷ they requested, at the eleventh hour, that the Bishop grant them “chapel status” so they would remain part of the parish, but be absented from the everyday costs and ministries of the parish. When it was time to choose, the majority of St. John’s chose the needs of the wider community and parish over their own preferences, but Holy Trinity chose to protect themselves. They could not move from out of the fortress mentality. However, it was not a total loss. Six people from St. John’s refused to make the journey to St. James. Two began attending St. Clare’s in Winchester, and the other four began attending Holy Trinity in Riverside

²⁸⁴ Field notes, Education Program: *The Great Emergence*, Lent 2016.

²⁸⁵ In one occasion, a member of Riverside Heights threatened to tell the province that he knew of a body that was secretly buried on the property so that the church would be harder to sell. As well, a small but powerful group from Iroquois threatened to leave the church and take “everyone” with them.

²⁸⁶ The annual general meeting of the whole parish.

²⁸⁷ Agreement between the wardens of both communities.

Heights. The people of Riverside Heights, from what I am told, welcomed them with open arms. A certain level of hospitality persisted.

At St. James in Morrisburg, several things have now taken place. In response to the feedback from the *Dreams to Reality* consultation, the parish is having a building assessment done to the current church structure. They want to know what is possible with regards to repurposing the building so that it can function as a multi-purpose space that can be accessible to the wider community. They have started conversations with a local brewery and winery, as well as a local B&B to discuss the possibility of having a local pub and/or restaurant run out of the building during the week. These connections were made when the parish ran “A Taste of the Seaway,” an annual fundraiser that partners with local vendors to promote their wares and supports local outreach ministries throughout the deanery. The fundraising strategies at the parish changed to meet the needs described through the community consultation and the feedback received from the new relationships that were stimulated by this new approach. This new way of combining community relationship development and effective fundraising was highlighted at the annual Synod of the Diocese of Ottawa in 2019, and described in the diocesan newspaper, *Crosstalk*.²⁸⁸

In a direct response to the concern around local opportunities for accessible arts programming, the parish chose to reallocate part of the budget. They hired a professional music director to not only help the parish work on the goal of renewing the worship and liturgy program, but also to offer free music and theatre lessons for children from low income families. In addition, the director teamed up with a Brockville theatre company to run free theatre camps

²⁸⁸ “Beyond Bake Sales: South Dundas Shakes Things Up” *Crosstalk*, January, 2020. March 31st, 2020. <https://www.allsaintswestboro.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Crosstalk-January2020.pdf>

for low income families during the summer. At the end of each year, the parish hosts a festival that highlights the artistic work of the participating children. While there is still work to do, the parish seems to have turned a corner and managed to reconnect its relationship to the wider community in a way that has allowed it to be a mutually transformative relationship.

East Stormont Deanery Site

In 2017, the clergy of the Deanery of Stormont met together to discuss the challenges of its individual parish ministries.²⁸⁹ For those in the eastern section of the deanery, the same list of struggles that North and South Dundas had experienced were brought forward. It was at this time that the Archdeacon and Regional Dean for Stormont asked me to be a consultant and facilitator to help the parishes involved find an answer to their problem.

Initially, I met with the clergy leadership of each parish and listened to their concerns. I described the experiences I had with North and South Dundas, and the various ways those parishes had chosen to engage the problem of dwindling resources and dying parish churches. They agreed that something similar could be helpful to their situation.

Next, a strategy was developed to bring the clergy leadership and the parish wardens together to discuss a way forward. At that initial meeting, the group was introduced to the four principles of Sacred Hospitality. They listened to the experiences which had helped guide other communities towards healthy and life-giving relationships between the parish church and the wider communities they served. We spent a long period of time discussing what it meant to practice the principle of *respect*, and that this process could only be effective if the clergy and lay

²⁸⁹ Field Notes, Bishop's Clergy Conference, September 2017.

leadership alike were able to embody these principles. The group agreed; the process began. We started by naming the problems and concerns of each parish, and as described in the first chapter, we also heard the stories of those parishes. Once the problems were named, the *rooting* process began. In those initial stages, the parishes decided that they would like to keep their current church buildings, but were open to developing new relationships with one another to see if a viable way forward could be discovered.

As the intervention continued, we invited the parish councils and then eventually the congregations of each parish to join. We presented the four principles of Sacred Hospitality and suggested that together they can be understood as the rules of engagement for this intervention process. We shared the stories of the consultation discussions up to that point so each party could root themselves within the work and story that had started before their arrival. We explained that anyone who wanted to be part of this conversation had to do so in good faith. That meant giving up their need to convert anyone to their way of seeing things. We insisted on their respecting one another's views and truths. At the same time, we asked them to be open enough that through mutual conversations, they might find themselves shifting or being more open to change. And in the end, the invitations happened naturally. Long Sault, Cornwall and Lancaster began to invite one another to community events, and later, to share worship services together on major celebrations. After one of the clergy was moved to another parish, and another retired, the parishes decided to amalgamate into one "area parish."²⁹⁰ Following suit, Maxville, Hawkesbury, and Vankleek Hill joined. While they are not as keen to worship together, they have participated in community events, and have expressed openness in sharing a priest between them. The [Anglican] church in Maxville has started to speak with the other denominations in the town to

²⁹⁰ A geographic area that has a team of clergy serving several communities.

see if there are shared relationships that could benefit the community. These changes have also allowed them to stabilize financially for the first time in years.

One of the significant impacts of this process happened at Trinity in Cornwall. After consulting with local non-profits, the parish was told that there were no local supports for low income and homeless people coming to the city. The Rev. Deacon Peter Cazaley, with permission of the parish and the Bishop's Office, created the Trinity Drop-In program.²⁹¹ While it started small, they now serve over 50 people each day. It is a far cry from a former mayor who told Cazaley that "there are no homeless people in Cornwall."²⁹² By 2020 the drop in had been taken on as a full diocesan "Community Ministry", which means it receives funding and support from across the Diocese. There is now discussion on the viability of it becoming a shelter as well.

Conclusion

In this chapter, three leadership interventions were described in the context of the Diocesan shift around ministry and community. The Diocese of Ottawa was engaged in its own work around transformation, and was encouraging parish churches to do the same. Each of the three intervention sites were then described to highlight the insights and reflections from previous experiences that helped to shape the subsequent intervention.

The next chapter will explore the voices of the research participants. Clergy leaders and lay members of the three sites will describe their experiences of the interventions as well as the

²⁹¹ A day program where people can come in off the street for food, clothing, community, and some counselling services.

²⁹² Quoted from a meeting between the mayor and Cazaley.

insights from the results of those interventions. This information will then be brought into a dialogue with the materials and insights covered so far, as a means to begin to develop a possible response to the problem of dying churches.

Chapter Four – Research Methodology and Findings

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the leadership interventions were outlined in three specific locations where each intervention was adapted with the information gained from the previous. As described, each of these interventions included varying degrees of intentionality in the presentation and inclusion of the four principles of Sacred Hospitality.

In this chapter, the experience of these interventions will be reviewed by providing the perspectives from each of these three sites. The qualitative research method was used to gather the data and phenomenology to engage with participant responses in order to explore the essence and insights of the participant experience. This is the empirical element of the descriptive-empirical task. While this chapter will provide empirical data for analysis, it also serves as another form of deep attentiveness and listening, as the data provided are the reflections, stories, and experiences of the participants involved.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to reflect on the leadership interventions enacted within each intervention site, and to determine whether or not they were able to help move parishes towards being open to change and transformation. The interventions themselves were a response to the problem of parish resistance to change which contributed to parish decline.

The goal of the interventions was to help closed off parishes move towards becoming Transformative Communities, so that they can change and adapt to the evolving needs of their ministry contexts in each generation. Previously, the framework and principles of Transformative Community were detailed. If a community was starting “from scratch,” then the community could choose to develop itself around the framework and principles of Transformative Community. However, when an already established parish church has become resistant to change and transformation, it can be difficult to encourage their movement towards being transformative. The research portion of this project focuses on a way to assist closed off parishes in becoming more open to transformation. It is not enough to simply say to a community, “be more open to transformation and your problems will be solved.” There needs to be a way to help parishes who are resistant to change become more open to the possibility of transformation. It is only then that they can work towards becoming Transformative Community.

Research Question

This research focused on discovering whether the leadership interventions that took place across Stormont Deanery helped the parish churches become more open to change and transformation. *Did the introduction of Sacred Hospitality principles within the life and leadership of the parishes involved help them in becoming more open to transformation? What might be learned from the insights of those who experienced the interventions? Could those experiences help to develop a framework to guide other rural parish church leaders?*

Methodology

In order to bring the voices and experiences of parish members into this interdisciplinary conversation, this chapter will move from the theoretical information gathered so far into the lived realities and experiences of people within the parish ministry context. In order to best capture this lived reality, I chose to use the methodology of qualitative research.

In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, this project was carried out within the natural settings of the specific intervention sites with the intent to make sense of the parish members' lived realities, the impact of the interventions, and to determine what kind of meaning people made of their experiences. With that in mind, it starts to become clear that a qualitative method would be appropriate for this research project. John McLeod defines qualitative research in the following way:

Qualitative research is a process of careful, rigorous inquiry into aspects of the social world. It produces formal statements or conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding the world, and therefore comprises knowledge that is practically useful for those who work with issues around learning and adjustment to the pressures and demands of the social world.²⁹³

Furthermore, qualitative research stresses the practical function of knowledge because knowledge has the potential to be world changing. As Swinton and Mowat describe:

... knowledge that has the potential not simply to comment on the world, but to change the world...this definition emphasizes the important role that qualitative research plays in complexifying the world. Qualitative research locates the researcher in the world in a very specific way. It offers her a position that enables her to render the familiar strange...By placing common-sense understandings of the world under scrutiny, the world is complexified, challenged and transformed as the envisioned eye of the

²⁹³ John McLeod, *Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*, (London: Sage, 2001) 3. Quoted in John Swinton, Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006) 31.

qualitative researcher encounters it.²⁹⁴

With this definition, and its unpacking from Swinton and Mowat, it becomes even more clear that a qualitative method is the appropriate choice for this project as it looks to understand the experiences of participants. The research itself was to see if leadership interventions that introduce the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life and ethos of a parish church would help them to become more open to transformation. In a way, it can appear that this project is trying to answer two separate questions. In a sense, it is. One question centers on finding a model for parish churches that allow them to be able to transform themselves to the changing needs of their time while maintaining an authentic Christian identity. However, Transformative Community is much more difficult to embody if a parish church is resistant to change, or inward-looking in its makeup. The second question, and the focus of this part of the research, centres on how parish churches might be able to become more open and move towards this new framework for the community. While Transformative Community is the ideal goal, the leadership interventions were intended to assist the parish churches towards becoming Transformative Community.

This project was about understanding the real-life problems of rural parish churches, gaining insight into their causes, and exploring possible solutions. The interventions within each of the studied sites were already underway when this project started, so instead of looking to insert a hypothetical solution and observe its potential effectiveness, this project's focus was to investigate the results of interventions that had already occurred, or were in the process of occurring. A qualitative approach allowed the research to take place within the local context,

²⁹⁴ John Swinton, Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006) 31-32.

included interpretation from local participants and outside observers, and allowed participants to express their own meaning making regarding the phenomena they experienced. It was, very much like the description of Swinton and Mowat, “like a detective story without a fixed ending.”²⁹⁵ This research needed to be about understanding, interpreting, and telling the story through the rigor of disciplined detective work.

Method

Qualitative research takes human experience seriously, and puts great effort into finding multiple ways to understand and interpret those experiences.²⁹⁶ It is a balance between being storytelling, and much more than just storytelling. For the purpose of this study, phenomenology was selected as the research method.

Phenomenology

In order to bring out common themes within each intervention site, and across intervention sites, listening to those with lived experience of the interventions was important to get a sense of the meaning they ascertained as a result. It is at this point that the project enters the realm of phenomenology. As Creswell defines:

...a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Swinton, Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 30.

²⁹⁶ Swinton, Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 31.

²⁹⁷ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 76.

The phenomenon that was similar across each of the three intervention cases was the leadership intervention to address the problem of parish church decline. Each intervention site was engaged in either using one on one interviews or a focus group setting to tell the story of their experiences, with the goal of insights being gleaned from them as a collective.

Phenomenology follows a specific procedure. Creswell describes this process in the following seven steps: determining if the problem is best examined with this approach, identifying a phenomenon of interest, collecting data from the individuals who had experience with the phenomena, participants asked about their experiences of the phenomena, analysing data through statements of significance, grouping statements into themes, and generating a description of the “essence” of the phenomena.²⁹⁸ Since this project sought to find insights through the lived experiences of the participants in response to the shared event of leadership interventions, the first two criteria are met. The data was reviewed several times as were the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups. Those transcripts then had statements of significance organized into themes that were then used to capture the essence of the phenomena.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is heavily influenced by the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.²⁹⁹ The philosophical assumptions for this method, while coming from different sources, have some commonalities: studying the lived experiences of people, the understanding that conscious experiences are being explored, and that the purpose is to understand the essence of these experiences, not simply to analyze or find explanations.³⁰⁰ As well, phenomenology

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 81-82.

²⁹⁹ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 76-77.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

seeks to try and do away with presuppositions about the realness of an event or experience until more information can be gathered.³⁰¹ Phenomenology rejects the “subjective-objective perspective” and bases itself “...on the lived experiences of individuals and how they have both subjective experiences of the phenomenon and objective experiences of something in common with other people.”³⁰²

Challenges Associated with Phenomenology

While the benefits of phenomenology are the ability to find a rich understanding of how several individuals experienced a phenomenon, this also provides challenges to the researcher. Finding participants can be difficult as it is essential to this method that the participants have experienced similar phenomena.³⁰³ As well, the ability to effectively bracket personal experiences can be a challenge for the researcher. When the data is interpreted, making sure personal assumptions are minimized during the interpretation is essential.³⁰⁴

Bracketing

Part of the phenomenological method of analysis involves either setting aside or putting something in place to minimize the impact of the researcher’s personal bias and understanding on the analysis of data.³⁰⁵ In this project, an outside research assistant was brought in to conduct the parishioner interviews, and they analyzed the transcripts of both the focus group and parishioners separately from the researcher. It was only after these independent analyses that the researcher and assistant shared their initial insights to begin the process of identifying significant

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid., 78.

³⁰³ Ibid., 83.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 83.

statements and themes with one another. This allowed the statements and themes to be identified with insights from both participant-observer perspectives and independent third-party perspectives. In the event of both the researcher and assistant being unable to reach a consensus on a statement or theme, the third-party transcriber was consulted to lend their insights. This assessment framework allowed for the researcher's personal bias and understanding to be set aside, as much as possible, and fostered an element of curiosity when receiving the insights from different perspectives.

Research Design

Participants were invited from each of the three intervention sites. The common experience for these sites was that each experienced some form of an intentional introduction of the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life of the parish through leadership interventions.

The research looked at the three intervention sites and collected data via interviews, focus groups, documents, and observations. The goal was to explore and analyze the experiences of those who lived through the interventions that occurred in each of the three sites.

The research was designed in a way to collect data to either support or refute the research claim that leadership interventions, based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality, helped the parishes in question become more open to change and transformation. As well, it needed to be done in a way where participants had a chance to share their stories and experiences. In order to collect the data for this study, documents from within the sites were gathered around consultations with the wider community that one of the sites facilitated, as well as, their own story telling of their past 10 year history and reflections (pre-intervention) as to what they needed

to do in order to be sustainable and effective. To give the data additional context, a focus group of all the clergy leadership from the Deanery of Stormont gathered to give their reflections on the benefits, challenges, and impact the leadership interventions had on the parishes. For one site, semi-structured interviews were conducted to get an in-depth description of the state of the parish before interventions took place and what impact the interventions have had within the parish itself. It was the hope of this project that other sites would have made their lay leadership available for these interviews as well; however, the clergy leadership of those sites were uncomfortable doing so due to pastoral reasons.³⁰⁶

Research Ethics

Academic research must have appropriate safeguards in place. Researchers have a duty to make sure that participants encounter minimal risk and can benefit from the results of the research in which they participate.³⁰⁷ As Sensing describes:

As a researcher, you have an ethical obligation to your congregants and participants. You are examining and leading change in the social-religious lives of people. Your role as a minister is a sacred trust. Violations of this trust sometimes happen, and once the damage is done, it may take months or years to repair. Therefore, ethical considerations must be attended to in the research design phase of the project.³⁰⁸

The research design for this thesis strove to minimize risk for the participants by inviting free and informed consent, and minimized the risk of relational power imbalance between the researcher/research assistant and the participants. As well, the participants, and the communities

³⁰⁶ The Rector of North Dundas believed that it would be too soon after the building of St. Clare's for the parish to revisit the process, and the clergy of East Stormont believed it to be too soon into the process to have the parishioners reflect.

³⁰⁷ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 33.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 31.

they belong to, received the benefits of the research as the results helped them to make choices around the development of their community ministry. The research design was approved by the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University.³⁰⁹

Data Collection

Data collection was done in several ways. There was a collection of documents that the parishes had put together around their own attempts at assessing and addressing the problem. As well, a third party layperson was asked to conduct semi-structured interviews with members of interview site parishes. A focus group of clergy leaders within the deanery was facilitated by the researcher. A separate third-party consultant then transcribed the recordings of the interviews and focus group participants. Parish artifacts were also collected as data from the interventions. These artifacts included the parish's own analysis of the community consultations, as well as my field notes throughout each intervention.

Participants

The target group for these interviews were to be members of Parish council. As per diocesan policies, being a member of Parish Council sets natural limits on the research group. Members are 18 years of age or older and need to be regular participants within the leadership of

³⁰⁹ See appendix C, REB File Number: 1360.12/17

the church. It also meant that both clergy and laypersons are included. Exclusions include children/youth under the age of 18 and persons who are not active members of parish leadership.

Parish Council members were chosen as the research group as they were the most active and engaged group in the parish interventions and by extension have a good sense of the state and history of the parishes they represent. They were also the most likely to have experienced the interventions and be knowledgeable about the interventions' impact on their parishes as a whole, as they are the parish leaders who other community members come to for advice, and to express their concerns and insights.

As well, the research focused on the leaders of the parish since leaders have a large impact on members' chances of feeling inspired, challenged, empowered and to become loyal, high performers.³¹⁰ This means that one way to introduce the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life of community and to gather data around impact, effectiveness, and success is through the leadership within each parish.

Research Assistant

A lay research assistant from outside of the parish was chosen as they were familiar with the topic at hand, trained in interview techniques, facilitation, and consulting, while also having a neutral relationship with each of the communities that were being studied. This was put in place to remove power or relationship imbalances, as they did not represent the institution(s) that had a vested interest in the research outcomes. The assumption was made that in engaging with the third-party assistant, participants should feel more comfortable expressing their true feelings and insights. One benefit to the researcher is by choosing an assistant with working knowledge of the

³¹⁰ Bernard M. Bass, Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (New York: Psychology Press, 2006.), xi.

topic at hand, there was no need to get them “up to speed” to be able to do their work, and do it well.

Consent

With regards to consent, every effort was made to ensure participants could be comfortable agreeing to participate or not. The research assistant contacted the rectors of each parish intervention site for permission to do the research. Next, the research assistant asked the wardens of the parish to invite members of each Parish Council to participate in the interviews up to a maximum of six persons per site. After the interviews, the participants could indicate if they wished to participate in a follow up focus group.

The Revised Design

At this point it is important to note that the original application, while approved, needed to be revisited. When the original research assistant reached out to the rectors of the intervention sites, serious pastoral concerns were raised about the comfort of parishioners participating in the interviews. For the members of North Dundas, the concern was that they were still recovering from the completed amalgamation and new build of St. Clare’s, and that doing an in-depth interview would only aggravate wounds that had just started to heal. In East Stormont, the concern was that the new ministry project had just started, and that in-depth interviews would be overwhelming for parishioners. After having taken this feedback into account, the approach was adapted with renewed approval. At the same time, the original research assistant wished to step away from the project for personal reasons. With these new events and insights, I contacted the Research Ethics Board with a revised research design and a new research assistant. The new

assistant was a layperson who was familiar with the Anglican Church, but did not work in the Bishop's Office. This eliminated power imbalance for potential candidates as there was very little power differential between the interviewer and the participants.

Parishioner Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it allowed specific questions of interest to be asked, and would also allow the interviewer the flexibility to probe deeper into the answers provided, or try and broaden the information given. In short, it gave both the interviewer and the participants the best opportunity to engage the fullness of their experiences while still focused on the topic at hand. When looking for qualitative and experiential data, the ability to use questions and engagement to provide “thick” data was essential. The conversation was “shaped” by the approved questions on the list, but had the freedom to “flow” in whatever directions the participants need them to in order to feel that their stories had been fully explored, heard, and respected.

In terms of interviews, the interviewer contacted research participants by email or phone to set up the interview. The interview was conducted either in person, or by a phone call, depending on the preference of the participant.³¹¹ A list of applicable persons was accessed through the Rector of the parish. While the communication between Rector and council member meant that the participation of each candidate was not completely anonymous, the content of each interview was confidential. Only myself and the interviewer are aware of each participant's answers. For the questions themselves, please see Appendix B.

Clergy Focus Group

³¹¹ All participants chose a face to face interview.

The revised design incorporated a focus group for the clergy of the Deanery of Stormont. Instead of lay parishioners, the clergy leadership met to discuss the impact of the leadership interventions within their parishes. This focus group would be conducted by myself so there was no power imbalance. The new research assistant would conduct seven semi-structured interviews with members of South Dundas that met the previous criteria. The revised design was approved by the Research Ethics Board.³¹²

The focus group was held with clergy who were working in the parishes where the interventions took place. I chose to conduct this focus group myself after the clergy participants, when asked their preference, indicated that they would feel most comfortable participating with myself as a facilitator. The collegial relationship was strong enough for comfort, but contained the necessary boundaries where honest and open feedback and discussion could occur. During this focus group, the clergy were asked to describe their experiences of the interventions and their outcomes. In one instance, the clergy person was the Rector who followed after the intervention, so he could speak to the experiences and impact on the parish as they “looked back” on what had happened. This focus group was recorded, and the conversation transcribed. For a list of focus group questions, please see Appendix 1.

Analysis

The focus of this research was to engage with participants, both clergy and laity, that had been part of one of the leadership interventions, and attend to their experiences of those

³¹² See appendix B

interventions. The research question asked if the leadership interventions had helped the parish churches move towards being more open to change and transformation.

As mentioned above, data was gathered from several sources: documents from self-directed problem analysis and possible solution brainstorming by the parishes before my intervention time with them, documents and field notes from consultation portions of my intervention time with the parishes, transcripts from the clergy focus group, as well as semi-structured parishioner interviews. The parish documents were gathered electronically from the Anglican Parish of South Dundas. The artifacts were analyzed in a similar fashion to the transcripts (see below). The research assistant was provided with their own copy of the data. We both did our initial analysis separately from each other. Afterwards we brought our separate findings together and worked towards a consensus with regards to statements of significance and important observations.

With regards to the semi-structured interviews, the interviewer and I began our data analysis by looking for statements of significance that described how participants experienced parish life before and after the interventions. Creswell describes this analysis:

...data analysts go through the data and highlight “significant statements,” sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon...these significant statements and themes are then used to write a description of what the participants experienced...³¹³

As we went through the interview transcripts, we noted words, thoughts, and phrases within the data to see what patterns emerged and whether the lived experiences of participants related to the principles of Sacred Hospitality. We looked at what the participants had experienced as

³¹³ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 82.

outcomes or effects of the leadership intervention. We were particularly interested to learn if the intervention had helped the parishes become more open than they were before. For the theme development, the research assistant and I read through all the transcripts and marked instances with coloured highlighters where we saw statements of significance as well as elements of the Sacred Hospitality principles present, or absent.

To complement this, we went back through the transcripts and wrote down our observations about what was being said, what questions the comments raised, and what they added to the discussion. We also recorded participant's responses to the primary question, "Did the interventions work in regards to helping parishes become more open to transformation?"

Research Findings – Participant Answers

The primary question for this research project was to see if the parishes involved in the various intervention sites were more "open to change and transformation" after the interventions had ended. Across the board, both clergy and lay interviewees said that they believed the parishes were more open to transformation after the interventions. As one clergy person described, "Near the beginning of them [the interventions], I would say no, they curled up like little pill bugs, you know, and there was keening...I think that's quite different from what's happening...now."³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, MK, pg. 1.

Another described it this way, “Parish [X]³¹⁵ would have no part in [this], and Parish [Y] was going to pull out...I could tell that they were very defensive and very mistrustful...managed to get them to agree to at least try it out...”³¹⁶

From a different part of the Deanery:

And certainly at [parish X], uh, the, well I’ve already mentioned my personal bias against Sacred Hospitality. But leadership sometimes is messy and ugly, and hospitality implies lovely dovey, let’s hold on to each other and sing kumbaya. So that’s where I kinda look at it. But, after saying that, in your role as the principal um, architect, of [parish X], it would have been reasonable to think you could have called the community people together and say, “where is your focus and what is it going to be?” And they could have come around, like you guys are all suggesting, is it a food bank? Is it an OPP station, is it a youth gathering? And instead they said, yeah, we want a gathering place basically for all ages. And because of that, you, in your leadership style, were able to effectively bring about that.³¹⁷

Within the clergy leadership of the Deanery of Stormont, the consensus, even with some biases within the group, is that the leadership interventions did help the parish churches become more open to transformation.

From the perspective of the laity of South Dundas, the level of effectiveness was described in slightly different ways. As one parishioner described:

Yeah. I think that’s, that’s a very important one...that Sacred Hospitality, and I especially liked the part in there where it talks about, that we have to be open to others. And it can’t be just our way...we can’t just invite people in and want to offer them programs but it has to be our way, on our time, when we want it, and how we want it. That’s not Sacred Hospitality...so we have to be open to work with them...that’s a very important intervention, and that it met with success.”³¹⁸

³¹⁵ As agreed with the clergy group, parish identifiers have been removed from the body of this thesis project, however, they remain within the body of the transcripts within the appendices.

³¹⁶ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, FK, pg. 1.

³¹⁷ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, JW, 2.

³¹⁸ Parishioner Interview, Appendix F.2, DJ, pg. 3-4.

In this description, it is clear that the participant not only affirmed the success of the intervention, but was able to articulate some of the principles of Sacred Hospitality, and know what they imply, and what they do not imply. As well, another parishioner from a different part of the parish, when asked if the interventions were effective, stated:

Yes, it did because um, there are, now, Iroquois was very small, to start with. And the reality is, you can't support [a congregation with so few people], and they make concessions here at St. James. They listen to some of the things that Iroquoians didn't want to see or weren't happy about. For example, we were never very touchy feely in Iroquois, and having to hold hands to say the Lord's prayer, is...and you know, bless them, they stopped that because that was something that, for whatever reasons, they changed the time of the services a little bit to accommodate...You know, there was, there was some serious efforts to try to please, you know, to make it so that everybody would feel comfortable together.³¹⁹

This parishioner states that the intervention was effective. She adds her experiences of how one part of the parish was willing to listen to the concerns and preferences of another part of the parish and make adjustments so that the new members joining their community location would feel more comfortable. This would equate to the Sacred Hospitality principles of *respect* and *openness* at play. We also see elements of *rootedness* and *invitation*; Iroquois was rooted enough to know what they liked and did not like. Morrisburg was able to hear the needs and traditions of Iroquois without asking them to change. With an invitation extended for Iroquois to join, Morrisburg was open to changing some of the liturgical practices, and service time, so that it would be easier for Iroquois to accept the invitation. This suggests that not only were the interventions effective, but the values and principles of Sacred Hospitality had also entered the ethos of the parish. I was assured that this was not simply the bias of my own preference when the research assistant made a similar observation before going over our findings together.

³¹⁹ Parishioner Interview, Appendix F.8, WG, pg. 5.

Evidence began to mount in favour of the impact of the interventions as the verbal and direct statements of success affirmed this, alongside the results of the parish ministry development both during and after the time of the interventions. The community of North Dundas was not only able to complete an amalgamation that had been decades in the making, but they allowed their design of the new church building to be strongly influenced by a community consultation that consisted of people who were not members of the church. The wider community said that what they needed most was a community centre for gathering.³²⁰ St. Clare's was designed to be a community centre that could also function as a worship/ministry place.

In South Dundas, the original option was to close St. James in Morrisburg and amalgamate to St. John's in Iroquois.³²¹ And yet, it was the community consultation where the wider community suggested that the parish needed to have a physical presence within Morrisburg because of the location of communities in poverty that carried the decision making, and the plans were changed.³²² At the writing of this paper, the parish is envisioning what a repurposing of the building of St. James should look like to best accomplish the ministry needed within the local community. As a member of that community described:

...openness to collaboration...collaboration and the offering input, and the developing opportunities for people to come together several times and to share ideas...to listen to other's ideas...allowed more people to buy into the change...rather than observers of the change, they were stakeholders participating in the actual change that happened."³²³

From this perspective, we see a parish church with membership moving from passive participation to more active participation and having ownership in the development of ministry.

³²⁰ Field notes, parish consultation lunch, 2009.

³²¹ Field notes, conversations with the previous Rector who had shared their conversations and plans with the parish at that time, 2016.

³²² Appendix D, Dreams to Reality Final Report, pg. 1.

³²³ Parishioner Interview, DJ, pg. 4

With respect to the parishes involved in the East Stormont interventions, new parishes were formed despite the resistances and reservations of some participants, and communities started to come together in ways that crossed the boundaries and barriers that had previously existed. As described by one of the clergy leaders:

It is important to acknowledge that there was a lot of fear at the beginning. There was a lot of self preservation motivated rivalries. People quickly realized that if this is going to work, we need to make sure that we all do well...not just protect ourselves. It's the first time 'Parish X' has partnered with another parish!³²⁴

With regards to the research question, "Did the leadership interventions help parishes become more open to change and transformation?" there is considerable evidence to suggest that the interventions did assist the parish churches in becoming more open.

Data Analysis

While having direct answers to the research question can provide useful data, it is not, by itself enough to satisfy the intent of the phenomenological approach. In this next section, as per Creswell, statements of significance from participants will be grouped into themes from each of the intervention sites.³²⁵ To do so, both the research assistant and myself went through the transcripts and identified statements of meaning and significance. The first stage of this identification was done separately. Each of us used coloured highlighters to identify perceived significant statements. Afterwards, we compared our assessments and compiled a series of pre- and post-intervention themes based on agreed upon statements of significance. In the event that

³²⁴ Clergy Interview, Appendix F.1, PS, pg. 1.

³²⁵ Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 193.

we could not reach an agreement on the significance of a statement, our third-party transcriber was consulted to gain tie breaking insight.

Results

The results of our analysis will be detailed by intervention site, beginning with pre-intervention themes that arose, and then moving on to post-intervention themes to explore any changes that occurred as a result of the leadership interventions.

North Dundas Intervention Site

It should be noted that the clergy leadership in North Dundas, at the time of this research, had been in the parish for three years. He was not present for the leadership intervention itself, and his ministry has been focused on the post-intervention parish work. That being said, the focus group did give an opportunity for him to make some comments on the parish from a longer view.

Pre-Intervention Themes:

Past as an Identity

As noted above, the clergy leadership was not present for the pre-intervention stage of the parish. However, during the focus group there were still several comments made that provide some insight. For North Dundas much of the clergy reflection focused around identity. As the participant states, “And that’s a real struggle. Because they have been, their identity has been, focused on what they were in the past.”³²⁶ While this was the only significant statement made by

³²⁶ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1., JW, 7.

the clergy leader about the pre-intervention period, both the research assistant and myself found it to be significant. As the participant-observer within that parish, it was also consistent with my own experiences there.

Resistance to Change

While not present across the entire parish, one significant comment was made about resistance to change within the parish. As the participant describes, “[Parishioner X], well, to her grave she will go saying this [the amalgamation] was never a good idea...even to the point where...I buried her husband...there was absolutely no way they were coming to St. Clare’s.”³²⁷

Openness to Change

While some within the parish had been resisting the amalgamation, and the direction of development of the new building, others had been more open to change during the process. In an exchange between myself and a participant, we noted, “...when Crysler closed...they were given...an option to do you want to rebuild...they said no, lets take what we have...and go to Chesterville...”³²⁸ The participant responded with, “...it’s nice to have the group...and you’ve got the group from Winchester themselves...the Winchester group says, hey, well this is a big win...we had to change the name, but we can live with that.”³²⁹

Post-Intervention Themes:

During the focus group, the participant from North Dundas made several statements that brought three themes to the surface.

³²⁷ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1., JW, 7-8.

³²⁸ Ibid., JM, 8.

³²⁹ Ibid., JW, 8.

Search for New Identity

While discussing the concept of the principles of Sacred Hospitality and their impact on a parish going through change, the participant noted, "...when you bring all these churches together...they have to struggle to find a new identity...what is our identity, what is St. Clare's identity going to be."³³⁰ Later on, he continues, "We're [the parish] still at home...but now, it's this new rootedness."³³¹ With his reflections on the aftermath of the intervention, the North Dundas leader places significant emphasis on the idea that the parish is having to contemplate who they are now, as a community, after the intervention and amalgamation process.

Recovery/Sabbath

During an exchange between myself and the participant, the idea of the need to recovery or Sabbath came up repeatedly. As he describes, "What I can say is...for St. Clare's doing nothing is the best thing right now...let us ground ourselves, if you want to use that language."³³² When I mentioned that that the change could have been traumatic, he replied, "It's recovery. It's recovery."³³³ Later on the participant continues, "What Frank was saying about the Sabbath part, the rest, I wouldn't call it a rest I'd call it a Sabbath to make it sound, listen, there's something sacred about this rest...It's not just simply we're lazy."³³⁴ For the parish of North Dundas, the participant places a great deal of emphasis on the need to stop and rest. This theme was linked to the need to find a new identity as part of the re-rooting and rest process.

³³⁰ Ibid., JW, 7.

³³¹ Ibid., 8.

³³² Ibid., 14.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid., 21.

Open to Change

While this theme was present before the intervention took place, it was different after the intervention. The pre-intervention theme discussed parts of the parish being open to change, but also included a significant element of the community being resistant to change. This is, quite possibly, why the transformation needed had not taken place before the intervention. Post-intervention, the participant describes a significant amount of change that has happened within the parish. He describes, "...if you were to put St. Clare's on a change scales...I think it has gone to 85-90% change."³³⁵ However, at the same time, he reinforces the need for stability and Sabbath time as he acknowledges that the community needs a break from change for a bit. This statement does seem to indicate a shift from a community that had been able to resist change to a community that was willing to change to bring a new church into being.

South Dundas Intervention Site

Pre-Intervention Themes

In the parish of South Dundas, several lay participants reflected on the life of the parish before and after the interventions. In the pre-intervention time, several common themes emerged:

Resistance to Change

It should be noted that this resistance was not experienced equally across the parish. The participants mentioned that the congregation of St. John's in Iroquois seemed much more

³³⁵ Ibid., 19.

resistant to change than St. James in Morrisburg. With this in mind, levels of resistance were indeed noted in both communities. The element of resistance was noticed throughout the participants with statements such as, "...there was still some resistance...there were some people that never seemed to reconcile to the fact that...St John's was closed."³³⁶ Another states, "...there are some people that would feel that there would be...challenges involved in changing things."³³⁷ Yet another when asked about the parish attitudes towards change, "Resistant. I think everybody like the way things were and didn't want to see one thing change, because that's where my comfort level is."³³⁸ The participant then details the story of new members being chased off by the "old guard" because they brought new ideas into the parish.

Inter-Village Conflict

Inter-village conflict was something named by almost every participant; moreover, it was done so with very strong statements. As one participant said, "There's a long history in this community that I discovered working at the high school, that the people in Iroquois hate the people in Morrisburg. And the people in Morrisburg hate the people in Iroquois."³³⁹ This tension between the two villages was also mentioned by another participant from a different location within the parish: "If you live in this community long enough, you would know that attitude, Iroquois versus Morrisburg versus Holy Trinity has been around a long time. If Morrisburg gets

³³⁶ Parishioner Interview, Appendix F.8, WG, 4.

³³⁷ Ibid., Appendix F.2, DJ, 3.

³³⁸ Ibid., Appendix F.5, ML, 2.

³³⁹ Ibid., 7.

something Iroquois says, well why didn't we get it?"³⁴⁰ Various comments of a similar fashion were made by other participants.

Closed Off/Limited Relationship with Wider Community

While not all identical, the participants indicated that at one time in their history the parish had cultivated a relationship, of varying degrees, with the wider community, either through outreach, fundraising, or programs. However, with several changes in leadership over a 10-year period, those relationships had lessened or dissolved. As one participant described, "St. John's was about two things we did in the community...people did things individually...we had the roast beef dinner, but basically it was a fundraiser for the church...we got more community involved after Jon came."³⁴¹ Another stated, "I would say that our relationship with the community was good, [but] I wouldn't describe it as active...in terms of us being out, vibrant, in the community and active and providing things for the community, I wouldn't say we were doing that."³⁴² And even more to the point, another participant states, in response to a question about if the community knew the church existed, "No, I don't think so. No...we still need to work at community...it was stagnant...probably on the verge of dying, but definitely stagnant."³⁴³ While not the same across the parish, it seems clear to the participants that before the intervention the parish had elements of being closed off, resistant to change, and were in known conflict between villages.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., Appendix F.8, WG, 4.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

³⁴² Ibid., Appendix F.5, ML, 2.

³⁴³ Ibid., Appendix F.4, JM, 2.

Post-Intervention Themes:

More Community Involvement

With regards to the parish, post-intervention, participants indicated that there was a more intentional effort to reconnect and be open to the wider community. As one participant states, "...but now, you know, there's messy church and there's movies and there's even the Taste of [The Seaway]...inviting people to come."³⁴⁴ Another describes, "...we've had wonderful opportunities to do some music things that allow...outreach in the community and provide a pace for the community to come."³⁴⁵ One of the participants described this change and its impact on relationships: "...the new friendships and new groups that are forming...since the transformation has gone on."³⁴⁶ They continue, "...I'd like to think the parish vision has change from being insular to being outward."³⁴⁷

Open to Change

Each participant indicated that they believed the parish was more open to change than before the intervention. As one participant describes, when asked if they believe the interventions helped the parish be more open to change, "Well from my point of view it is successful...I can't speak for others...only what I think. And because I became more involved because of it, you know, that spoke of its success for me."³⁴⁸ Another answered the same question, "...we went from a three point charge to one, definitely successful...originally we wanted to it [church] in Iroquois but the needs were in Morrisburg. So...we moved it to

³⁴⁴ Ibid., Appendix 5.8, WG, 2.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., Appendix 5.3, JD, 8.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., Appendix 5.9, WL, 7.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., Appendix 5.6, RC, 2.

Morrisburg...so that was successful.”³⁴⁹ Others went on to describe the types of changes they saw as indicators that the parish had become more open to change.

East Stormont Intervention Site

Pre-Intervention Themes

Resistance to Change

The East Stormont intervention was a unique experience. Each parish came to the consultations with the understanding that something had to change, so the clergy focus group did not intentionally ask about the pre-intervention time. Yet, through the conversation, some themes began to emerge. One of the first was resistance to change. As one participant describes, “...in the initial phase...I would say no, they curled up like little pill bugs...and there was keening...”³⁵⁰ Another describes, “...they were really pulling into themselves and did not want to be proceeding with any of this stuff.”³⁵¹ Furthermore, as one leader describes, “It’s important to acknowledge that there was a lot of fear at the beginning. There was a lot of self preservation motivated rivalries.”³⁵² It appears at the beginning of this process, people were resistant to change because of fear, yet the situation demanded that they do something about the realities within their parishes.

Post-Intervention Themes

³⁴⁹ Ibid., Appendix 5.4, JM, 3.

³⁵⁰ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, MK, 1.

³⁵¹ Ibid., FK, 1.

³⁵² Interview with PS, F.1, 1.

Need for Identity and Confidence

Similarly, when analyzing the discussion with North Dundas, time and identity development was something that came up repeatedly. As one participant described, "...one of the big, fat hurdles...confidence in their self and their own identity."³⁵³ Another continues, "It's very much a process...they're still testing the waters...experiencing the different personalities..."³⁵⁴

The Process Takes Time

While each described the intervention as being successful in terms of helping the parish church to become more open to change, when it came to the more significant goal of forming new community and relationships, several topics were raised. One participant described his situation, "...although the area parish of [X] has happened, they're still only single churches doing their own thing. With no real connection other than the priest...it's something that is still in the process of happening."³⁵⁵ That concept of changing relationships and the challenges presented with new types of community were echoed by another, "...sacrifice for the parishioners because where it falls down is on pastoral care...I don't know if somebody is in Florida for the winter, or whether they've had pneumonia, because I haven't quite been able to track that...I'm not there."³⁵⁶ The changes produced by the intervention put leaders and members

³⁵³ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, MK, 5.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., FK, 5.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., DR, 12.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, MK, 6.

into new configurations that changed how their relationships happened, and the expectations of those relationships.

Essence of the Site Experiences

When taking a step back and looking at the narrative of those who experienced the phenomena of the leadership interventions, there were several elements that seemed to be common throughout the sites. Each of the three sites began with the need of some sort of intervention because of the financial and practical strains that come with a parish in decline and lack of support from the wider community. Each could remember a time when parish life had felt good and successful, and they were not sure what had happened to cause these changes. Each of the interventions asked the parish churches involved to consider being open to input from the wider community with regards to how the church might adapt to meet the needs of the communities they serve. Some of the feedback involved designing a building that would meet the needs of the wider community. Some suggested that the church consider a different primary location than originally intended. Some were asked to consider partnering with neighbouring churches. In each of these cases, there was some initial resistance to the changes proposed. During the interventions the parish churches engaged with the principles of Sacred Hospitality as a framework for working their way through the intervention process. For some, it was too much to ask, and at each intervention site, some members chose to leave, some chose to close their church building, some joined other denominations. However, a vast majority of the parish churches slowly became more open to change, and some noted that being Christian, or having a theological identity, made a difference in how they approached these challenges. At each site, the parish churches made significant changes. North and South Dundas completed amalgamations

and took on new building projects. East Stormont reconfigured parish boundaries and partnered up with neighbouring Anglican churches in a way that challenged historic conflict between some of the parish churches. Afterwards, there was a need for some Sabbath rest - not simply for the sake of resting, but in order to have time to consider who they were now that transformation had taken place. There were questions around new identity, which will take time to process and sort out.

In short, the pressure of diminished finances and membership forced parish churches to face the problem of decline and a lack of support from the wider community. While some chose to let themselves die out, most entered a process that helped them move from being fearful and resistance of change to a place where those fears were faced, and transformation could occur. It also created space where the parish churches could make contact with the wider community in ways that were meaningful. Afterwards, the parish churches needed time to rest and discover their new identity in this new time, and new configuration.

Other Observations – South Dundas Site

- With regards to observations based on lay parishioner interviews, some interesting themes and stories appeared. St. James, Morrisburg had a previous history of being well rooted, open, and inviting. Their decline began when they felt that the trust and openness had been betrayed by clergy leadership and lay members from other parish congregations. Once proper clerical and lay leadership were put into place, the trend began to shift back to being a more hospitable and open parish.³⁵⁷
- The parish timeline in South Dundas was described as: The Golden Age – [Clergy A] and [Clergy B] have created a full parish that lives out the principles now described as Sacred Hospitality, after these two leaders leave, the parish fails to notice a shift in

³⁵⁷ Appendix D, Dreams to Reality Reports

demographics, when change is proposed some parishioners dig in and resist, there is not proper leadership in place to lead the change. After the interventions for this research lay people describe the parish as having recognized the need for change, or, have made changes and have stabilized. Now they are ready for next steps.

- There was still a small pocket of parishioners from St. John's, Iroquois that were resistant to the interventions. This group was described as toxic and destructive. Their lack of inclusiveness "became their demise." Instead of joining the rest of the congregation at St. James, they decided to either change parishes, or attend the parish chapel of Holy Trinity, Riverside Heights. People were unsure if anything could have been done differently to prevent this, however from the clergy focus group, the question arises if a longer period of time to be "rooted" and consult might help.
- It is interesting to note that the two churches that were unsuccessful (closed, became a chapel) were the congregations who had very limited to no relationship with the surrounding community. The congregation that was successful had numerous relationships with the wider community, and took their feedback seriously when it came to developing ministry and planning a way forward.
- The type of leaders chosen (lay and clerical) made a large impact on the empowerment and effective development of the parish. Leaders needed to embody the principles themselves so that others were empowered and motivated to incorporate the principles into their own life, and the life of the church.

Observations from the Clergy Focus Group – North Dundas and East Stormont Sites

These interventions redefined expectations and identity of lay leaders and clergy leaders alike.³⁵⁸ Up until this point, there was a culture that the parish church was a communal system that was somewhat internally focused. Members joined the parish, the clergy would give pastoral care to those members, and solutions would be developed, primarily by the priest, from the inside. With this proposed change in community principles and praxis, community members are learning that they may not see the same clergy person for all events. As well, laypeople may be called upon to take on more with regards to leadership. At this point in time, the Area Parish of

³⁵⁸ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, MK, pg. 6.

the St. Lawrence has several lay leaders that are involved in the liturgical and pastoral ministries of the parish. While some members of the community may have expectations of a clergy centred leadership team, the current reality is that clergy and laity share community leadership alike.³⁵⁹

Throughout the focus group the clergy felt that there needs to be a structure to these processes or interventions. It was proposed that a process should begin with a parish rooting itself because that is an important place to begin.³⁶⁰ There was a sense that part of the struggle that parishes had going through the intervention was that the parish sense of identity was underdeveloped. Some had experienced change or loss and did not know who they were as a community, or as a member of that community. More change was coming to an already unsettled state of being.

Another observation from the clergy focus group was that there needs to be some time of Sabbath, or rest, after each cycle as it takes a lot out of people.³⁶¹ The clergy acknowledged that time commitments and deadlines are important, however it is also important to know that people need rest after undergoing a difficult process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, after looking over the descriptive responses of both clergy and lay leaders within the intervention sites it has been concluded that the interventions had some success in regards to helping closed off parishes become more open to transformation, and that the principles of Sacred Hospitality being inserted into the life of a parish is a viable option to

³⁵⁹ Field Notes, Deanery Clericus, 2018

³⁶⁰ Ibid., MK, pg. 9.

³⁶¹ Ibid., DR, pg. 14.

helping that parish become Transformative Community. In each of the sites, the participants experienced the parish move from being resistant to change to being more open to change, as well as becoming more open to building reciprocal relationships with the wider communities around them.

In the next chapter, the experiences of the research participants, and their insights, will be brought into dialogue with the other voices of wisdom and insight that are engaged in this project. Through the lenses of Christian Tradition, culture, and human experience, the topics of parish decline, fear of change, intolerance to difference, and other themes that emerged from the data collected can help to discern a way that parish churches may engage the problems at hand.

Chapter Five – Discussion

“Yeah, but your scientists were so preoccupied
whether or not they could
that they didn’t stop to think if they should.”³⁶²

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the methodology and method of this research project were outlined, and research participants expressed their belief that the leadership interventions had some success in helping the parish churches become more open to transformation. In addition, the participants described personal experiences and insights of the three leadership interventions that occurred within the three intervention sites. Those experiences gave rise to overarching themes of moving from a change-resistant mindset in the pre-intervention to being more open to change post-intervention. The importance for parish churches to have a good sense of their identity at the start of the intervention process, as well as the need for Sabbath rest and time to grasp their new identity was highlighted.

In this chapter, those experiences and insights will be brought into a process that Osmer refers to as, “the normative task of practical theological interpretation.”³⁶³ This convergence of theory and experience produces a dialogue so that we can begin to put together ideas for what renewed praxis might look like. Osmer describes the importance of this interdisciplinary form of discernment as he describes his own experience unpacking a case study with a supervisor:

This was not a pleasant experience. But it was one from which I learned a great deal. More than I realized at the time, I was beginning to learn two skills that would prove important to my ministry and my career as a scholar. First, I was learning how to engage in interdisciplinary thinking, the task of bringing two fields into conversation. My CPE

³⁶² Goldblum, Jeff. *Jurassic Park*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. USA: Universal, 1993.

³⁶³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 173.

supervisor modeled this, bringing family systems theory of therapeutic psychology into dialogue with a theological perspective on law and gospel. Second, I also was learning how to develop a normative theological perspective in ways appropriate to practical theology.³⁶⁴

While not always easy or comfortable, much like the need to create open systems that interact with other members of the system to provide feedback, the need to see a particular problem through an interdisciplinary structure is essential when trying to discern an appropriate response or solution. It helps us to develop what Osmer refers to as, “good practice.”³⁶⁵

The normative task, for the congregational leader, is also much more than simply taking information gathered through research and experience and turning it over to the community. Osmer refers to this stage as “prophetic discernment” and roots it within a deep Christian spirituality.³⁶⁶ As he describes:

The prophetic office in ancient Israel is best understood in terms of this community’s covenant with God. When Israel strays from covenant fidelity, the prophets announce God’s Word to the people, reminding them of God gracious actions in the past and of their promise to live as God’s people. The prophetic word articulates two futures: the immediate future in which Israel faces the judgement of God and imminent disaster, and the further future when God will turn to Israel in mercy, renewing the covenant and delivering it from the disaster that has befallen it. The prophets announce God’s word of judgement and hope.³⁶⁷

With the current problem of church decline and death, the parish church must hear the prophetic call from God if they are to find a solution. Parish churches that are failing may have failed to recognize the changes that have happened as a secular, postmodern world came into existence. Because of this inability, or unwillingness to adapt and serve this new world, the church faces

³⁶⁴ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 130.

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 132.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 135.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 132.

decline and death. Parish churches need to hear the call of God's voice, and seek what is a faithful ecclesial response to the community at hand.

On the topic of "discernment" he continues:

Discernment is the activity of seeking God's guidance amid the circumstances, events, and decisions of life. To discern means to sift through and sort out, much as a prospector must sift out the dross to find nuggets of gold. It also means to weigh the evidence before reaching a decision, much as a judge listens to all evidence in a case before reaching a verdict. In early Christianity Paul encouraged his congregations to develop practices of discernment with which to weight the words of the prophets, to test the spirits, and to make decisions and settle disputes in the community. Over the course of Christian history, various practices of discernment have been developed by different Christian communities. These practices are important to the work of interpretive guides. They offer a disciplined way of seeking God's guidance and sorting out what ought to be done in particular episodes, situations, and contexts.³⁶⁸

The interpretive task of prophetic discernment is a sacred task that has been a part of Judeo-Christian faiths for thousands of years, and it is into this task that we now enter.

For Osmer, there are a number of ways in which one can engage in the normative task, and each way includes a cross-disciplinary conversation that includes the voices of experience, culture, and Christian tradition. For this task I have chosen to use the method proposed by pastoral theologians and ministry consultants James and Evelyn Whitehead in their work, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*.³⁶⁹ The reasons for this selection are two-fold. The first, as Swinton and Mowat define practical theology:

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in the God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 137-138.

³⁶⁹ James D. Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1995)

³⁷⁰ Swinton, Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6.

Practical theology brings the questions and experiences of “real life” ministry into conversation with deep theological reflection and the wisdom and revelation of the social sciences. The creative tension of those three voices as they interact with one another creates a space where new revelation(s) for faithful discernment can come forth. As will be shown, the framework proposed by the Whiteheads bring these three perspectives together in a way that allows each to wrestle with the other until a new insight is produced. Secondly, as mentioned at the beginning of this project, the concept of accessibility is an important value if a research project is to be helpful to those involved in parish leadership. While the work of theologians, such as Paul Tillich, or David Tracy, is important with regards to theological reflection, the level at which their insights are discussed is too high for the average faith community.³⁷¹

At the same time, this project cannot spend all its efforts at the other extreme of the reflection continuum. While “critical incidents” are helpful to assist the minister in reflecting upon a specific pastoral concern within their context, this level of engagement is insufficient with regards to finding a broader theological understanding.³⁷² The model proposed by the Whiteheads allows for a pastoral question to be explored within a cultural and Christian context, taking in local contextual insights alongside of broader theological wisdom. The Whiteheads describe their proposed process as they continue:

The process of theological reflection elaborated in this book situates itself midway on the ministry-theology continuum. It focuses on the pastoral concern in both its immediate dimension...and its broader religious import...These characteristics suggest the kind of minister for whom this model was devised: the minister who is neither exclusively an activist nor a professional theologian; the minister who needs and wants time for reflection in ministry; the minister who wants to be more critically aware of the influence of the Christian tradition, culture, and personal experience on pastoral decision

³⁷¹ Whitehead, Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, xi.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, xiii.

making.³⁷³

The model that will now be described is both accessible to those who are active in ministry leadership (save for professional theologians) and to those who wish to explore and discern ways forward for modern problems with a greater sense of theological rigor and Christian identity.

Pastoral Reflection – Model and Method

The Whiteheads use the term “model” to refer to “the participants in the conversation, helping us recognize the different voices and alerting us to their authority.”³⁷⁴ With this model, the voices that make up the sources for reflection are Christian tradition, experience, and culture.³⁷⁵ Christian Tradition involves both the insights of Scripture as well as the historic wisdom and traditions of the Church.³⁷⁶ The experience of both the Christian community and the individual participant bring important insight to this model. It is the real-life hopes and fears of communities and their members that make up pastoral situations.³⁷⁷ The third voice of this dialogue comes from culture. Culture involves the world views that shape how we see the world, as well as the social and political frameworks that shape our social lives.³⁷⁸

These three voices mirror the voices of the first three movements of Osmer’s hermeneutical circle.³⁷⁹ It is through having the voices of human experience, social sciences, and

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

theology interpret one another that a change in practice, addressing the problem at hand, can be discerned.

The method through which this form of theological reflection takes place has three dynamic movements: attentive listening (being aware of the relevant information that each of the above sources brings to the conversation), assertion (bringing the various perspectives into dialogue with one another), and finally, pastoral response (the response discerned through engaging in the process).³⁸⁰ While this form of theological reflection is very similar to the process as outlined in Osmer³⁸¹, the Whiteheads offer a process more geared to ministerial practice for theological interpretation to lead to opportunities of prophetic discernment. As we look at the first step in their method, attentive listening, we will begin where the Whiteheads suggest most pastoral reflection begins: individual and collective experience.³⁸²

Attentive Listening – Collective Experience

When beginning by being attentive to the voice of experience, the Whiteheads give a word of caution:

Beginning in experience risks becoming bogged down in narrow self-interest or being swept away by self-deception. To be cautious of authoritative claims made by single individuals makes sense, especially in the U.S. culture where the tabloid press and talk show hosts exalt personal experience, the more outrageous the better.

The challenge of this practical method is to assist the minister and the community to come to a reflective grasp of their own experience (convictions, feelings, ideas, biases) about a specific pastoral concern.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Whitehead, Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 5.

³⁸¹ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

³⁸² Whitehead, Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 5.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

When in the midst of a pastoral concern, it can be easy to assume that one's own personal experience is the fullness of truth and wisdom when it comes to understanding the problem. In this stage, through deep attentive listening, we will engage multiple voices of experience to see what insights they may provide.

The problem at hand, or the pastoral concern that arose in regards to this research project was originally described as “churches are dying”. When listening to the voices of personal and group experiences around this problem the responses were varied and diverse. Some people within the parish church community placed the blame at the feet of “Sunday shopping” or “too many Sunday morning sports”.³⁸⁴ Others described it as a lack of effective programming:

And so we went along through the years, there were times when we were really active and, uh, but then prior to Jon, there was a wane. And uh, those programs seemed to disappear, programming wasn't as strong as what it had been, and so again, we were in the lull kind of thing.³⁸⁵

Previous to this quote, the participant describes the time before the “wane” where programming was active, and had been effective in interacting with the needs of the wider community as well as those of the parish.³⁸⁶ Others still described part of the reason that the church was declining as a failure of the parish clergy leadership:

We'd been through a number of, well a couple of difficult departures of ministers, difficult times in my um, you know a sense of betrayal in our time with [clergy x]. At least a sense of betrayal on my part, because he was a wonderful preacher, and charismatic, and had the ability to attract a lot of people, and when he left abruptly when it was perfectly clear that he'd been working on leaving for quite a while, um, that was a very, very hurtful time. And, um, when [clergy y] arrived here, you know, wrong person and probably wrong place. When she announced on her arrival that she was planning to retire on 'x' date...it was not exactly an invitation to, oh, let's go. And my experience of

³⁸⁴ Field notes, “Why Don't They Come to Church”, December 2017. “Why Don't They Come to Church” was an Advent program I designed for my parish and part of the opening session asked participants to give their thoughts on why the numbers of both people and finances were diminishing in the parish.

³⁸⁵ Parishioner Interview, Appendix F.2, DJ, 3.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 2.

those five years was waiting out [clergy y]. During that time, well, uh, [clergy y] had some positive impacts I think, like her I appreciate and enjoy liturgy...[but] it wasn't a time of us doing a lot of – in my memory – a lot of programming, which people here love to do. Um, programming, and learn, and invite the community in that way. And we didn't build on our outside relationships, and our congregation sort of drifted.³⁸⁷

Not only was there a lack of programming, but the relationship between the clergy and the parishioners was difficult at times, and there was a lack of effort to try and cultivate relationships with the wider community.

The experience of members of the wider community seem to support some of the observations made by parish members. During a community consultation that the Parish of South Dundas held when trying to discern a way forward in regards to their development as a church, people from outside of the community were asked what their first thoughts or impressions were in regards to the Anglican parish. The participants stated that there seemed to be a “struggle for relevance” within the wider community, that the church was perceived as “stiff”, and that there was certainly a “missing connection to the wider community”.³⁸⁸ However, not all the feedback was negative. The wider community also pointed out that the parish church could have something to offer. The community noted that the parish church gave the community the chance to “experience something live” and not just through electronic experience.³⁸⁹ The parish church provided a historic site; the physical structure of the church could be a positive resource for the wider community to use.³⁹⁰ Their suggestion to the parish church, in regards to what kind of direction the parish should develop, was to make the church a place where the community could gather and build relationships; relationships between multiple denominations, relationships with

³⁸⁷ Parishioner Interview, Appendix F.3, JD, 1.

³⁸⁸ Community Consultation, Appendix E, Photo 1.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

the wider community, and relationships with people in need.³⁹¹ In short, they suggested that the parish be a place that actually offered services that were of use to the wider community on both a social and needs-based level.

On a third level of experiential listening, it is important to bring in one more voice. As the Parish of South Dundas tried to develop viable responses to the information they gathered, it was noted that there seemed to be more difficulty than expected.³⁹² In response, they invited a diocesan staff person to run an evening workshop with the parish council to see if they could discern what the real problem was. After spending several hours naming their hopes and the obstacles they had encountered, the facilitator had the group brainstorm why these obstacles were happening. At the end of the workshop, the two main root obstacles that were highlighted were “fear of change”, and “intolerance of difference and diversity”.³⁹³

The experience highlighted here from South Dundas was very similar to the struggles and experiences from both North Dundas and East Stormont. While not identical (not everyone did a community consultation), the processes and responses had several similarities. From the perspective of experience, the root problem seems to be an intolerance of difference, rooted in a fear of change.

Attentive Listening – Culture and Social Science

From this lens, the problem of parish churches dying can be looked at as the death of a system. As Margaret Wheatley describes:

These systems are called ‘open’ because they have the ability to continuously import energy from the environment and to export entropy. They don’t sit quietly by as their

³⁹¹ Ibid., Photo 2.

³⁹² Field notes, Parish Council, January 2018.

³⁹³ Field notes, March 2018.

energy dissipates. They don't seek equilibrium. Quite the opposite. To stay viable, open systems maintain a state of non-equilibrium, keeping themselves off balance so that the system can change and grow.³⁹⁴

Closed systems have no way of bringing in new and life-giving energy, and so as they burn through the energy they already had, they slowly move closer and closer to death. It is the point when the “machine” stops working because it has run out of energy, the parts are worn out, and it can no longer complete its task. Or, in some instances, the machine may still be able to do its task very well, but the task it performs is no longer needed, and so it sits idle and begins to rust. Wheatley describes the need for a specific kind of “feedback loop” that can keep systems viable:

But there is a second type of feedback loop – positive or amplifying feedback. These loops use information differently, not to regulate, but to notice something new and amplify it into messages that signal a need to change...But positive feedback is essential to life's ability to adapt and change. In these loops, information increases and disturbances grow. The system, unable to deal with so much new and intensifying information, is being asked to change.³⁹⁵

It is reasonable to assert that, one of the reasons for the system failure of the parish church, is that they chose stability over growth. If the needs of the community around them changed, they did not adapt to engage with the new way of being. Instead of wondering what the “microphone feedback” was about, they simply turned down, and shut off, the sound system.

Attentive Listening – Christian Tradition

When it comes to the topic of communities of faith failing, the Christian tradition, specifically the Scriptures, have a lot to say. The promise of a new land and community was first made to Abram:

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I will give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of

³⁹⁴ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 78.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Repham, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.³⁹⁶

God set a place apart for the Hebrew people for them to be their own community. To jump ahead in the story, in the book of Exodus, the Hebrew people are captive in Egypt. Moses, through the power of God, leads the Hebrew people out into the wilderness.³⁹⁷ After 40 years in the desert they arrive in the promised land, and after receiving the Commandments, they begin their new life as a community of faith that has been set apart. Their identity and vocation as a people are deeply enmeshed within covenant they have made with God. As Old Testament Professor Terence E. Fretheim writes:

The Ten Commandments are an integral part of the covenant between God and people at Mount Sinai. This covenant is a specific covenant within the already existing covenant with Abraham. The Sinai covenant does not establish the relationship between Israel and God. Israel has long been God's people when Sinai happens ("Let my people go"). These commandments are given to an already elected, redeemed, believing, and worshiping community. They have to do with the shape of daily life on the part of those already in relationship with God. The commandments give shape to Israel's vocation. At the same time, the Ten Commandments specify no judicial consequences for disobedience. Their being obligatory is not conditional on their being enforceable. Their appeal is to a deeper grounding and motivation: these are the commands of the Lord your God, who has created you and redeemed you.³⁹⁸

In the Promised Land, the Hebrew people, because of their covenant relationship with God, have agreed to act as a specific type of community. While there are many rules and laws, they can be summarized in the well-known words from Deuteronomy, "Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and

³⁹⁶ Genesis 15: 18-21.

³⁹⁷ Exodus 12: 37.

³⁹⁸ Fretheim, Terence E. "Commentary on Exodus 20:1-17" Working Preacher. March, 2015. Accessed August 10th, 2019. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2368

with all you might.”³⁹⁹ As well as from Leviticus, “...you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.”⁴⁰⁰ Jesus himself would go on to put the two together when questioned by a scribe about which commandment is the “first of all?”:

Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ – this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”⁴⁰¹

All of this sets the stage for a theological reflection on why communities, or systems, fail. God had called the Hebrew people to be a community set apart; based on love of God, and love of neighbour. We will now look at the three obvious examples of a dying faith community in the Scriptures, the destruction events of the Temple.

In the second book of Kings, we hear of the destruction of Solomon’s Temple.⁴⁰² The purpose of this part of the theological attentiveness is not how it happened, but rather why it happened. Theologian and Old Testament Professor, Walter Brueggemann describes the theological reason behind the destruction of the Temple, and the Babylonian captivity:

The Hebrew Bible presents the prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. as representatives and advocates of the covenant of Israel with Yahweh. In various cadences they issue “speeches of judgment” relating how Israel in its religious and political-economic life has violated the covenant—by taking bribes and reducing religion to commerce (Mic 3:9-11), ignoring the plight of orphans or the needy (Jer 5:28), and depending on cheap labor and unjust wages (Jer 22:13)—and so evoked the curses of the old covenant agreement (see Deut 28 and Lev 26). None of the prophets are more committed to this covenantal discernment than is the prophet Jeremiah. In Jer 11:1-8 the

³⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

⁴⁰⁰ Leviticus 19:18.

⁴⁰¹ Mark 12: 28-34.

⁴⁰² 2 Kings 24:13.

prophet summons Israel to “listen” just as the Shema of Deut 6:4 had summoned Israel to listen to the commandments, the terms of the covenant.

In the course of Jeremiah’s lifetime, Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonian army. To the prophet’s way of thinking, that destruction is the enactment of severe covenantal curses in divine response to the Israel’s violation of the covenant. Israel’s continuing disobedience demonstrates its irreversible rejection of the covenant with Yahweh. As a result, the promises of Yahweh no longer pertain; Israel is left abandoned amid the vagaries of history, without the attentiveness or protection of Yahweh.⁴⁰³

As Brueggemann suggests, the reason for the collapse of the Temple, and the captivity of the people, was that they failed to remain faithful to the identity and vocation that their covenantal relationship with God had called them to.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus predicts the destruction of the rebuilt temple.⁴⁰⁴ Just previously to this prediction, Jesus witnesses a poor widow giving all she has to the treasury of the Temple.⁴⁰⁵ Professor Robert J. Karris describes the importance of this scene:

Two segments (20:45-47; 21:1-4) have been joined together via the theme of “widow” (20:45-21:4). True worship of God, in the prophetic tradition, demands care of and justice to society’s neediest and weakest members represented by the widows...In a lament interpretation of 21:1-4 Jesus decries the religious teaching which has caused a widow to give up all she has to preserve a decaying religious institution.⁴⁰⁶

These scenes set up the reason for Jesus’ prediction that the Temple would be destroyed. The community of faith had stopped being faithful to its original purpose. It was supposed to be a community that took care of the most vulnerable in its midst, and instead a poor widow is forced to give up everything she has in order to support the institution. The link between God allowing

⁴⁰³ Brueggemann, Walter. “A New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34)” Bibleodyssey. August, 2019. Accessed August 10th, 2019. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/main-articles/new-covenant-jer-31>

⁴⁰⁴ Luke 21: 5-6.

⁴⁰⁵ Luke 21: 1-4.

⁴⁰⁶ Robert J. Karris, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1993.) 713.

the institution, or Temple, to be destroyed, and the faithfulness of the people is consistent. As Brueggemann describes (in reference to Jeremiah 31):

This text is situated in a season of failure in ancient Israel. The city of Jerusalem has been conquered and burned, the temple has been destroyed, the monarchy has been terminated, and the leading citizens deported into exile. This all came about, says the poet, because Israel broke the old covenant of Mt. Sinai. Over a long period of time Israel refused the commandments of Sinai. Israel did not take justice seriously, and did not ground its life in the God of the Exodus. And so, in covenantal perspective, came the judgment of God.⁴⁰⁷

Scripturally, it appears that one of the primary reasons that faith communities fail is that they forget their primary purpose: to be a community that loves God with everything they have, and to love their neighbours just as much as they love themselves. However, Scripture is not the only source of tradition to speak to this reality.

Hospitality to strangers is deeply rooted within the Christian tradition. While much of this material is described in chapter two, it is important to be reminded of this important element of the Christian tradition. Christine Pohl states that the early Christians were well aware of the importance of hospitality.⁴⁰⁸ Those who had been welcomed into God's household, should practice that same kind of costly welcome with regards to others. By the fourth and fifth centuries of the church, a very specific ideal of hospitality had emerged: hospitality and welcome should be extended to those who may not be able to repay the kindness.⁴⁰⁹ Not only that, welcome was not only offered to family and friends, but it was also offered with equal measure to strangers.⁴¹⁰ This selfless and sacrificial model of hospitality, while not always perfectly lived

⁴⁰⁷ Brueggemann, Walter. "Facing Up to Our Broken Covenants" Sojourners. March, 2015. Accessed August 12th, 2019. <https://sojo.net/articles/facing-our-broken-covenants>

⁴⁰⁸ Pohl, *Making Room*, 161.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

out, remained an important part of the Christian tradition until the Late Middle Ages.⁴¹¹ It was at this point that Christian hospitality began to welcome that could, “reinforce power and influence.”⁴¹² The historic link between hospitality, and the welcoming of those who were poor, and the intention of, “crossing social and cultural boundaries was nearly lost.”⁴¹³

At a first glance it appears that parish churches fail because there is a resistance to change, a lack of openness within the community system, and that they have forgotten their theological identity and purpose. However, from a traditional lens, it appears that the main source of the problem is that parishes have neglected the second half of the great commandment: to love their neighbour as themselves. Parishes have forgotten that theologically, to be Christian is also to be hospitable. As discussed in chapter two, from the very beginning of the Christian movement, “hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human...relationships. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers...but also a recognition of their worth and common humanity.”⁴¹⁴ From its onset, the Christian church took its relationship with strangers seriously. While this way of being Christian eventually began to disappear, it would re-emerge around the time of the Second Vatican Council.⁴¹⁵ In a world of growing pluralism, it was deemed important to be less exclusive, and more welcoming. The practices and principles developed by the monastic communities engaged in hospitality with strangers showed that to be Christian, hospitality is practiced in ways that intentionally invite those who are different, or with whom there is disagreement. There is respect for the beliefs and truths of the stranger, and the Christian lets go of their desire to convert the stranger. At the same

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Pohl, *Making Room*, 6.

⁴¹⁵ Blee, *The Third Desert*, 3.

time, a well-grounded Christian is open to the idea that this sacred encounter might change their perspective on God, their neighbour, and their life of faith. To practice hospitality is to be Christian. It is part of how we love our neighbours as ourselves. To fail in this regard is to repeat the mistakes of the faith communities that have come before us.

With regards to understanding the problem of decline, this information is very helpful. However, this is not the end of the task. In our next movement from the pastoral model outlined by the Whiteheads, we will take this information and bring it into a stage of “assertion”.⁴¹⁶ It is in this stage that each of the voices engage with one another in the hopes that through a rigorous engagement with each voice, a creative new way forward can be discerned.

Assertion

As mentioned above, each of the voices we have looked at so far provide valuable information in regards to the problem of dying parish churches. However, each voice, in and of itself is not enough to solve the problem at hand. If it was, chances are someone would have solved the problem already and there would be no need for this research project. This movement, *Assertion*, is an important part in moving forward towards a possible solution. As the Whiteheads describe:

All three sources of information described in the model contribute to theological reflection in ministry. The contribution of each is not made in isolation, but in an assertive relationship of challenge and confirmation. Two assumptions ground this conviction: (1) God is revealed in all three sources and (2) the religious information available in each source is partial...Our faithful efforts to both recover and overcome our religious past are facilitated by placing tradition's insights on a pastoral concern in assertive dialogue with the community's experience and with cultural information. It is in this dialogue of mutual interpretation that new insight is generated and the shape of pastoral response

⁴¹⁶ Whitehead, Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 14.

begins to emerge.⁴¹⁷

It is also important here to mention that “assertive” is an intentionally chose term. Too often, in my experience within the church, new ideas fail to come into existence because of some voices being too strong and overpowering, and some voices not remaining unheard. The Whiteheads go on to explain:

Assertive engagement is a style of behavior which acknowledges the value of one’s own needs and convictions in a manner that respects the needs and convictions of others. Assertive behavior functions between the extremes of not being able to express personal convictions (non-assertiveness) and forcing one’s convictions on others (aggressiveness). In the metaphor of conversation, the overly assertive person dominates the discussion; the insufficiently assertive person withdraws and does not participate. In both instances, the communal effort is defeated.⁴¹⁸

Much like the conversation around the principles of Sacred Hospitality, there needs to be the space to describe one’s own experience and conviction in ways that are heard and understood by others, while at the same time, giving up the needs to convert the listener to a particular way of thinking. As well, invitations to dialogue should be accepted.

Assertive Dialogue

To begin the dialogue, we go back to the voice of experience. When listening to the collective voices of experience, parish failure seemed to come from two primary sources: a fear of change, and an intolerance of difference. As we heard from Charles Taylor, the world had changed. It had changed from a time of enchantment where it was almost impossible to not believe in God, or at least be pressured into participating in the religious life of the community, to one where there was no longer any pressure to conform to a given religious practice.⁴¹⁹ Not

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 520.

only that, but in a pluralistic secular society, for those who wish to participate in some form of spiritual or religious life, there are now a number of choices for them to select from. At the same time, as described by Elaine Graham, we have entered into a postmodern society where both skepticism and pluralism are considered to be positive elements to society.⁴²⁰ Because of this, any institution or organization that is not open to feedback and change, as suggested in the work of Margaret Wheatley, will not be able to bring in new and life giving energy.⁴²¹

In order to find a way forward, there needs to be an understanding of why this level of resistance is happening. Why is it that people, and parish churches, resist change? Conflict specialist, Dr. Cheryl Picard, suggests that people become defensive and protective when they feel that the things they care deeply about, such as values and identity feel threatened.⁴²² As Picard describes:

Simply put, Insight mediators understand conflict behavior as defend responses to apprehensions of threat. This definition is fundamentally different from those where conflict is viewed as a struggle over claims to scarce resources, or the incompatibility of goals, positions, needs, status and the like. Insight advocates hold that it is not resources or incompatible goals alone that create conflict; they often exist without conflict ensuing. Instead conflict emerges, escalates and is sustained through the discernment of threats-to-cares, followed by the decision to defend and the ensuing patterns of interaction.⁴²³

At first, this level of change resistance and intolerance could seem surprising. However, when taking a closer look at what kind of experience the communities have had with change, it becomes more understandable. In the parish of South Dundas, the Seaway flooding had a profound impact on the people who lived next to the St. Lawrence River. Villages and hamlets

⁴²⁰ Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 1.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 20.

⁴²² Picard, Cheryl. "Welcome to The Insight Approach" Insightapproach. 2019. Accessed August 13th, 2019. <http://insightapproach.ca/>

⁴²³ Picard, Cheryl. "The Origins, Principles, and Practices of Insight Mediation" revistademediacion. Feb, 2017. Accessed August 13th, 2019. <https://revistademediacion.com/en/articulos/the-origins-principles-and-practices-of-insight-mediation/>

that had been lively communities and family farms for generations, were suddenly underwater. Family homes were either moved or destroyed. People needed to decide, in regards to cemeteries, if they would like their loved ones exhumed and reburied in new cemeteries, or if they would leave them where they were, and the river would prevent them from visiting the final resting places of the people they loved.⁴²⁴ It is understandable, with this experience, that communities along the Seaway would instinctively resist change. One of the most formative communal experience of their lives was that institutional change took away the homes, businesses, loved ones, and identities.

While North Dundas and East Stormont were not impacted by the flooding of the Seaway in the same manner, not only were the reverberations felt, but they had their own significant experiences as well. Both of those intervention sites rely heavily on agriculture. From the founding of the various communities, families built and then maintained family farms. With the rise in farming costs, and the pressure to industrialize farming, small family farms face significant struggles to maintain their family identity while still providing financial stability.⁴²⁵ Across the Deanery of Stormont, part of the experiential narrative is that change and progress is a risk to values, identity, and the rural way of life. It is these experiences that are, at least in part, responsible for the deep response of fear in regards to change and diversity.

As we look towards the voices of social science and cultural wisdom, similar concerns are raised in the work of Arbuckle and Cobb Jr. Both authors recognize this similar resistance to change as being present within the larger community of the church as well. Part of the resistance

⁴²⁴ As someone who grew up along the Seaway, this was the story of lament that was ingrained into the local ethos from early days. I can still remember Fran Laflamme telling us the story of the Seaway during “story time” in the local school in grade one. Local teacher and author, Clive Marin, was well known for calling the flooding, “A violent end to a peaceful way of life.”

⁴²⁵ Field notes, parish breakfast/lunch conversations, July 2008 – 2015.

to the changes of Vatican II, in the movement towards restorationism, was a feared loss of identity in regards to orthodox Christianity.⁴²⁶ As well, Cobb Jr. notes that parish churches who forget their identity as theological communities, will inspire no passion within its membership, and lukewarm church not only fail, but they are unacceptable to God as well.⁴²⁷

The fear around a loss of identity and values is a legitimate one. However, it raises questions around if it must be that way. Is it true that adaptation needs to lead to a loss of community values and identity? Wheatley's insights into systems clearly says the answer to this question is "no":

There is another important paradox in living systems: Each organism maintains a clear sense of its individual identity within a larger network of relationships that helps shape its identity. Each being is noticeable as a separate entity, yet it is simultaneously part of a whole system. While we humans observe and count separate selves, and pay a great deal of attention to the differences that seem to divide us, in fact we survive only as we learn how to participate in a web of relationships. Autopoiesis describes a very different universe, one in which all organisms are capable of creating a "self" through their intimate engagement with all others in their system.⁴²⁸

As Wheatley states, it is quite possible to maintain a unique and authentic identity while still being open to change and transformation. In fact, it is often through encounters with new experiences that we can come to understand who we truly are at an even deeper level.

Theologically, we see this reflected in the story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman.⁴²⁹ As New Testament scholar and author Benedict T. Viviano writes:

Matthew chooses this archaic biblical name [a Canaanite woman] in place of Mark's contemporary "Syrophoenician" to remind us of 1:5. The woman is doubly marginal: a woman alone in a man's world; a Gentile and hence unclean, a "menstruant from the cradle" (m. Nid. 4:1; cf. Matt 15 1-20)...This statement [except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel] reflects the normal policy of the historical Jesus, his mission to gather all

⁴²⁶ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3-4.

⁴²⁷ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 3-4.

⁴²⁸ Wheatley., *Leadership and the New Science*, 18.

⁴²⁹ Matthew 15: 21-28.

Israel for the end-time events; Matthew retains the harsh saying from Mark, but without the softening “Let the children first be fed.” Which includes a salvation-historical perspective: first the Jews, then the Gentiles...The woman is quick to pick up the imagery of Jesus’ reply and twist it to her advantage, yet without arrogance. Her bold humility bests him in debate...Jesus is generous in his praise...and in his healing power. On the reactional level we hear two voices from Matthew’s community, particularist and universalist.⁴³⁰

In this telling of the story, we see an example of how Jesus is able to adapt his ministry while not giving up his identity. The idea that God’s grace and healing might be extended to Gentiles do not take away from his identity as the Messiah, or his importance to the lost house of Israel. In Mark’s version of events⁴³¹, the context makes the point in an even clearer way:

Although this incident has the features of a healing story (an unclean spirit, Jesus’ healing power, proof of the healing), its real focus is the dialogue between Jesus and the Gentile woman. It takes place on Gentile soil. In reply to the woman’s request of healing for her daughter, Jesus utters a saying that appears to exclude non-Jews as recipients of his power. The woman’s reply criticizes such exclusivity and shows how there can be a place for non-Jews in God’s plan. Mark’s Gentile-Christian readers would have taken this story as an explanation of their presence in the people of God.⁴³²

Instead of these versions of the story as being seen as Jesus giving up, or losing his unique identity, they are examples when, through encounter with “the other”, Jesus is able to come to a deeper understanding of who he really is, and that God’s love and power go past the boundaries and limits that he may have imagined.

With these things in mind, two things seem clear:

- If parish churches wish to remain viable and effective in their communities, they must be open to change given feedback from the wider community. Social sciences and cultural wisdom are very clear that adaptation, change, and transformation are needed so any organization, including the parish church, must adapt to meet the needs and challenges in every changing generation. If they do not, they become stagnant and die as the

⁴³⁰ Benedict T. Viviano, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1993.) 658.

⁴³¹ Mark 7: 24-30.

⁴³² Daniel J. Harrington, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1993.) 612.

relationships between themselves and the wider community breakdown.

- While change is necessary, it should not be done in too casual a manner. Maintaining an authentic Christian identity through theological engagement and discernment is essential. It is the unique identity as a Christian community that helps to create passion within the parish, and it is the offering of ministry that meets the real life needs and challenges of parish church members, and the wider community, that will help to build committed relationships within the parish church, and beyond its walls.

With regards to Osmer's third movement, "What ought to be going on"⁴³³, a pastoral response is that in order for the problem of decline and death in parish churches to be addressed, a change in practice must help parish members move from a place of resistance and fear to a place of openness to change and transformation in relation to the voices of a wider changing world and the needs and values of the local community in which the parish serves. At the same time, it must also encourage theological discernment as part of the transformation process. With these two elements in place the parish church becomes part of a feedback loop that is open to interacting with the other sources of feedback within the wider community. As they interact with one another, there may be the opportunity for co-shaping. The wider community can help to shape the parish church, and at the same time, the parish church has the opportunity to, not only receive information, but to put out information into the wider community and impact its development as well. It is these insights that prophetic discernment points towards in way that honours the lived experiences of the community, while also having the support of social science insight as well as theological grounding.

It is through this process that the parish church can move past the options of being a closed off fortress, or a lukewarm social club. Instead, it becomes a Transformative Community.

⁴³³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

It is this type of community that hold the most potential in terms of sustainability, vital ministry, and faithful Christian identity.

The final movement in the theological method put forward by the Whiteheads is the pastoral response.⁴³⁴ Because of the similarity with Osmer's final movement, the pragmatic task, the following chapter assume that engaging the pragmatic task also completes the process of engaging in the pastoral response.

Conclusion

In this chapter the problem of decline was engaged with the voices of Christian tradition, culture, and human experience. The history of faith communities struggling with issues of decline, and in historic time, defeat, can be traced back to the early history of the Abrahamic faith. When faith communities forget their identity, and the commandment of loving their neighbour as much as themselves, the relationship with the wider community suffers, and the faith community crumbles. It is by remembering their unique identity, and the commandment to love their neighbours as much as themselves, that can create the space for faith communities to remain effective within their current and ever-changing context.

In the following chapter we will look at what changes in practice that would need to occur for parish churches to become more open to change and begin moving towards becoming Transformative Community. These proposed changes will occur at the theological, pastoral, and practical level.

⁴³⁴ Whitehead, Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, 86.

Chapter Six – Renewed Praxis

Introduction

In this fourth movement of Osmer's hermeneutic circle, we enter into the pragmatic task. That is, now that we have an idea as to why the problem is happening, and we have wrestled with what should be happening, we look for, "forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."⁴³⁵ It is important to note that this is not change for the sake of change, or even change for the sake of institutional protection. As Osmer describes:

Change to what end and for what purpose? This is determined by reflection on the purpose of an organization and its ability to achieve this purpose in the particular setting. In the church, this involves theological reflection on several key question: What is the mission of the congregation? How is this mission best carried out in a congregations' present context? What role do leaders play in guiding the congregation toward the fulfillment of its mission, and what changes might need to take place for this to occur?⁴³⁶

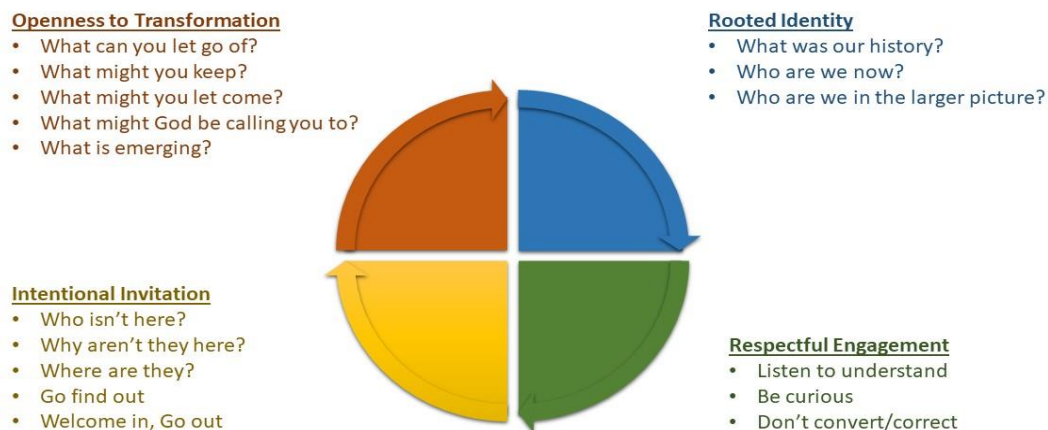
Given that we are addressing a problem that impacts Christian communities, the purpose of this change must be viewed through certain lenses. For this fourth movement, the proposed changes are categorized into three sections: theological, pastoral, and practical. These lenses will be used to interpret what type of change could be used to help move parish churches from dying communities towards becoming Transformative Community.

⁴³⁵ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 176.

⁴³⁶ Ibid, 183.

Transformative Hospitality and Leadership (A Tool for Parish Leaders)

Part of the feedback received within the clergy focus group was that there was doubt that hospitality could play an active role, or be part of a style of leadership.⁴³⁷ As well, there was a desire for a framework to be developed that would assist parish churches try to find new ways to be open to transformation, but that also allowed enough flexibility for parish churches to adapt the framework to their particular circumstances and context.⁴³⁸ It is with this in mind that the *Transformative Hospitality and Leadership Cycle* was developed.



Each of the four movements articulates a Sacred Hospitality principle within. Beginning with “Rooted Identity,” the cycle makes its way through the four principles of Sacred

⁴³⁷ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1, JW, 2. The participant is referring to a conversation we had over lunch where he felt that hospitality was too “soft” to be considered a leadership style or component.

⁴³⁸ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1., JW, 27.

Hospitality, with regards to leadership practices. A description of how the hospitality and leadership principles were applied with the leadership interventions will now be detailed.

Rooted Identity

In this first movement, the parish church is looking to develop a sense of identity within the immediate local perspective, as well as, in a broader sense. The community that is looking to undertake this type of leadership intervention must have a good sense of their own personal identity (who are they are as people of faith in this place, at this time). This means knowing what it means to be a church within the local context, also what it means to be (in this case) Anglican with regards to the diocesan level, national level, and international level. In order to represent a group, the people participating must have a rooted understanding of how each level of that group operates, its values, and its way of being.

Leaders who are chosen to participate in this intervention should be people who are spiritually and emotionally mature and healthy. This work requires leaders who are well grounded in a mature faith, and their sense of personal and communal self. Leaders should model the behaviours they wish to see in others. This means modeling healthy boundaries as people are encouraged to share their stories. Leaders encourage members to reflect on “who are we?” and “what do we do?” or “what does it mean to be an Anglican in this place?” It is through this first movement, of wondering “who we have been?” and “who we are now?” that the parish church begins to root itself into a common identity and shared vision. Leaders will need to make sure there is safe space for each person’s version of the “historical story” and sense of identity.

It is at this stage that, once a common identity is developed, or is in the process of developing, leaders can hold up the “vision so far.” Draw the experiences, successes, and

struggles of the community into the common story or identity, and link it into the story of faith. Very few things are exactly as one person experienced or remembers them. Leaders should encourage curiosity, creativity, and refrain from public criticism of mistakes or ideas. This is a chance to look at the story of identity from many angles. North and South Dundas ran “Anglicanism 101” during each intervention, so that leadership and community members were exposed to the wider history and concept of the Anglican church.

Leaders, in this first movement, need to make sure that each participant has the opportunity to share their version of identity and history. By taking the time to check in with each person, there is a great chance of unearthing the important identity elements that need to be brought forward.

During the interventions, the process of rooted identity played out in various forms. In South Dundas members of the parish were invited to “story telling” days where the history of the parish was told along a timeline. At the same time, they were invited to mark down significant milestones in the church (personal or broad concept) on the story line. For some this was the date of the baptism, and they told the story of what that meant to their family. For others, this meant remembering when women could be ordained as priests. It was this interaction that allowed them to see how their personal and parish stories also intersected with a wider identity.

In North Dundas, during a Lenten series, parishioners were invited to speak about “what the church has meant to them.” It was a chance to tell the parish the meaningful stories of time in the church. Afterwards, during coffee hour, attendees were encouraged to share their own memories and stories. In both North and South Dundas, when a church was deconsecrated and closed, the members were invited to tell the sacred stories of their time in the building. All this story telling helped to shape a sense of common history and identity. Hearing different stories

and perspective of common events allowed members to see their history from various perspectives. The themes and common identity were then inserted into the regular preaching style used on Sunday mornings so that the story of the parish was brought together with the story of its faith.

During the East Stormont intervention, the process began with leaders from each of the participating parish communities sharing the stories of their parish identities and histories. This gave each parish the opportunity to remember where they came from, also to remember that over time, parish relationships had changed and a bigger picture of their history was important.⁴³⁹

Respectful Engagement

This second movement is about having “holy manners”⁴⁴⁰ as groups come together to listen to what is important. Some parish groups may find it helpful to start with this movement to prepare safe and healthy space for the story sharing of *rooted identity* to take place. This movement has members of the group learning how to listen respectfully to the various stories, values, and perspectives that come out through the process. This means taking on the act of “listening to understand” and giving up the desire to “listen to respond.” *Respectful engagement* means giving up the need to convert the other person(s) to our way of thinking or perceiving. It is about being curious as to the perspectives and insights, and not starting from the assumption that, because their perspective is different, it must be wrong.

⁴³⁹ For example, the Anglican community in Maxville had been paired with the community in Lancaster. However, as the stories were told, the groups remembered that there had been a time when Maxville had been partnered with Long Sault. This gave a chance for them to remember their history and identity in a broader sense.

⁴⁴⁰ A term used by a clergy leader during a table leader’s workshop for her parish. The term refers to the idea that Christian leaders should behave in certain ways when accepting and participating in a leadership role.

Leaders should model the principles and behaviours they wish to see develop within the community. If leaders can, through modeling, create safe spaces for members to share intimate and vulnerable information, the quality and effectiveness of the intervention, and the relationships that are built will be much stronger.

In this step, there is room for leaders to challenge members to “wonder” about the stories of others. Are they able to recognize the God they have experienced in the story of the other? What seems to be important for other people in their stories? What is similar? What is different?

Leaders should check in with participants to see what they need to be able to practice these new skills, how they might best learn them, and if they feel that others are being effective in their use of these skills.

Within several of the intervention sites, the various groups came up with “group norms and boundaries” that were developed with input from them, and some best practice behaviours that were suggested by the diocesan counseling centre. During each intervention session there was a time to “check in” and see if everyone was feeling respected. As well, leaders would touch base with those who appeared to be struggling with either, being a respectful listener, or being respected while they were sharing. As time went on, and leaders continued to model the behaviour, the group became more effective at living out the norms and expectations.

Intentional Invitations

In this movement two things are highlighted: intentionally accepting invitations from people and groups that are different, or who disagree with the parish church, and, intentionally extending invitations to those that are not part of the community, have left the community, or who may not seem like the most pleasant person to visit. The reason for this is twofold. The first

reason is that there is valuable information to be gathered from the people who do not use the services of the community. Why don't they? Is the parish church not relevant to their lives? What is relevant? Did they have a negative experience? What made them leave? What keeps them from coming back? The second reason that, at the heart of this, building relationships is essential to the success of any community organization, especially the church. In small rural communities, where churches used to be the central hub, there are reasons that families either stopped attending and supporting the parish church or there are reasons why they never started in the first place. Finding out that information is extremely important when trying to create a new and effective vision and mission for the parish church. While some people may attend an information gathering session, or an exit interview when they leave the parish, others will not put themselves in that type of vulnerable position. This means that church leaders must go out into the regular lives of the wider community if they would like to find answers.

Furthermore, by modelling the behaviour of inviting those that would not normally get an invitation, and being willing to go into places that the parish might not normally go, it starts to change the way a parish behaves and acts. When the question of "who isn't here?" is raised, eventually the response should be, "we should go find out, and ask them why."

During this step, members are invited to let go of their judgement, and put their desire to engage and build relationships, without an agenda. It is an opportunity to learn about the wider community's needs, desires, hurts, and hopes. Moreover, it is a chance to demonstrate that the church cares about them, and their lives, even if they do not show up on Sundays. Regardless of their religious affiliation, or lack thereof, they matter to God, and so they must matter to the faith community as well. Members can also be challenged to see where God is already at work in the lives and activities of people outside of the church. Much like they did when listening to the

different identity stories of parish members, participants can try to see the God they know already present within the outside community.

During this step, it is important and parish leaders check in with parish members to see how best to help them make this change. As well, checking in with all those from outside of the community to make sure they are treated well. This can be a challenging time for both parish members and outside participants. Knowing what each person needs in order to succeed is important.

Within North and South Dundas, parish churches used a community meal to invite those who had never attended the church, as well as those who had left. They used this as an opportunity to hear what the concerns of the wider community were, and to discover their perception of the parish church. It was with this information that both parishes could make intentional choices about what direction they would move. It was also this information that allowed them to discover that the wider community was not averse to a relationship with the parish church. There simply needed to be some common ground and common understanding so that those relationships could grow. While East Stormont was not prepared to engage in consultation invitations that extended to the wider secular community, they did participate by receiving and offering invitations to neighbouring Anglican parish communities. As well, one parish community showed a willingness to extend an invitation to other Christian denominations to participate in discernment conversations.

Openness to Transformation

This final movement is rooted in the hospitality concept that, if one is well grounded, respectful of others who are different, and intentionally seeks out information and people who

are different, those encounters may inspire the person or group to try something new. While they did not impose change on others, they may be changed by the new relationships, or new understandings that come from these types of encounter.

Leaders should model openness to considering new information and highlighting what could be different in ways that still honour what was important in the historical identity. It is this process that allows the community to hold onto what is truly important, but potentially let go of elements that no longer fit with the new relationships and the insights they bring. Parishes are challenged intellectually to wonder “what could be?” and how that fits into the various levels of Anglican identity with the parish. Personal consideration is given when all members of the community have the chance to speak about any proposed insights and changes, and express what they would need in order to move forward.

In all three intervention sites, these encounters with the wider communities resulted in parishes making large changes to the direction they chose. North and South Dundas chose ministry locations and building designs that responded to the needs of their wider community. East Stormont was willing to engage with their Anglican neighbours in ways that began to reconnect parish relationships that had been damaged some time ago.

In the end, by going through this process, parish church members were able to lower their fear toward the “others” in their midst, be them people, or groups. It was by reconnecting with these “others” that new information and insight allowed for new ideas, and new relationships. It was empowering parish leaders to model these principles and behaviours within the parish, and outside of it, that enabled parish churches to adapt how they engaged with the wider community, and together, they could allow much needed transformation to take place.

The potential for renewed praxis is not only limited to the individual practitioner. There is room for the councils and committees of the parish church to examine their practice. As discussed above in the work of Arbuckle, and in the description of Transformative Community, the role of the loyal dissenter, or Devil’s Advocate, needs to be intentionally filled on leadership groups within the parish. In my experience, governing bodies, such as parish council, are often filled with people who get long well with one another. Unfortunately, “get along” seems to mean that everyone already agrees with each other on most topics, and a small echo chamber comes into existence. The parish leadership needs to ensure that there is at least one voice around the table that can ask the hard and challenging questions.⁴⁴¹ This helps to ensure that any given matter has been well thought through and enables better decision making.

The parish of South Dundas is currently at a stage where it is envisioning a building redesign to meet the ministry challenges of the current day. A recent community discussion and survey to get a “wishes and hopes” list for an architectural firm to begin designing what a new space might look like produced results that showed a small group of people with a strong desire to “rebuild what we already have, but better.”⁴⁴² There was some hesitancy around adopting some of the building redevelopment ideas as proposed by the wider community. It was the voices of the people who would consistently ask questions around if the proposed design ideas would meet the needs and function that the wider community had asked for, that continuously made the group remember that they had committed to serving needs that did not just belong to them. A change that did not serve both parish church and wider community was not being faithful to the direction they had discerned.

⁴⁴¹ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 2.

⁴⁴² Parish survey discussion, June 9th, 2019.

Practical and Pastoral Implications

Parish Level:

As discussed in chapter two, a Transformative Community offers a framework to form a community that can adapt to the various contextual changes that present itself from generation to generation. At the same time, Transformative Community retains the identity of an explicitly Christian community. It is a community that is formed around the idea that being an “open system” gives a greater chance for effectiveness in an ever-changing world environment. It was also noted that this concept of an open system is very much part of the Christian tradition, and that a secular world can be a valid source of God’s revelation to the church. At the same time, when relationships are developed with members of the wider community and local culture, it can provide an opportunity, when appropriate, for the parish church to become a source of feedback to the culture in which it finds itself.

The research findings suggest that there was some value in the implementation of the primary principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life and leadership of parish churches to help them become more of an open system, develop these relationships with the wider community, and be able to move towards becoming a Transformative Community.

When examining the findings of this research project, and pondering what would need to happen so that the principles of Sacred Hospitality might be developed within the life of the parish church, through appropriate leadership styles, it seems the various substantial changes in practice within the ministry of this Deanery of Stormont, and the Diocese of Ottawa would need to occur.

To begin, the feedback from the research suggests that, instead of an informal and unintentionally structured intervention, there should be an intentional framework that gives enough stability to bring some order and intentionality to a potentially chaotic time, yet possesses enough flexibility that each parish context could adapt the framework to suit its unique and individual circumstance. As one participant pointed out:

Um, but what does it [Sacred Hospitality] look like in the messy, every day life of parish stuff. So the question you raise is, do they [the four principles] all have to happen at once? Is there an order that they're going to play out? Um, we are going to be the first practical experiential attempt at this, so our experiences will be like, the first published thing and that's a good question to ask. Cause, I don't know yet.⁴⁴³

Having a flexible, but formalized structure seems to be a potentially helpful tool to develop for parishes. During the research process, it was observed that one of the major struggles was around parish identity, or *rootedness*. A possible framework would begin by having a time of “identity searching” or “story telling” so parishes can root themselves in their “story so far,” but would also need to be expanded to, in this case, who are we, as a parish, in relation to being an Anglican community within the diocese, the country, etc. Once a communal identity is discovered and constructed, it would then be time to start working with the principle of *respect*. Respect, is the principle of giving up one's desire to convert the other party to their own way of thinking. In my experience, and quoting a registered psychotherapist, “Well-grounded people rarely feel the need to convert anyone. They are way too secure to worry about those kinds of things.”⁴⁴⁴ It could also be a time when parish churches worked on understanding healthy boundaries, active listening, and respectful group norms and behaviours. As well, a collaborative process where people get to share their stories of meaning and identity within the parish, and the

⁴⁴³ Clergy Focus Group, Appendix F.1., JW, 27.

⁴⁴⁴ A conversation with Sharon York, director of the Ottawa Pastoral Counseling Centre

wider church, would most likely expose participants to stories that are somewhat different than their own. It would be an ideal moment to work to practice the principle of *respect* during this phase.

Once *rootedness* and *respect* have been developed, communities could then explore ways to extend and accept invitations from the various “others” that surround them. In the North and South Dundas intervention sites, the practice of *invitation* was conducted through holding community consultations with people from outside of the parish church. It was an opportunity to hear, from a “outsider” perspective, what the needs of the local community were; what the local community might need from the parish church in relation to community needs; and a chance to hear the impressions about the parish church from the wider community. In both cases, not only did this practice of *invitation* help to shape the ministry development of the parish churches, furthermore, it developed community relationships resulting in the wider community becoming more invested in the ministries of the parish church, and they began to invite representatives from the parish to participate in their consultations and programs. To sum up, a relationship of mutual support and respectful feedback was developed.

The final principle, *openness*, is a natural consequence of a parish, that is secure in its identity, and has given up the need to convert others, exposes themselves to feedback, ideas, and experiences from people and organizations other than themselves. Openness is the idea that an encounter with another party may lead to a conversion or transformation of the original participant, in this case, the parish church. The parish will have chosen to be an open system that, as described by Wheatley above, brings in energy, and exports “entropy.” With this new exchange of energy, and a well rooted sense of Christian identity, the parish church will be well equipped to discern what parts of the community wisdom and experience may be God calling to

a new direction. It is a discernment process that is now well equipped with information from local identity, ecclesial identity, input from the wider community, and is now ready to be considered theologically.

As well, as noted in chapter four, including a time of Sabbath to rest and unpack the process and results will be important for any intentional interventions. In response to the research findings, a formal leadership framework tool, known as *Transformative Hospitality and Leadership* is now being proposed and is detailed above. However, the exploration and testing on the effectiveness of a formal framework will be the work for those interested in what comes after the completion of this project.

Diocesan Level:

While the proposed changes in practise, so far, have been primarily focused on the level of the parish church and those who work within parish ministry, there is also room for change at the diocesan level. Creating and maintaining healthy channels for reciprocal feedback between the parish churches and the institutional diocese is important. At this point in time, in the diocese of Ottawa, the Bishop visits parishes once every three years, and the Archdeacons are also working full time in their own parishes which makes it difficult for local parishes to feel like they can create and maintain any form of relationship or identity between themselves and the wider church. In my experience working in this deanery, and in some of the discussions during the interventions, many parishioners did not see themselves as belonging to a wider church body that worked together, but instead commented that “The Diocese” was simply the body that took away their money.⁴⁴⁵ The current system is not designed so that parish churches can cultivate

⁴⁴⁵ Conversations and comments from the East Stormont Intervention

healthy relationships with the wider diocesan structure and so it is difficult for them to have this part of their structural identity *rooted* within their perceived identity. Finding a way to have consistent and regular chances for feedback and discussion between the parish church and the wider diocese will be an important goal to strive for.

Parishes are the primary areas of ministry and financial accruelement for the wider diocese. The diocese is the support structure that enables parishes to do their ministry in effective and consistent ways. A healthy and reciprocal relationship between the two is essential if vital and faithful ministry is to be exercised through the diocesan Anglican Church. To accomplish this, the diocese needs to rethink their current structures and communication format so that these things may take place. The diocesan structures need to be filled with transformative leaders that also embody the principles of Sacred Hospitality in their own workplace and ministry. This could begin by some reasonably simple changes. At this current stage, most diocesan events happen within the city of Ottawa. The diocese itself is approximately 80% rural and have parish churches outside of the city of Ottawa. Some of the consistent feedback from parishioners (and some clergy) within the Deanery of Stormont is that many of the diocesan events and meetings are mostly in the city, and at night.⁴⁴⁶ As well, they tend to be considered expensive. It is hard for parishes to practice the principle of *invitation* when there are location, time, and financial barriers which make accepting an invitation difficult. A little more than a decade ago, the annual Synod of the Diocese of Ottawa would change locations every two years. In year one, it would be held within the city. In year two it would be held in our Deanery, which is mostly rural. However, that practice changed and now Synod is only held in the city of Ottawa. For rural

⁴⁴⁶ In my experience, rural parishes have a high number of senior citizens as parishioners. The consistent feedback from these parishioners is that they do not like to drive at night. Their night vision is no longer strong enough for them to feel safe doing so.

people, this means spending sizable amounts of money on overnight accommodation or having long days with long drives. To members of a rural community, it can feel like, once again, “The Diocese” wants everyone to meet them on their terms and their turf. Despite repeated calls to use technology to help bridge this gap, such as using Zoom cyber-meeting software, to allow members to attend digitally, that has yet to be integrated into the diocesan way of gathering its members. A rethinking of how the principle of Invitation is lived out within the life of the diocese could very much help rural parishes to find “Rootedness” in regards to part of their identity within the wider church, as well as helping to form good relationships between themselves and their perceived “other,” The Diocese.

Finally, the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak provided a unique opportunity to observe the decision-making framework of the Diocesan and National Church with regards to pastoral and sacramental ministries. When the Diocese of Ottawa announced that church buildings would be closed for worship, the clergy of Stormont Deanery met electronically to discuss how best to respond.⁴⁴⁷ For those who were able, pre-recorded and livestream services took place on Sunday mornings. This allowed for current parishioners to follow along with a morning prayer service in real time. At the same time, the Anglican Parish of South Dundas noticed that their viewers were not only from the regular congregation. People from other churches, other denominations, no previous church affiliation, and other religious traditions were watching as well.⁴⁴⁸ These viewers participated in the livestream chat forums, submitted questions for discussion, and began to become ingrained within the life of our virtual Sunday morning service. As Easter approached the question from the community was about Easter communion: Would we be able to host a

⁴⁴⁷ Field Notes, Deanery Zoom Meeting, March 2020.

⁴⁴⁸ Field Notes, Observed Facebook Live participants, March 2020.

virtual Eucharist? After forwarding this question to the Bishop of Ottawa, a pastoral letter was sent to the diocesan clergy stating that the national church had been consulted, and the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario agreed that we would enter, “a time of Sacramental fasting.”⁴⁴⁹ No virtual Eucharists were permitted. When questioned, the clergy were told that, “a robust theological understanding of what the Eucharist is does not allow [for a virtual Eucharist].”⁴⁵⁰ The reason for this, as Director of Faith, Worship, and Ministry, The Rev. Eileen Scully describes:

Whereas musical and theatrical performances can be moved online, the Eucharist is not about performance by one for the many and cannot move into that mode.... Efforts to replace the community’s physical-and-spiritual gathering with practices that try to offer a eucharistic communion online, though well-intentioned, do not reflect our sacramental theology, which is deeply about the physical-and-spiritual together.⁴⁵¹

When this news was conveyed to the viewers of our parish’s livestream service, some were deeply disappointed. As one viewer described, “How can they tell me what virtual communion should, or should not mean for me? Is my family home less sacred a space than the church? Are my hands not worthy to hold bread and wine for my family? Do we really think that the Holy Spirit is limited by wireless networks?”⁴⁵² This decision, and responses to the decision, raise a number of questions. For the purposes of this thesis, the important questions center around how directions are discerned, and decisions made, within the Diocese of Ottawa. Not every Anglican Bishop came to the same decision around virtual Eucharists. Some permitted their clergy to move forward with them. On this occasion there was an opportunity to respond to this issue

⁴⁴⁹ Field Notes, Bishop’s Pastoral Letter to the Clergy, March 2020.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ “Eucharist feast, fast, or famine?” The Anglican Journal, April 9th, 2020. April 22nd, 2020.
<https://www.anglicanjournal.com/eucharistic-feast-fast-or-famine/>

⁴⁵² Field Notes, phone conversation with an online viewer, April 2020.

differently. While it appears that the National Church, and other Bishops were consulted, it does not appear that a large sampling of clergy within the diocese were consulted. It also appears members of the virtual community worship services were not consulted. It appears the Diocese chose to make decisions for the members of the online community without consultation with members of the community in question. Could this have been an opportunity to discern if now was the time to expand our Eucharistic theology by listening to the stories of others? What theological insights might have been learned if the conversation had included this wider community?

If the Diocese of Ottawa wishes to be an institution that is able to transform in ways that meet the changing needs of each generation, perhaps this framework can offer insights at this level.

Forming Parish Leaders:

For parish churches to move towards becoming Transformative Community, change cannot be limited to localized parish churches. Leadership formation and development must also be considered as viable fields for change.

To enable parish churches to effectively work towards becoming Transformative Community, diocese and seminaries must rethink formation programs for clergy, and training opportunities for laity. As Cobb Jr. points out as one of the breakdowns of the modern church, has been, “The professionalization of Theology.”⁴⁵³ This suggested that in modern times, laity, and even some clergy, did not see themselves as theologians. The work of theology was to be left up to professional academics. However, in a Transformative Community, with the need for

⁴⁵³ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 22.

theology being done within the local context as parish church and local culture engage with one another, the need for theology to be reclaimed as a calling and task of the local parish church is high. Transformative Leadership offers an effective approach for encouraging, and producing positive results within an organization as it focuses on transformation at both the personal and social levels.⁴⁵⁴ From the perspective of personal transformation, its emphasis on self evaluation as a key component encourages the capacity to learn personal strengths and weaknesses, which in turn provides the necessary insight to effectively make intentional changes that move towards excellence.⁴⁵⁵ From the perspective of interpersonal and social transformation, the principles of encouragement,⁴⁵⁶ group consultation,⁴⁵⁷ empowering education,⁴⁵⁸ and transforming institutions⁴⁵⁹ create an environment that encourages group members to flourish, and their personal transformation lends to the effective transformation of the institution. It is a reciprocal transformation that works towards bringing out the best in both.

Furthermore, within parish ministry, the skills needed to accomplish these things have been missing from seminary and diocesan formation programs.⁴⁶⁰ Some of the observed obstacles within the intervention sites, with regards to becoming more open to change, seemed to occur because the clergy and lay leadership were not equipped to be capable and confident enough to embody the Sacred Hospitality principles. Or clergy that came in afterwards had a different style of leadership and ministry agenda, and so the work that was started was not able to

⁴⁵⁴ Anello, Hernandez, Khadem, *Transformative Leadership*, 58

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁶⁰ With the exception of the Transformative Spirituality and Leadership program at Saint Paul University, Ottawa.

continue along the path towards Transformative Community.⁴⁶¹ Ensuring that both ordained and lay leadership have access to formation and training programs that can equip them for this style of leadership is essential.

With regards to leadership succession planning, and in the spirit of reciprocal feedback cycles, seminaries and diocesan training would benefit from re-examining their current practice. It is not just the parish leaders that participate in the transformative cycle, but seminaries, and other leadership formation institutions as well. If this can be accomplished, it could very well enable continuity between leadership, and a commitment to a transformative process. The experience of the Anglican Parish of South Dundas underlines this point. The parish church had been successfully functioning in a way that could be considered transformative. Parish members were often consulted by clergy leadership, and decisions were made collaboratively. The relationship between the parish church and the wider communities was such that feedback and adaptation was encouraged. However, after that team of clergy leaders moved on to other parishes, the following three clergy placements were priests who either preferred the restorationist model of church or did not embody the principles of Sacred Hospitality. The result was that their parish stopped being a place where healthy transformation took place, and the relational sources of feedback were closed off, so the church slowly began to become stagnant

⁴⁶¹ In South Dundas, the parish had been successful under the leadership of two specific clergy leaders with regards to ministry development that had many similarities with a Transformative Community. However, after their departure the follow up clergy placements had roots within Christian fundamentalism and “fortress” model church. In North Dundas, after the intervention was complete and I was moved to my next parish, the interim clergy placement was not someone who continued with some of the intentional changes that we had made, and according to local clericus reports, was not involved in creating and maintaining intentional relationships with the wider community context. It was more of a “pastoral” model of leadership that focused on ministering to those already attending the parish church.

and die off. It was not until those clergy were no longer in a leadership position, and the parish began to reclaim its transformative identity, that positive changes began to happen.

While there is much to be excited about, with regards to the results of this research, there is also a pastoral reality to contend with. This framework can only be as effective as communities allow it to be. In the various intervention sites, none of the communities went through the process without some form of loss. In each intervention site, despite all the efforts made, there were people who chose not to make the journey towards being a Transformative Community.

In North Dundas, as each congregation closed a building to come together as an amalgamated group, small groups of people chose to either join another church or stop attending church altogether. As of the writing of this chapter, there is at least one person who refuses to step foot inside the new building, even going so far as to make sure family funerals are not held at the church. While a social movement towards using funeral homes, or other locations for funerals is certainly taking place, this person has been very outspoken about the reasons for not using the church. They are upset that “their” church was taken, and so they refuse to use the building in any meaningful way.

In South Dundas, their congregation numbers had declined significantly before any intervention was attempted. As the intervention progressed, and the church building in Iroquois closed, four people began attending other churches, and six others declined the invitation to join the primary congregation in Morrisburg. Instead, they chose to attend the parish chapel in Riverside-Heights.

While it is still early days in the East Stormont intervention, and many of the reports are positive, there still seem to be small pockets of people who are resisting the changes. It seems that in these cases, there are some who simply felt unable to accept the invitation to be a part of this new community concept and framework. As illustrated in the story of Jesus and the Rich Man,⁴⁶² invitations are never forced, they can only be offered. The recipient of the invitation to transformation and new life can decline the offer.

As mentioned in chapter one, the work of Rainer suggests that these people who are not open to transformation, and who will cling to the past as an idol, will belong to communities that will die. Because of this, the institutional church must be prepared. While certainly there is a need to have clergy and laity exposed to the insights of transformative leadership, the diocese will also need to make sure that some leaders are trained in the pastoral and palliative care of parishes that do not choose to make the transition. While the communities may choose to eventually die out, it is important to make sure that appropriate pastoral care is given as they go through the stages of grief and death. It could be possible that a sustained level of compassionate care allows them to reconsider their acceptance of *invitation* after a time. However, if these people do not reconsider, it is still appropriate to make sure they are cared for and well looked after. It will be a difficult time, and they deserve as much love and care as anyone else.

Another element of pastoral implications centers around the appointment of clergy leaders to rural parishes. As noted in the experiences of South Dundas, they moved from a time when the clergy leaders seemed to embody a hospitable and open theology of church and leadership style. The leadership that came afterwards did not embody the same qualities of

⁴⁶² Luke 18: 18-30

openness and hospitality, and so the relationships between the parish church and wider community began to deteriorate, as did the parish's ability to fully discern transformative paths of ministry development. One of the key elements of transformative leadership, mutual transformation, should be considered to high priority in the selection of clergy leaders appointed to parishes. This would provide healthy discernment and transformation, as well as continuity between the various clergy leaders that are appointed over time.

Theological Implications

As discussed in chapter one, some of the reasons that churches become resistant to change were based on a sense of self preservation. Arbuckle described this as a need to preserve orthodoxy.⁴⁶³ Rainer described this as a need to cling to the past, to the Golden Age, in the hopes that the success of days past would save the community.⁴⁶⁴ Cobb Jr. describes the issue as a loss of theological identity.⁴⁶⁵ One of the elements that each of these potential causes have in common, is that the result is a community that espouses one, or all, of these values fails to have a solid theological grounding in what it means to follow Jesus, and faithfully rooted community ministry. As Osmer explains:

While Christ as the “suffering servant” of God is used in the New Testament to portray his priestly office, it is clear that this theme also is used to describe the nature of God’s royal rule. Christ redefines the nature of power and authority by taking the form of a servant. He teaches his followers that servanthood is fundamental to the mission of the community of disciples and leadership within this community.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church*, 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Rainer., *Autopsy*, 18.

⁴⁶⁵ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 4-5.

⁴⁶⁶ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 184.

The first theological implication for parish communities is to remember that Jesus taught that those who would follow him needed to be servants of others. This is a profound difference from the theological model of insular parish churches that insist that others serve them within the pre-existing making up of the community. As Osmer describes, “Mainline congregations can be on the road to slow death, or they can form a new understanding of their mission...losing their power and influence represents a chance to gain a more biblical and authentic understanding of true power and influence.”⁴⁶⁷ This shift moves the parish church from acting out of a sense of entitlement and deference, to acting out of an identity of service to their local context that embodies the principles and practices of Jesus. It is this ability to offer up an alternative way of being to the wider community that could very well end up being the way to initiate social transformation.⁴⁶⁸

The second proposed theological implication would be based in how parish churches, and the wider church for that matter, view the relationship that the community of faith has with culture, both local and extended. While Margaret Wheatley’s work with feedback loops and the relationship between social organisms clearly show that church and culture can be sources of feedback that give one another new life and insight, this concept is also grounded in a theology of culture as a means of revelation to the church. As Cobb Jr. writes:

This reform [transformation] proposal views Christianity as a movement that lives always out of its past but in such a way that it learns from and is changed by its cultural environment, while also taking responsibility to Christianize that environment...our task as Christians is not to recover an original form of life in the church...Our task, as we try faithfully to continue the Christian tradition, is to respond as effectively and appropriately today to the particularities of our situation as the early church responded in its time. That may involve reproducing some of its teachings and practices, but that is not the main thing. Our task is to be transformed by the best of what we are now experiencing and

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

learning and to share in the transformation of the world.⁴⁶⁹

This is similar to what Osmer speaks about with his concept of the contrast society.⁴⁷⁰ The church is responsible for the needs of its members, and the members asked to take responsibility for the needs of others. The focus switches from placing one's own needs first, to placing the needs of others first.⁴⁷¹ This is the moment when the church ceases to focus on what relationships might provide for them, and focuses on how relationships might provide God's love for others.

While some may still choose to see this as "giving in" to the pressure of culture, it is important to remember the stories of the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman. As described in chapter four, both of these stories have Jesus adjusting his understanding of ministry, and his willingness to act based on a revelatory encounter with a woman from a different religion, culture, and purity status.⁴⁷² As described in chapter two, with the principles of Sacred Hospitality, being open to encountering the other, and being changed by that encounter, is very much part of the Christian tradition. To be a Christian community, theologically, is to intentionally welcome the other, especially those who might never reciprocate, so that they might encounter the unconditional love and grace of God, and at the same time knowing that those encounters might be a source of revelation and transformation for the Church.

⁴⁶⁹ Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church*, 42-43.

⁴⁷⁰ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 195.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Daniel J. Harrington, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 1993.) 612.

Other Implications

While it does need to be noted that there were losses, with regards to parish membership as they engaged in these interventions, it should also be noted that the losses were much lower than the communities expected. When initial conversations began in both North and South Dundas around the forward movement of the parishes, business people from both inside the parish church, and from the outside communities suggested that the parish should expect to lose up to 40% of their current membership, and that it should know a baseline of maintained membership in order to be successful moving forward.⁴⁷³ In two intervention sites, the loss of membership due to the intervention changes was 10% or less. As one parishioner remarked:

It's always sad to see the people you love choose to walk away, but I really expected that more would have left. We should probably be celebrating how many chose to stay and take part in this new direction.⁴⁷⁴

At the same time, while it is understandable to mourn the loss of community membership, it could be the case that this is a moment of personal growth and transformation for those people. It is possible that this is a new moment in their life that will bring them closer to what is best for them, and the new form of community life they will engage in. God will still be present with them, and that is a good thing.

One final observation that arose from the community consultations is that in both North and South Dundas, the wider community clearly said that there were too many churches, all doing similar things, for such a small community. One of the benefits of the consultation was that the Anglican parishes could redevelop the kind of ministry they offered so it would be

⁴⁷³ Conversation during internal and external consultations.

⁴⁷⁴ Member of Parish Council from South Dundas. Similar sentiments had been mentioned after the amalgamation process in North Dundas as well.

somewhat unique. However, this raises larger questions around the need for ecumenical efforts within our current context. In terms of a change in practice, it is suggested that local Christian churches need to find ways to do things together. Across the Deanery of Stormont there is not a large effort for ecumenical ministry. During my own conversations with ecumenical partners, most of the leadership agreed that our church communities should be doing more, and we should be talking about some substantial changes (such as sharing buildings and resources), yet there is a large reluctance to enter into that level of conversation. As one person described, “Sure, we should be sharing buildings, but who is going to volunteer to give their building up first?”⁴⁷⁵ There is a sense that people will still choose their denominational loyalty over a potentially life-giving new way forward. Yet, despite what some may think, people are not always gathering around denominational identities or theological differences. They are gathering around ministries and relationships that positively impact their lives.⁴⁷⁶ It would be interesting to see how the principles of Sacred Hospitality and the framework of Transformative Community might impact ecumenical relationships within local parish settings. Instead of ecumenical gatherings based on, “the lowest common denominator so nobody is offended,”⁴⁷⁷ ecumenical partners may find ways to improve working relationships and bring the best gifts and skills that their denomination has to offer.

For the full potential of this proposed framework to have the highest impact, there are significant changes to how parish and diocesan ministries are played out. This first begins with

⁴⁷⁵ Field Notes, Ministerial Lunch, March 2018.

⁴⁷⁶ Field Notes, Deanery meeting over lunch at the annual clergy conference, Sept. 2018. During exit interviews from Anglican churches within the Deanery of Stormont the vast majority of those who chose to give feedback said that they were trying out other churches because the programs they offered met the needs of their everyday lives. These programs consisted of things like free or affordable day care, babysitting so parents could have a night out, summer camps that were affordable, etc. As well, they listed a worship style in a format they could relate with as part of the reason for their change.

⁴⁷⁷ Observation by a clergy leader in the Deanery of Stormont.

an intentional change in a theology of what it means to be a parish church, and a follower of Jesus.

On a practical level, an intentional structure that gives some clear guidelines is important, while still maintaining flexibility so each parish can adapt it to their contextual reality. Parish leadership, both clerical and lay, must have opportunities to be formed and equipped with the principles and skills of Sacred Hospitality and Transformative Community. Once equipped, parishes can reclaim their identity as a theological community that is capable of discerning God's transforming call to them, through the voices of the traditional structures and sources of revelation, and through the voice of the culture and local context in which they exist.

At the diocesan level, there is room for change so that parish churches and diocesan structures can foster healthy and reciprocal relationships. This creates a reciprocal circle of feedback so that both parties can make sound and informed decisions about who they are, and what kind of ministry God is calling them towards. Parish churches, and the communities they serve, and serve with, are calling out for healthy and life-giving relationships with one another. The same principles and frameworks that can help parish churches accomplish this may very well be able to assist diocesan structures to accomplish the same thing.

The teaching and integration of Sacred Hospitality principles into the life and ethos of a community shows promise as a way to help rural parishes become more open to transformation. However, it is not perfect. Not everyone will accept the invitation to be part of God's call to the transformation of parish ministry and new community. Because of this, there needs to be leadership and resources in place so that appropriate pastoral care is available for the people who are not ready to make the journey. Palliative sensitive leadership needs to be available for those who will choose to never make the journey.

With these changes, there is an opportunity to see the relationships between parish churches, and the communities they serve developed, strengthened, and deepened in ways that create mutually beneficial circles of feedback and ministry. There is also the chance to see the relationships between the parish church and the diocesan church developed in a healthy way as well. While mainstream media sources, and many voices within the church suggest that the modern church is dying, this project suggests that it might be too early to predict that outcome. There is another option. There is another way of being a faithful Christian community that can help transform parish churches so the ministries they offer are vital within the communities they serve. It may take some significant changes. However, the experiences within the Deanery of Stormont suggest that it is not too late to accept God's invitation to transform.

As well, there is room for exploration with regards to potential impact on ecumenical development. In this deanery there was a clear call from the wider community for churches to work together and stop over-saturating the ministry field with several denominations doing similar things.

With these things in mind, it seems quite possible that the church is not dying. It may simply be that an insular form of church is ending so that a new form of Church may emerge. I do not know of any theme that is more grounded in faithful Christian tradition and theology than God doing a new thing, raising Jesus Christ from the dead, and in Christ we become a new creation. The question is no longer, "can we do this?" rather, "will we?"

Conclusion

“There are somewhere between 12-20 different churches in South Dundas. As far as I could see, you guys were the only church who bothered to ask the rest of the community what they needed. That’s why I wanted to come and work with you, and I’m not even sure I believe in God. I do believe in what you’re trying to do though.”⁴⁷⁸

This project sought to engage the issue of parish decline as experienced within Anglican parish churches within the Deanery of Stormont. Even with exploring the issue through the lenses of philosophy, sociology, demographic assessment, theology, organizational change, and human experience, every project has its limitations. This was a modest attempt to gain some understanding as to the causes of decline within the rural parishes of the Anglican Deanery of Stormont, as well as propose a revised praxis to address the underlying cause: resistance to change. The listed causes of decline are not exhaustive, nor are the solutions that have been offered. With the ever-changing reality of parish ministry within various contexts, the causes and solutions will be as varied as the locations in which they appear. It is hoped that this project can offer a resource with enough flexibility in concept and framework that practitioners of parish leadership have at least one more option to try as they engage the problem of parish decline in their own context.

Limits of the Project – Areas for Further Research

While there is much to be hopeful about, with regards to the findings of this thesis, there are also limits to work as well. One of the questions raised through the Clergy Focus Group was around the idea of Sacred Hospitality as a leadership style. Because this thesis was not just about leadership, there was not the space within the framework to explore that question. While this

⁴⁷⁸ Field notes, conversation with Ashely Lewis, June 2019.

work does suggest the principles of Sacred Hospitality, introduced into known effective leadership styles can be effective, it cannot make the claim that Sacred Hospitality is a leadership style of its own.

The second limitation recognizes that the work for this thesis took place within rural parish communities. Because of this, the results, at this point, can only speak to the experience within those rural communities. In order to develop generalizability, more study is required within other rural parish communities to see if the outcomes would be successful. As well, more study would be needed to see if this framework would be effective within urban or suburban communities. Those contexts are very different than rural parish communities and so it cannot be assumed that the results would be transferable. The COVID-19 outbreak also highlighted the limitation of leadership interventions being done within traditional face to face ministry situations. Questions have now arisen around the effectiveness of this proposed framework when introduced into online or virtual communities.

Finally, the Transformative Leadership tool now needs to be tested and refined. This project developed the concept, however further study will be needed to assess the effectiveness of the tool in other contexts, and refinements to the tool will need to be made.

A Way Forward

At its heart, this project was about identity and relationships. The problem of church decline can be viewed through several lenses but at its heart it is about how fear of change can breakdown relational love between the church, God, and neighbour. The wider community began to stop investing in the life of the parish church because the relationship between their everyday

lives and needs were no longer being addressed by parish church leaders or parish ministry. Parish churches stopped investing in the lives of the wider community because they were afraid that to do so, they would put their identity as a Christian community at risk, and so they chose to cling to their past as opposed to working with the wider community to develop a new future. In the breakdown between the community of faith and their neighbours, theologically, there was also a breakdown in the parish's relationship with God. They were not willing or able to see God's presence within the culture that surrounded them, or in the voices that called out for change. Parish churches became self-serving, instead of hospitable, in the true Christian sense.

For a time, resources were plentiful enough that parish churches felt no pressing need to attend to these changes. There were enough volunteers and financial gifts that the parish church could continue on as if nothing was wrong. They could choose to be insular. As one colleague said when reflecting on parish life, "It's fascinating to watch what people in the church choose to do, when there is no pressure on them. When you have the opportunity to do anything, what you choose says something profound about you."⁴⁷⁹

Now, with natural attrition, the finances and volunteer numbers have signalled a crisis. Some might consider the outcome of parish decline unavoidable. However, the results of this research project show significant promise that another outcome can be possible. This project affirms the belief that community relationships can be formed, healed, reformed, and developed in ways that make communal life better. In a sense, this has been the reality of the parish church for some time. From my youngest days I can remember the parish church as part of the centre of the community. The only difference now is that, if that level of relationship wants to be restored,

⁴⁷⁹ From a conversation with a colleague at the annual clergy conference, 2017.

then the wider community requires that their voices and wisdom be respected before they recommit to the relationship. The quote at the beginning of this chapter comes from a local woman who became interested in combining her professional training as a chef and restaurant manager with her love of community outreach. As she describes above, it was the moment the church asked the wider community for input that she began to think a new relationship could be possible.

Becoming Transformative Community gives parish churches an attainable way of being church that can help them reconnect with the communities they serve. It allows them to let go of the fear that has stood in their way for far too long. It allows them to help create a space where God's wisdom and grace can once again flow between the church and the world in ways that are mutually beneficial. It does so in a way that maintains an authentic Christian identity and faithful practice. In fact, as Christine Pohl reminds us, Christian hospitality does not just maintain a Christian identity, it always was part of the Christian identity:

For most of the history of the church, hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter, and protection, but also a recognition of their worth and common humanity.⁴⁸⁰

Historically, to be hospitable to the stranger is to be a faithful Christian person, and Christian community. Transformative Community is a framework that rebuilds that principle back into a way of being community that can also adapt and change to the challenges in each generation.

In order to achieve this, parish churches, and diocesan structures will have to let go of some of their control and certainty. To paraphrase a concept of Sacred Hospitality in chapter

⁴⁸⁰ Pohl, *Making Room*, 6.

two, in front of the hearth there is no guest, no master.⁴⁸¹ Communities of faith must be willing to meet as equals with the world they have been called to serve. They must be willing to see that God is just as present in the lives and wisdom of a secular world as God is present within the church.

It is my hope that for parishes who are trying to find a faithful way forward and become a renewed community, this project will provide some new insights to guide them along the way. For those who have felt abandoned and hurt by the insular behaviours of the church, I hope this project might serve as both an apology, and a moment of vindication. For both sides of the equation, I hope this thesis inspires us to remember that the lives lived in a secular world are just as sacred as those lived within the church, and that it will take all of us to bring about fullness of life that is reflected in the Kingdom of God. If nothing else, I hope we all remember this: the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we have, and to love our neighbours as ourselves.⁴⁸² There is nothing more important than this. Everything else is secondary.

During the Clergy Focus Group, a question had been raised around if Sacred Hospitality could be a form of leadership. Since the purpose of this project was different than exploring that question, it will remain unanswered at this point. As mentioned in the limits of this project, that could be a direction for future research. However, what the project does show is that Sacred Hospitality principles can be paired with known effective leadership models in ways that allow the principles to be inserted into the functioning life, and decision-making framework of the parish church in ways that help it to become more open to change. At the beginning of this research project, I indicated that I wanted this work to be accessible to leadership practitioners

⁴⁸¹ de Bethune, *By Faith and Hospitality*, 3

⁴⁸² Luke 10:27.

within parish churches as they struggled with the issue of parish decline. This thesis offers another option for parish leaders looking to help their parishes move from being resistant to change, to being more open to change and transformation. It also offers a way to accomplish this while maintaining an authentic Christian identity and way of life. While no model or framework is complete or perfect, this thesis offers practitioners, who have felt as though they have run out of options or ideas, another chance to faithfully navigate the challenges of their ministry within their localized context.

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Appendix A

Clergy Focus Group

Introduction: During my time in the parish of North Dundas, and as facilitator to the ministry re-development of East Stormont, I was tasked with helping the people of the parishes open up to new ways of possible transformation. To do so, I opted to use my leadership intervention as a way to insert some/all of the principles of Sacred Hospitality into the life and process of the parish. The hope was that this would create a framework that would encourage the parishes to be open to possible transformation and adaptation so they could make decisions about how best to move forward in their parish life. (Handout of Sacred Hospitality principles will be made available and a time of clarification and explanation will be provided).

In North Dundas, the parish had been in the process of amalgamation for over 20yrs. They were unsure of a future direction, and they were worried that if they did push ahead, the discomfort of change would cause further loss of members. The primary intervention used was Invitation. The parish agreed to invite community leaders who were not members of our church to a lunch consultation. During that lunch we asked them to give their thoughts on what they thought the local needs were, and how our parish might best respond. Up until this meeting, the parish had been considering that a new church might be a new home for a foodbank or community outreach. However, after the consultation, the parish heard a message that what the community might need most is a community centre and place to gather. The parish then decided to change direction, and St. Clare's was built in the style of a community centre church. The secondary intervention used was to have my preaching focus on hospitality, transformation, and change as being very much a part of the Christian and Anglican tradition, and that God calls people of faith to live out these values in the communal and personal lives.

In East Stormont, as multiple parishes began to come together to discern a way forward that would offer sustainable and vital ministry, I began by setting up our consultations based on the Sacred Hospitality principles of Invitation and Respect. We intentionally invited the Corporations, Parish Councils, and Vestries of all parishes to meet, and we did so by agreeing in the beginning that we would not try to change any of their core beliefs. When all parishes said that their "line in the sand" was to keep their church buildings, we agreed that we would help put together a plan that would respect that. During these several facilitated conversations, we continuously went over the principles of hospitality as we discussed various ways forward. Through this, the parishes were able to slowly develop and "buy in" to realigning their parishes and resources so that they acted in "team ministries". Sharing resources and clergy, as well as developing lay leadership (up until my departure from the process) seemed to be the way forward for them.

Questions:

1. The initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward and get past their immediate struggle. To do so, I made use of the principles of Sacred Hospitality, as discussed above. Can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in that task? Why or why not?
2. As you observe your parishes during their “post intervention time” can you see any of the principles of Sacred Hospitality still being present within the life of the parish?
3. If your observation is that the intervention was not successful, or that the principles are no longer present within the community, what do you think needed to be done differently to be successful, and/or to have the principles take root within the life of the parish in a lasting way?
4. Would you say that your parish(es) are more, or less, open to transformation since the time of the intervention?
5. Looking forward, what kind of things do you think would be needed to inspire your parishes to more fully adopt the spirit and principles around Sacred Hospitality and transformation within their common life?

Appendix B.

Revised Questions for Lay Interviews:

Intro: As you will remember from the consent letter, Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry degree through Saint Paul University in Ottawa. The question that we are exploring with this research is, “Do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parish churches to become more open to transformation so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve?”

1. To start, can you describe the state of your parish before Jon arrived, in your own words? How was the financial situation? What was the state of your weekly attendance? How would you describe the relationship between the parish church and the wider community? (active, stagnant, non-existent) How would you describe the life of the parish? (active, stagnant, dying, life giving, etc.) *
2. Looking back, how would you describe the parish’s feelings and attitudes towards change?
3. The initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward and get past their immediate struggle. To do so, Jon made use of the principles of Sacred Hospitality, as discussed above. Can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in that task? Why or why not?
4. Thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of them?
5. What changes in vision or parish practices (if any) would you say have come from those interventions?
6. Looking back, if the goal was to help the parish become more open to transformation and change, what would you say was missing from the interventions? What would you have done differently?
7. Can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential that your parish is capable of at this time? Would you describe it having more, or less potential than before the leadership interventions described above?
8. What would you need from parish leadership now in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

*For participants from the Advent adult education session at St. James, question 1 may not be applicable as some members are from churches of another denomination. Their answers will be interpreted in regards to how the intervention impacted them personally, and what thoughts, attitudes, or ideas they may have brought back to their own church communities.

Appendix C - Research Ethics Board Approval

On the next page you will find the Research Ethics Board approval for research.

Comité de la déontologie | Certificat d'éthique
Board | Ethics Certificate

REB File Number 1360.12/17

Principal Investigator / Thesis supervisor / Co-investigators / Student

Last name	Name	Affiliation	Role
Martin	Jonathon	Faculty of Theology	Student-Principal Investigator
Ste-Marie	Lorraine	Faculty of Human Sciences	Thesis Supervisor

Type of project Doctoral Thesis

Change to the Research Protocol (Revised Consent Forms R1) Becoming a Transformative Community: Intra-Connecting the Parish Church and the Community it Serves through the Principles of Sacred Hospitality

<u>Approval date</u>	<u>Expiry Date</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Initial Approval 13-02-2018	12-02-2019	1 (approved)
Revision (R1) 05-06-2018	12-02-2019	1 (Approved)
dd-mm-yyyy	dd-mm-yyyy	

Committee comments

The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the revised research protocol. The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.12/17 when recruiting participants.

In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.

The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.

The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety. Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.

The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.

Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Louis Perron
Chair
Research Ethics Board

When I first arrived here in June, I remember having a conversation with the councils where I said that, as a parish, we need to be ready to embark on a journey of deep transformation and change. Little did I know that this process was already well underway and being led by some very capable hands. I would like to thank Ann Barkley and Jill Dumaresq for being co-chairs of this team, and I would also like to thank Doug Jarvis, Wendy Gibb, Mark Lewis, and Fran Aird for their time and efforts as part of the team. Before I get to my final report on the work of this team I would also like to mention that this team did an excellent job of making sure that through the entire process of discerning a path for the future they made sure that their work was rooted in prayer, compassion, and a genuine desire to seek what God was calling us to do. In every direction that was discussed, there were equal conversations about the scriptures, what theological implications were at stake, and did our current practices, or what was being proposed line up with the values of the Gospel. As a new rector, I have spent the last nine months being really, really proud of their work.

When our team first sat down to go over the information that had been gathered in the April congregational consultation it quickly seemed obvious that, while looking to do so in different ways, the whole parish was looking to return to “what we do best” in regards to ministry. There was a desire to have worship that engaged both the hearts and minds of the congregations. As well, it seemed important to the members of the parish that consistent access to well-developed Christian education programs be made available. Finally, there was a desire to continue offering vital outreach to the wider community. In fact, there seemed to be a desire to find ways to reach out in more ways to the vulnerable communities that surround us. Because of this we worked with a mission statement that seemed to sum it up nicely: Exploring faith and serving the world God loves.

At the same time, we talked about how the three communities we serve (Morrisburg, Iroquois, and Riverside Heights) were each unique places in their own ways. The strengths and challenges of one community were not always the same as the other two. We discussed how Morrisburg seemed to be a place where the population needs would focus around issues with poverty. For Iroquois it seemed like developing ministry for the senior’s population might be worth exploring. For Riverside Heights, we wondered if there might be a way to engage with the camping and tourism community, while still offering community chaplaincy to the folks attending the church. A review of demographic changes and patterns for our area seemed to confirm what we were discussing.

Finally, we consulted with community leaders from the area (police, hospital, seniors’ services, the Play House, inter-agency, etc.) and we asked the folks about their thoughts on our church and what we should be doing. We also asked them what they thought the area needed most. The feedback we received was very interesting. We heard that we really need to be advertising our services at a greater level, or “elevating our media profile”. Many were unaware about the services of Apple Tree, and some thought that it was the Legion that ran the Christmas dinner. We heard that, in an age of technology and cyber experience, the community needed to have a place to gather and interact with one another, a place to experience the joys, fears, sadness, and excitement of community life. We were also told that the community needed a

central place so that community ministry could be accessible to those who need it. While the details of those specifics are available, for the sake of this report I will end this description here.

With all the information gathered from community consultations (internal and external), demographic research, peer review, and consultation with congregational councils, parish council, and various committees within the parish, the Dreams to Reality team offer up the following proposal:

It seems clear to us that God is calling our parish to do a new thing. We have a history of being a parish that is vibrant and engaging, as well as offering much needed ministry to the wider community. In order to continue to offer ministry that is both essential to our community and financially sustainable, we believe that it is time for our churches to come together as one parish. We need to operate as a united congregation if we are to successfully minister to the people of South Dundas, both in and outside of our churches. We feel it is time to have one centralized location in Morrisburg that would focus on community ministry for people living with poverty. The demographic research, and the consultations indicate that this location is central and accessible, (on top of having the best chance for potential growth) and would therefore be the best choice as a “home base” of operations. It would also allow us to create “critical mass” on Sunday mornings as a larger gathered community. As we experienced during the winter months of worshipping together, there is a different feel when we all gather, week after week, in prayer, song, and faith.

This change would mean that we would move away from having individual congregations as entities to themselves. There would be one corporation, one council, one set of financials, one vestry, etc. This would also address the potential issue of exhausting volunteers, while at the same time simplifying how we operate.

In terms of how this would impact the communities of Iroquois and Riverside Heights, some of that would be the work of a new parish council (made up of representation from all three communities) to decide. However, we believe that Morrisburg would become the main point of weekly Sunday worship. Riverside Heights is in a slightly different position because of the large trust fund they possess. Because of this, life will probably not change a lot for that community. For Iroquois, this community would see a change in how worship was done. A schedule of both communities worshipping together in St. James for the warmer months, and St. John’s for the winter months would be something the Rector and the new council should discuss and consider.

In regards to ministry development, we feel that the communities of Iroquois and Riverside have some exciting potential to explore. St. John’s already offers outreach in the form of Martha’s Kitchen. This gathering is an excellent opportunity to support our local seniors’ community. We would recommend that this area of ministry is one that should be explored further, and if possible developed. There may even be community partnerships that could be developed that might offer interesting options. For Riverside Heights, we are curious to see what kind of ministry might be developed with the surrounding community. Is there a way to become the “camping chapel”, or something along those lines? As well, there may be a relationship to explore with the next-door Lutheran community.

We also felt that with the very real financial challenges that our buildings present, we need to take a serious look at being good stewards of those resources. The time may come when we must discuss the sale of our buildings, but that time is not now. Because of our swift action to find a way forward, we have at least a year to see what else is possible. We recommend

launching a large financial campaign so that we might see, in a predictable way, what our next five years of finances might look like. This would be a campaign that was not just limited to current parishioners. In fact, we would invite the wider community to make an offering as we are looking to take our place among other community service providers.

It is our hope that this campaign will be able to get us started along the path of paying for ministry development, but also the renovations that are needed for our buildings. Part of the community consultation, which also lined up with our own, and the diocesan assessment, is that the reality is, South Dundas has too many church buildings. We have several Christian communities that all offer reasonably similar things. The day may come when we must answer the question, “How many buildings do we need?” However, for now we have an opportunity to see if we can develop sustainable ministry in each of our locations. This means looking at ways to make St. James more efficient when it comes to heating/cooling. It means renovating for the ministries that the community needs. It also means looking at making the upstairs worship space into a multi-purpose space that has upgraded audio-visual equipment.

It is also important to note that as St. John’s and Holy Trinity look to develop their own unique ministries, it is quite possible that their success will mean needing to upgrade the local facilities as well. As we consider renovations to buildings, this team also recommends that environmental and green energy options be considered as we come alongside the diocesan standards and expectations.

Throughout our discussions the message seemed to keep coming up time and time again. Despite historical divisions between communities, good theology, and our financial reality dictated that we needed to finally move past these challenges and come together as one church serving the people of South Dundas. As you will see in the suggested motions, we are also proposing that the Bishop be asked to rename our parish, “The Anglican Parish of South Dundas” as a reminder that we are one Anglican body called to serve our entire area, not just the community in which we live.

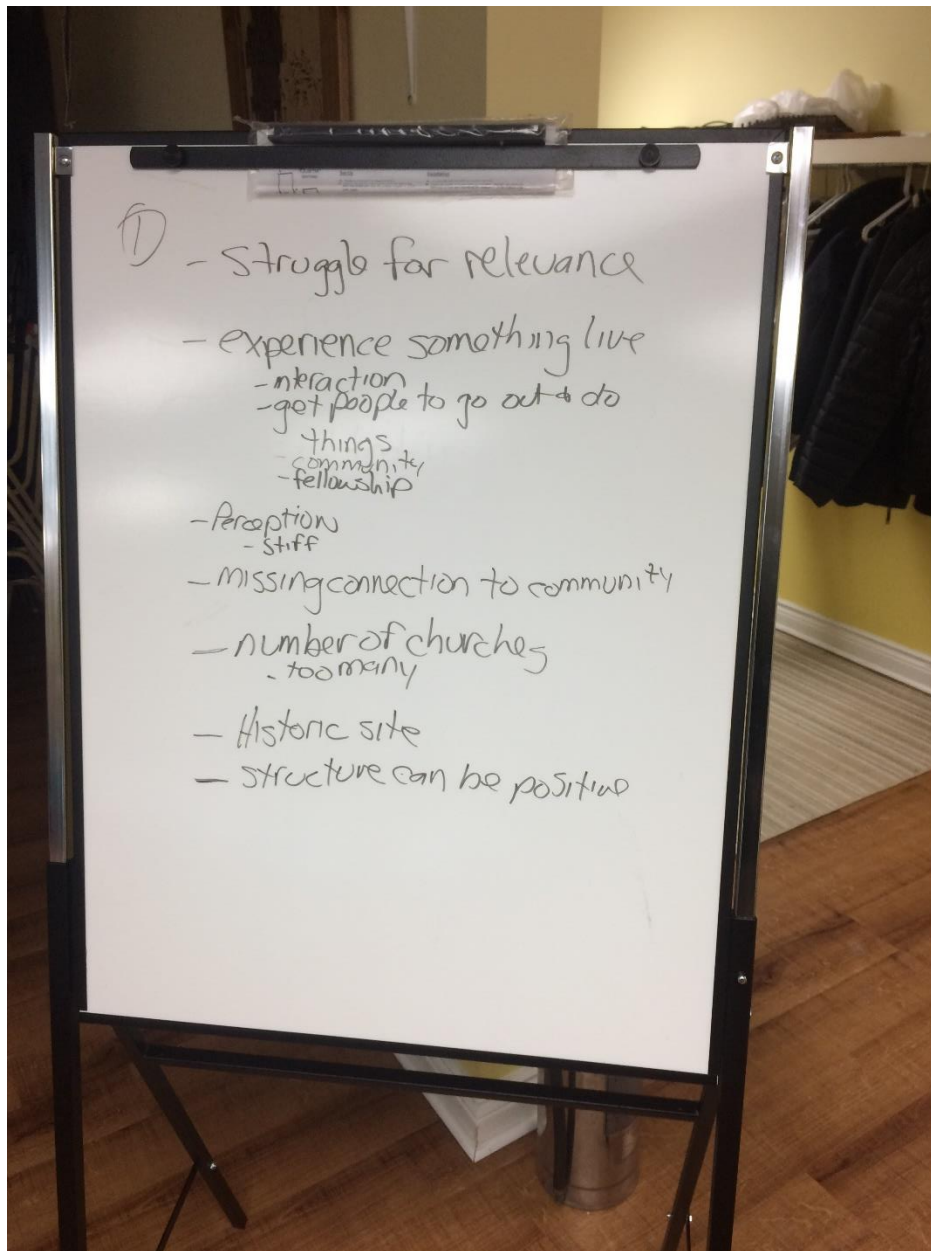
The world we live in has changed, and change can be both exciting and terrifying. We are confident that the people of this community will rise to the challenge, and with the prompting of God’s Spirit, find a way to come together so that we can continue to serve our Lord, and the people of South Dundas in the most essential and sustainable ways possible.

The Dreams to Reality team puts forward the following actions to be considered by parish special vestry on March 6th, 2016 (Moved and seconded by Jill Dumaresq and Ann Barkley):

1. The Amalgamation/Centralization of the parish. One parish that happens to own multiple buildings. There would no longer be separate congregations, but rather, one set of wardens, one set of accounting books, one vestry, etc. Regular worship would take place at St. James during the warmer months, and at St. John’s during the winter and special occasions (weddings, funerals, feast of St. John, etc.). Holy Trinity would continue as is and look to develop locally specific ministry. This amalgamation would begin on *(possible dates: Sept. long weekend, Advent 1, or Jan. 1st, 2017)*

2. Ask the Bishop to rename the parish “The Anglican Parish of South Dundas”.
3. Run a financial campaign with a predictable pledging income for the next five years to see what financial resources we may have within the community.
4. Explore possible renovations to St. James so that it functions as multi-purpose community programming space. Upstairs would be a social venue (dinners, worship, theatre, music, etc.). Downstairs would be a community ministries space (meditation, Martha’s, counseling, life skills services, etc.). This would mean the removal of pews and installation of comfortable chair seating (such as at St. Clare’s – Winchester and St. Paul’s – Almonte), the installation of an upstairs bathroom, and using the back of the church as a social space.
5. Renovate St. James so that its heating and cooling capacity are improved as well as explore eco-friendly forms of electricity and energy.
6. As new ministries develop in Iroquois/Riverside Heights, explore necessary renovations to meet the needs of these ministries.
7. Install a new audio/visual system at St. James to meet the multi-media needs of our times.
8. The parish will seek out and explore community partnerships, and develop ministries towards location-based priorities (Morrisburg: poverty and life skills for youth and adults, Iroquois: Seniors, Riverside: camping season and tourism).

Community Question 1 – What comes to mind when you think of our church?



Community Question 2 – What are some of the biggest needs in our area?

(2)

- place to gather / build Community
- building ecumenical relationships
- organizations want own building
 - Shared use? church buildings?
- youth engagement - morrisburg
- donor fatigue
- need to get buy in if working w. poverty
- geographic boundaries
- give people something to reach for
- Need to develop skills
- people leave town because there's nothing here

Community Question 3 – What could our church provide the wider community?

- Activity night
- drop in
- Seniors support
- mental health
 - partner w. service providers (wifi, etc)
- media release, advertize
- raise public profile
- Kids volunteer hours
- multi media services
- Piggy Back on other events
 - xmas parade
 - UCU

F.1 – Clergy Focus Group

JM – Jon Martin

JW – John Wilcox

MK – Mary Kate

FK – Frank Kirby

DR – Doug Richards

JM – The initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward and get past their immediate struggle. To do so, I made use of the principles of Sacred Hospitality as discussed above. Can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in that task? Why, or why not?

MK – I don't know that there's um, a blanket answer as I said, I think there are phased answers to that, so I would say in the initial phase in the initial meetings... I think I was in, near the beginning of them, I would say that no, they curled up like little pill bugs, you know, and there was keening. You know, and there was interest, but maybe not um, there was cautious interest is what I remember. And then there followed the little period of the pill bugs where they were like "no no no no no no no", and they translated that as closing. Or whatever the biggest fear was in their head. Um, I think that's quite different from what's happening, or my experience of what's happening now. Um, and I'm gonna kinda let others jump in at that point. I can come back.

FK – I agree. Um, should I name individual churches or just say two churches or three churches this, that?

JM – You can name them in this portion of the data collection, uh, when I put everything out um, all of the identifiers will be stripped from the data.

FK – I think it would help if I was specific for us, do you understand. Um, last summer, so it was just about a year ago, maybe not quite, um, it was in the waning days of Jason, in the parish of Glengarry, um, which has now of course ceased to be, if not officially, effectively. Maxville and Lancaster were being very much – I like the pill bug image, I wouldn't have thought of that –

JM – I'm totally going to quote that, it's going to be a thing.

(2:25) FK – It was very, it certainly describes, they were really pulling in to themselves, and did not want to be proceeding with any of this stuff. Uh, and I had a meeting, and it was a pretty tense meeting, Jason was there, and I was there as Archdeacon, and the wardens of Maxville and Lancaster. And they were on the verge of scuttling the whole thing, or at least as far as their participation. Maxville would have had no part in, at your end, Doug, and Lancaster was going to pull out of any... And I worked with them very slowly, I could tell that they were very defensive and very mistrustful. Managed to get them to agree to at least try it out before deciding whether or not to withdraw. And at the time I didn't think that I'd done a very good job of convincing them – I'm not meaning to sing my own praises

at all. But they did agree to try it out, and as Mary Kate just said, the result is St. Michael's Maxville is now part of the Northern area parish and St. John's is by and large a very willing participant in the area collaboration for um, for the St. Lawrence area. But I do remember the tenseness of that meeting, which was less than, it was in July I'm pretty sure. So about 11 months ago. And it was touch and go. It was really touch and go.

JM – Ya.

JW – And certainly at St. Claire's, uh, the, well I've already mentioned my personal bias against Sacred Hospitality. But leadership sometimes is messy and ugly, and hospitality implies lovey dovey, let's hold on to each other and sing kumbaya. So that's where I kinda look at it. But, after saying that, in your role as the principal um, architect, of St. Claire's, it would have been reasonable to think you would have called the community people together and say "where is your focus and what is it going to be?" And they could have come around, like you guys are all suggesting, is it a food bank? Is it an OPP station, is it a youth gathering? And instead they said, yeah, we want a gathering place basically for all ages. And because of that, you, in your leadership style, were able to effectively bring about that. I am the beneficiary of it, and it has grown because that has been its focus and continues to be its focus. We have not tried to be a food bank, we have not tried to be an OPP station, we are St. Claire's and we function that.

JW - Is that Sacred Hospitality? I think it was the approach of a logical step of bringing churches together and saying what is it that we as a group want to accomplish? Because I think you'd already broke the barriers of saying we're coming together. I think at that point, eh, you were... everybody was online, weren't they, by then?

JM – Uh, predominantly. There was a brief surge out of Chesterville when it was finally time to sell the building...

JW – Absolutely.

JM – And Shirley Coons held a secret meetin.

JW – Yeah, yeah.

JM – But other than that, yeah, it was...

JW – So yeah. But I come back to, is that, you know, using that term Sacred Hospitality, or was it the logical progression? That's where I have a disconnect.

JM – Yeah.

JW – But certainly, under your leadership style, I have to sing your praises cause that, it worked. Whatever you want to call it, if you want me to call it Sacred Hospitality roger that. It was Sacred Hospitality. In my view it was strong leadership.

(6:45) JM – Well I'll take it.

JW – Yeah, cause like I say I think there's a whole new discussion on a paper that could be done on is there such a thing as Sacred Hospitality, or is it trying to sell/make leadership sound softer than what leadership really is.

JM – And there would be some who would have done it that way, absolutely. I see what you're saying. Doug, anything from your perspective?

DR – I'm remembering the very first meeting where we met in the basement at St. Michael's Maxville with the wardens and treasurers and clergy. And the invitation there to, ok, what is the line in the sand? And it was very clear that the invitation was ok, what are you not willing to give up? And uh, um, it was, and so unanimously across the board they came up with "we don't want to give up our buildings." And how that, even though throughout the rest of the meetings at times that was challenged, the respect that you required for that first meeting was that, ok, the first meeting said our buildings are sacred. We need to keep them open. We need to have a presence in each of our communities. How do we do that?

JM – Yeah.

DR – And that moment of, ok this is the line in the sand, and how that was um, respected, throughout the rest of the process, even though it was challenged from time to time by very different people, saying "but we didn't agree to that." But the reality was, was that ok, from the very beginning we have always said this is the line in the sand. And so it was, there was always a respect in the process that people were heard, and whether they wanted to be heard or not was another story. But it was a sacred moment that, ok, this is the line in the sand, this is where we will not go. And uh, I think in some ways that helped to make, especially, well in the area parish of Prescott North Glengarry, that has made us what we are. Because we have made a commitment that our churches will remain open. Whether that is going to be happening in 10 years' time, who knows.

JM – But at least, it was the point of departure.

DR – It was the point of departure, and it gives us a vehicle on which to down the road, ok, we can't afford all of the buildings, what can we do? Or our churches are getting smaller, what can we do? How can we assist each other? Like they're... I'm thinking of the announcement of the creation of the area parish was made on one Sunday, and the very next Sunday was um, a joint service. On the fifth Sunday we had said, there will always be a joint service and the mood is celebration on that Sunday. We were at St. Michael's in Maxville and it was a celebration on that Sunday. And it was good. And there was Sacred Hospitality there. And it was, everybody was represented, and everybody felt listened to.

JM – Thank you.

(10:55) MK – I think one of the things that's really interesting about Sacred Hospitality, because we're in a different place than you guys are, in different churches, there's a lot of those things that Doug talked about coming in now. But on the other hand there's still um, a learning or an adjustment or a rubbing against process that's happening right now. There is, I think that's fine of the process, what's so important, but what's really interesting is, you, when you kind of look at your summary of Sacred Hospitality, in fact, some of it kind of, not backfired but acted in an opposite way. So that invitation was like, woah, really different. You

know, so there was that initial sort of scariness, and um, the rootedness, I think the rootedness in terms of, if a sort of goal is decreed a wholesome kind of Sacred Hospitality, or a wholesome way to go forward, rootedness is maybe the sticking point I think for some of our parishes along the way, I think that there's a little bit of it still there. And I would say the problem is that there's a respect in the identity of each which we talked about, and so they hold on to that, but there's a lack of confidence. And that lack of confidence is killing them every time, so that there's an initial kind of, running away, and be concerned or trying to fight or trying to close people out, so that kind of throws all the rest out of whack, all the other principles out of whack. Now, what has happened over the course of, I don't know the last 6 months or something, as those actual moments of invitation have been issued and asked, they've come and they've started to, either by force or by habit, have begun to lose some of the hard edges of difference, that it's working I'm going to say better, but that there's a willingness. And that, so not only is that hospitality being extended, that it's also coming from within, so that it's now spreading out from centres. So they are more willing to do things. And some of that I would say came about as a result of successful events. Maybe nothing as glorious as your celebration Sunday, but the fact that we can share Lenten events, or that just because we have something at one church doesn't mean we don't have it at another church. And so there's a reassurance that, I'm not saying is great in a kind of a, a reference to that within the style of leadership. And maybe that's a key component.

DR – Yeah. I think the test in the fire for us will be who shows up next Wednesday, with the celebration of new ministry.

MK – Yeah, that's going to be super interesting.

JM – So you guys are kind of naturally segueing into question two here, I think I've already got some of that data, but I'm going to read it anyway just so it can be explicit on the minutes.

JM – So as you observe your parishes during their post intervention time, can you see any of those principles of Sacred Hospitality still being present within the life of the parish?

MK – I was just going to say, just to follow up just quickly because I don't, its, that lack of confidence is sort of a bad way, and I don't want to be the bad.

JM – Yeah, that's ok, it's all good data.

(14:27) MK – In the bad, or the negative aspects of the rootedness especially, the lack of confidence, we haven't quite I'm going to say killed it, but we haven't really provided enough of a reassurance yet. It's getting there, but I think that is one of the big, fat hurdles. Their confidence in their self and their own identity, and that they don't have to ring fence everything.

FK – I was going to say it's tentative, so far.

MK – I think that's a really good description.

FK – Yeah. It's very much in process, uh, they're still testing the waters, um, in many ways I admire and envy the route that you've gone up north in actually

getting to an area parish. Uh, our folk just aren't really ready for that. But they are getting used to having a clergy team, and experiencing the different personalities on a rotational basis. I also think that the Lenten program, which was really Mary Kate and Patrick who uh, put it together, it was consciously very well balanced. Uh, an initial event out at St. John's in Lancaster, ongoing weekly um, what would you call it, discussion series at Trinity, and then an end of lent event at Christ Church in Long Sault.

JM – Oh yeah, ok.

FK – And, there was a respectable blend of people from the different churches. It wasn't equal across the board at everything, but um, it was a period where they really collectively I think started to explore the possibility.

MK – Maybe extend that hospitality, when they became agents of that hospitality, when they took it on and spread it out. You know, when they were sort of disciples of Sacred Hospitality, if you will.

DR – And the other reality is, in the area parish of Prescott Glengarry with the parish of Grenville Kalumet, there are people in Kalumet that say "I have absolutely nothing to do with Maxville, so why should I have any relationship with them?" And that's very real.

FK – That's understandable too, given the geography.

DR – Yeah. I don't want to, I refuse to go to Maxville, because I have no relationship with them. And yet, my response is, well how will you have a relationship with them if you don't interact with them. And um, my hope is, like the next fifth Sunday of the month is the last Sunday in July, which we will be in Grenville for the joint service, and my hope is that people from Maxville will come to Grenville. Whether that happens or not, I don't know. But, that will be a test of the fire. And, there, like, I look at some of the movements that we have done, and the Sunday after the announcement, um, as being a great celebration and there were people from every point at Maxville. But there are still some people saying, "I don't know those people, I don't want to know those people, why do I want to know those people?" And so I will just, as long as church is in my church I will go there.

(18:09) DR - And the other reality is, um, in Hawkesbury Grenville Kalumet they are grieving the loss of my permanence in their church every Sunday. And that is a reality.

FK – You know, to talk about the priestly experience in this, I know that we've been feeling it too, at our end. Both Mary Kate and I have remarked on how we've, to a certain extent, feel that we're losing touch with Trinity because we're not there every Sunday. And just because of the juggling of times and commitments, there have been times when I have been at Trinity only once in a month. And uh, now that's largely been rectified. But it did happen. And uh, I think for the clergy, cause we are part of the picture, that's been an element of sacrifice that involves some, certainly on my part, grieving.

MK – And sacrifice for the parishioners because where it falls down is on pastoral care. So I don't know if somebody is in Florida for the winter, or whether they've had pneumonia, because I haven't quite been able to track that as well because I'm

not there. But, yeah, it's funny with that whole thing of different, so one hand there's this whole lessening of difference, or you know building up the walls of difference, there's this funny thing going on there. And this, being solid about their own identity and we don't want to change, and we don't want this and we don't want that, we have this list of negatives. But for example, through sort of a weird set of circumstances I haven't been at St. John's for a month, over a month. And almost through another weird set of circumstances I'm not at Christ Church as often as the others are, and it's just kinda. And at the beginning that was, well like there was this whole period at the beginning that was well, you have to come and see us, because you're like the new person. You know you haven't been on the rota. Then there was a whole period where it was like well, you're all, you know, comfortable as furniture. And now there's this whole, but if you don't come, we're not, then there's something about it. Then we are different, like, if you don't come, we're the difference. And if you come, we're all together. And so there's this really interesting, well maybe not interesting but this particular phenomenon happening right now.

JM – Oh it's interesting, it's super interesting.

MK – But a really particular phenomenon going on right now. And I saw someone in the grocery store and they tell me I hadn't come to St. John's forever. You know, and they wanted to know, and I thought I don't know, I was looking for eggs. So that's, when you sort of start parsing that whole thing, about how difference has changed and been redefined, and both strengthened and yet broken down, it's pretty interesting what's going on. Whether you look at it as leadership or as Sacred Hospitality. Or just church systematics.

(21:23) DR – Ya, like there was one time when I, in Grenville, its not that they haven't had a eucharist in Grenville. I hadn't been in Grenville for a month. I'd been in Kalumet and Hawkesbury but the way the schedule worked I hadn't been in Grenville, and somebody saw me in the grocery store, and you haven't been to our church. Why haven't you been. And was actually hitting my chest. And so like, the scheduling is becoming, not necessarily a nightmare, but it's really becoming the focus of what I do.

MK – Kind of like a chew toy, in a way, you know which is a good thing because that means that the hospitality has worked and some of these things have been broken down. But on the other hand I think there's an element of "you're ours", but now you're four churches' ours, or whatever number it is, instead of one church ours. And that's a kind of a weird, not bad weird, but a weird thing that's going on. The other thing that I've noticed a lot is we were really twisted in knots certainly in our bit, about uh, how many eucharists you would have versus morning prayer. And I'll find that when I'm talking to them, and we'll say oh, you know, blah blah blah, we can only do three, or it may come to the fact that we may only do three a month. Three eucharists, and you have to have one, and we're all twisted in knots and we're all flapping because we're so caught up in extending this hospitality and respecting their difference and they'll go, yeah whatever, that's the way we used to have it. Now I'm not saying that they're all keen if that that actually happened, but there's a weird dynamic there. You know, perception.

JW – And I think that, for, in my situation, that, the thing that Sacred Hospitality doesn't identify is the fact when you bring all these churches together, that they have to struggle to find a new identity. So this particular model doesn't apply. I

don't see where that applies. But it's been used, and it's been successful, but now we're in this two year phase, or three year phase that I've been there, you know that, ok what is our identity, what is St. Claire's identity going to be. We work within the community, yes, we've got that, we're part of that, but then now it's breaking out of that mold to get us into the larger mission of the church. Which is you know, Canada and the world kind of thing. And that's a real struggle. Because they have been, their identity has been, focussed on what we were in the past, the five churches, or the four churches, and now they're the one, and now what does that identity mean. And so yes, Sacred Hospitality may have got them there, but now they're really, we're working on, what is our identity.

JM – It's almost like they are now looking to re-root themselves, right.

JW – Ok, yeah, I'll buy that. Re-root themselves, yeah. And because Chrysler was the only one that, they had no choice. Chrysler was, had been vandalized, there was no home for it, there was no money to fix it. It just snowballed until they had to close the doors. So they had to, so, they're the most accommodating group because they have already uprooted themselves. And you spoke of Shirley Coons, well, to her grave she will go saying this was never a good idea.

JM – Oh absolutely. Absolutely.

(25:30) JW – You know. And even to the point where, you know, I buried her husband three weeks ago. It was in the Legion. There was absolutely no way they were coming to St. Claire's. Absolutely no reason to come to the church that she has been worshiping in since the closure. So I mean, four years, three years, she's been worshiping in that church? Husband dies? Let's go to the Legion in Chesterville. And as a priest what do you do? Oh I'm sorry, I don't do funerals in the Legion? I have done funerals all over the world.

JM – You're right though to contrast the two. I remember Chrysler, uh, when Chrysler closed, um, they were given loosely, an option to do you want to rebuild? And they said no, let's take what we have left and we'll go to Chesterville and we will invest our Chrysler assets into there. Like, a very different ethos, right.

JW – Yeah, exactly. So it's nice to have that group, because you've got a foundation there, and you've got the group from Winchester themselves. So you've got these two groups that, the Winchester group says hey, well this is a big win. We got out of that barn, into a nice building, and okay so we had to change the name, but we can live with that.

MK – Because we're here.

JW – Because we're here, yeah. You know.

FK – We're still at home.

JW – We're still at home, yeah, that's the word I was looking for. We're still at home. Is that Sacred Hospitality? I think, it got them there, or a form of leadership got them there, but now, it's this new rootedness, like you called it. A new rootedness. But to me, the question I'm asking the researcher, is, can you just do one aspect of this without doing all four?

MK – That's a good question.

JM – That's a great question actually. Um, my initial thought as I'm thinking of the folks who... cause all of the folks who have... so I'm gonna back up. One of the things that's interesting about this, this is the first time in Western history this was ever tried outside of monastery traditions. That someone has intentionally, so all of these um, all of these principles were developed by Roman Catholic monastics, working with monastics from Hinduism, zen Buddhism, different other monastic orders. And they would go back and forth to each other's monasteries, um, and that's where they sort of came up with this. How did they build transforming community between monasteries and between, it's very interfaith. Um, one of the things as I was working with Fabreze Blay, was he said all of the monastics from Vatican 2 are getting up in their years. And they're wondering will their life's work just die with them. Um, and so one of the things he moved me towards was to say, is there a place... which is why you're right, it's messy right now... um, is there a place for the monastic principles of hospitality that if you're in, rigidly governed structured life, you can just apply the stuff and off you go, right. Because they actually have different rooms in the monasteries for each of these principles.

(28:49) JM - Um, but what does it look like in the messy, every day life of parish stuff. So the question you raise is, do they all have to happen at once? Is there an order that they're going to play out? Um, we are going to be the first practical, experiential attempt at this, so our experiences will be like, the first published thing on that's a good question to ask. Cause, I don't know yet.

JW – No, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JM - That's a great question John, that's fantastic.

MK – I have another question, and I came up with it when I was listening to John.

JW – I think this just, I just want to interject something right now, I think it was Monty Python that said "Let us get us to the nunnery." So, I think this should be a, not Sacred Hospitality, get us to the nunnery!

JM – I can always change the title of the paper.

MK – What I was thinking about when I was listening first to John and then when you were talking about how this plays out in monasteries is that, they're playing out largely in places that have a sense of self or a sense of identity. At least some. I would argue that not all, and this is my experience and whatever we call ourselves, the west bit of, not that bit of, the area, St. Lawrence area.

DR – You're the St. Lawrence collaboration.

MK – Yeah. I would argue the St. Lawrence collaboration that there is an imperfect sense of identity amongst at least one of the churches, and up to two, and I think in one or both of them it manifests itself as an, um, a belligerent sort of identity. But I think at mass there's a sort of lack of, a strong lack of self. So I'm wondering how this actually works in those situations.

JM – That's a good question. Um, so one of the things, if you are going to be a representative, um, from say either Bethune or Panakar's order, to go to the zen

buddhist monastery to be an ambassador of Sacred Hospitality on behalf of, um... their rootedness level is you actually have to show that you are well rooted spiritually in the history of Christianity, in the history of the order you represent, ah, because they're all Benedictines. And so there's actually a weeding out process, that if you're rootedness and awareness and sense of identity and knowledge of that which you represent is not high enough, you are not permitted to go.

MK – So how does that work? Do weed people, do we weed out parishes or people?

JM – So what we did with this, and by we I mean me, um, because as I'm hearing you speak there's some fascinating stuff I might... I'm doing my ENFP I'm putting dots together in my head... um, cause I've got John like, is there an order to this?

(31:46) JM - Um, and one of the reasons we did it in the order for the East Stormont group was, it was assumed if nothing else, the Corporation of the parish would probably be the most invested. So they'd probably have an element of the corporate memory, um, they would at least be invested enough within the church that they knew the people that they were representing, um, and that they were bought into the life and decisions and ministry of the church to a certain extent. Probably more than say, you're occasional Sunday sacramentalist that might come by. And so we made that assumption, because what I ended up doing, is my go to is, as you will probably have picked up on now, my first go to is invitation and respect. I want to get the people who care about the place we're at at the table, and I want to invite the people who represent the information we don't have. So when we did, uh, when we were at St. Matthias slash St. Claire's, we had the people who were passionate about the parish, but we had no idea about what the wider community thought we should be doing. What was the data that was missing? So we invited the people who had never come to the church.

JM – Um, when I worked with you guys, um, I wanted to have a room full of people, because I grew up along the seaway, I knew a bunch of our parishes had said a version of, "I'm never gonna go to that place." So what if we got the neighbours we said we'd never spend time with together. And I went with the invitation element. And then I went with the respect element because I had learned from North Dundas, um, the respect element you tell me what's most important to you and I won't cross that line.

MK – Okay, but what about the people who didn't accept the invitation? And I still think that there's an identity... I take your assumption, and I'm not picking it apart, I mean you have to start somewhere so that's fine, and that's a...

JM – Yeah, this is number one trial and error.

MK – No flaw on the assumption, I see why you would start there, it's a logical place. But I'm thinking about our shop for example, that the people who did not go are actually the more vocal. In some ways, some of the people you got there, would for lack of a better word be uh, persuaders, or even more than that.

JM – Persons of influence?

MK – No, not, that suggests that... okay the word I'm trying to avoid is bullies. But, there are, I'm gonna use it.

JM – Use it, it's okay, we're gonna have a whole section on it.

(34:23) MK – Yeah, because there is in fact, some of the people who were there, the range of people I saw at, and it changed, okay, and I'm only speaking from Trinity, because I'm, the people that we're with, the people that I knew best, were, there was probably I think at the beginning an interested or disinterested, I had to go, then there was a little bit of buy-in, and then there were champions, maybe vigorous champions. But the agenda that they were championing, I'm not convinced was one that was faithful to the church, always. It could have been, and I'm not calling out anything, but I'm just saying, I think it got lost up in some of these elements of Sacred Hospitality. So that issue, the question of invitation is really tricky. I mean, you can issue the invitation but.

DR – Who showed up at those meetings was very interesting, or who didn't show up.

JW – That's even more critical I think.

DR – That was, because, looking at uh the Grenville Kalumet Hawkesbury, which I knew at the beginning of the process very well, it was interesting who did not show up.

JM – Well, and fascinating Gary Smith from priority one showed up at the last meeting and tried to throw a wrench in the whole thing.

DR – Yeah.

MK – And, I imagine all of you had the same experience that I did, where there were as many conversations that I had in the hallways and in the nave of Trinity church as I did in that place. And that was because there was a whole, giant interested section, but only three people, it was like the whole province wants to know who's going to be Premier tomorrow but only, whatever, 42% is going to vote, you know. And it was classic.

DR – And how there was one person from Hawkesbury who had all the answers.

JM – Yes.

DR – To everybody.

JM – Yes.

DR – And all you have to do is listen to me and I will give you the answer.

JM – I've done this before.

DR – We've done this before, and we have the map, and we have the sacred solution. And all you have to do is listen to us.

JM – And it landed so well.

DR – And it landed so well.

JM – That’s sarcasm for the notes... sarcasm. :P

(36:48) DR – How that person almost sabotaged the whole night’s work.

JM – So at this point, cause you’re transition, you guys are so good. The next question, and it’s a bit putting the question back to you a little bit. Um, is to say, um, it is safe to say that this was not a perfect implementation of the principles of Sacred Hospitality, so well done that all parishes will live these things to the letter for the rest of their known days. So looking back, what should we have done differently, or what could we have done better, or more of, or less of, um, to have had a more successful initial outcome or long term outcome.

DR – And my first response to that is, absolutely nothing, because I think everybody went with their own agendas. And, we don’t want anything to change, so we are not going to change.

MK – We will speak loudest so that won’t happen.

DR – And in reality, although the area parish of Prescott, Russell, or Prescott, North Glengarry has happened, they’re still only single churches doing their own thing. With no real connection other than the priest. And I think it’s something that is still in the process of happening. That even though the parish has been formed, it’s going to be another five years until we actually see the reality of Sacred Hospitality and what that’s going to be. I think, um, the reality was, we needed to come up with a solution now, to a problem of finances. And we will catch up with the Sacred Hospitality later.

JM – And that meant we didn’t have time to do the rooted bit. Who are we now and what are we doing. And how do we bring the confidence level say to the first couple of meetings cause in a time crunched meeting, you’re not going to get people showing up with no walls and open arms.

DR – Because in reality the first meeting we had was after St. Michaels in Lancaster wrote to the Bishop saying we have eighteen months.

MK – I mean, if we, in a perfect world with all the time, and you know, whatever, available, we would have sat down with each of the parishes and said, “who are you? And what do you need? Where is your line in the sand? And who do you see yourselves as a parish church, in this deanery, in this area, and in the world,” you know. And if we had that, that could have been a really interesting discussion. Time that was never on the agenda, and I don’t think it would ever, ever be something you could do fully. You might be able to, you know with a little hindsight, you might be able to get better at it and have visioning or, or whatever. But I think a lot of the problem is, I’m gonna go back to that, is that the lack of a sense of self. It doesn’t mean that they’re unhealthy or they are healthy, it’s nothing to do with that, but they don’t have, a lot of them don’t, at least in our bit of the world, the seaway, I would argue they don’t have a good sense of self.

(40:34) JW – Yeah, and for St. Claire’s I would say that, I would just copy what Doug said. Do nothing. In the sense that, um, the beauty of the monastic side, and that’s a critical piece of the puzzle about this, the monastic side can sit on an issue for years and years.

JM – And they do.

JW – And they do. And they love it. And that's them. Our churches, you know, when somebody says that they've got eighteen months, and your doors are closing...

MK – There's no choice.

JW – To sit on rootedness for example, or invitation and that, um, it doesn't, ain't gonna happen. Now, certainly, um, we are now working on our identity. Will it be in my lifetime in the church? I can't tell you that. Is it going to have an invitation outlook to it, and then follow through to, you know, the different four pillars in this, I can't tell you. But what I can say is that this process takes more time than what our churches, especially in the rural, have got.

JM – Yeah.

JW – And we all are in the same situation, that to build St. Claire's they needed money. Nowhere in that invitation does it speak of money. It says, you go knock on doors and you find the money. The invitation is, come on.

JM – Yup. Well, and part of the story that the parish doesn't know, from North Dundas, is four years in, I was summoned by our Lord Bishop, who said um, you've been there for four years, you already have land, why isn't this done? Um, cause this is taking time. And the parish had asked for a year of sabbath just to not worry about the stuff, and I said, let's take, Chuck Adamson had said, let's take a year to breathe. To just do fun stuff together, um, we had a "fun"raising Chair as opposed to a fundraising Chair so it would just be, like, we had, Sandy came up with trivia nights, all that sort of stuff. And the Bishop said you've been there four years, I wanted this church built, so are you the guy to build it or should I put you in West Quebec and I'll get someone else to go do it?

FK – He threatened you with West Quebec?

JM – Yeah, that's right. Up in the Pontiacs. He said uh, I need to see something different in a year. Get on it. And so there was that level of pressure. So you then go back to a parish who's trying to, and as PJ will say they moved at a glacial pace, but they were moving. Um, then that ramp up of no, it's, something's got to be decided in a year, so you've got six months to start the boulders moving, right. Yeah, it was brutal.

JW – Well this, and so, like, I'm, I've got to say I'm blessed. I, I just get to grow with them. But is that Sacred Hospitality? Or is that, I can't tell you. What I can say is though, for St. Claire's doing nothing is the best thing right now. In the sense of, let us, let us ground ourselves, if you want to use that language.

(43:45) JM – It's almost part of the recovery too, right, like it was a traumatic change.

JW – It's recovery. It's recovery.

DR – And that's one of the things that I have said for a little bit now. I met with the wardens of St. Michael's yesterday, and said we need a little bit of time just to rest.

We have done a heck of a lot of work to get where we are. Let's rest a little bit. Because they're wrestling with some other issues on the ministry within Maxville, and there are people that are trying to force them down a road that the leadership is not ready to take.

FK – In a sense you need a sabbath.

DR – Yeah.

FK – It ties in with last Sunday's readings beautifully.

DR – Yeah. We need to rest a little bit because we have been working...

MK – Like dogs.

DR – ...hard. For a year.

MK – What's really interesting too when you were saying that you, I think I understood that you were saying that you were still very much individuals in some ways in the parishes, um, and the over... I like the way it manifests itself differently is what I'm saying. If this is Sacred Hospitality, if this is what the end product is. And to look at you guys, you're an area parish, you're kind of done, you know, and you're really done, you're like super done.

JW – You're well done!

MK – And we're still mooing, right?! But I would say, and maybe this is just my own perception, but listening to what you were saying in a way, I don't, I'm almost perceiving a little more cohesiveness in our seaway than in your Prescott etc. one. Because we, okay, so I know you've had a lot of joint services and some other joint events, our jointness has been in events mostly, and out with the Sunday services. And I gotta say, there are some encouraging signs there. And so in some ways I think ours is, somehow if that's the result of the Sacred Hospitality it might have taken route. Frank may have an entirely different perspective, this might be just me. And I, just before I will shut up in a second, I was going to say and it's countered with, when we go to that three parish meetings that we have, when we're sussing out the finances, it seems to be a little bit unfinished. So there's a weirdness that's going on, maybe this is just me. You might want...

(46:31) FK – Well I think it is partly, we all have our subjective points of view. Um, I think in our case, I mean, they've had it fairly lucky because it's still the three churches they've always known. And for the time being they have three priests ministering. It's not like Doug's situation where he is the only one with occasional help from outside. Um, they haven't really, the test will really start to come when we do reduce down to two priests, which is the goal for our area.

MK – With Lancaster, I agree with you, I'm just going to throw that little spanner into the, I'm not trying to interrupt but, with Lancaster I agree with that.

FK – Well, and not to the same extent as the other two congregations. Because they don't have an incumbent any more. Um, yeah, there are nuances. But by and large, we're only at stage one in the process.

JM – Yeah. It's very early.

DR – I think one of the issues in my area is the distance. Like, I had to, I did a Lenten study but I had to do it in two locations. Because it was just too difficult, not too difficult, um, but just the distance between Maxville and Greenville Kalumet is 45 minutes to drive, and so to do that sort of stuff is difficult. And so uh, we're trying to do different, like, and so for Lenten study I have to do two. One in the Hawkesbury Vankleek Hill area, and one in the Maxville area. Now there are people who come from Vankleek Hill to the Maxville because it's at night, or because it's at a time that is good for them. And so, that's the reality. But I think the one thing that is going against us is the distance.

MK – Yeah. And you have more too, there's distance and more.

DR – Where between Long Sault and Lancaster, is on the 401, is less than 20 minutes.

FK – Well, no, less than half an hour.

DR – Less than half an hour.

FK – Yeah, it's a much more doable, and it is the 401. It's not the side roads that you have to take, with a bit of 417.

DR – Yeah. There's no way to get to there from here. Like, Vankleek Hill and Hawkesbury are the most doable.

MK – And, just, further to that, a bunch of the people at Lancaster live in Cornwall, and a bunch of Long Sault people live in Cornwall so, you know, and vice versa and it's all mixed up.

JM – And all cause they closed Good Shephard so they won't go to church X.

(49:18) MK – Well you know.

FK – Evil Trinity.

MK – And Long Sault stole all our children and Trinity is the white collar church. I mean that's not died. Patrick and I use that. We goof around with that. That's a local joke. But it ain't funny. You know. That's still alive and well.

DR – And there's still animosity between Vankleek Hill and Hawkesbury and who knows where that came from. And like, there are still people who say, ehrrrrr, maybe we'll go.

JW – Yeah the other, there's also, in your situation when I was doing my <he mumbles here I don't know what he says> points that we are our own worst enemies when we said ok well, the focus of the church is the eucharist. And so because of that, when you start using your lay people again, they go well we're a second class citizen. Because we get, out of month five, we get three morning prayer. Whereas growing up, morning prayer was the bed and breakfast, it was, you know, it was the thing and then we've switched over. Well we're a eucharistic church, I get it, you know, but –

FK – You need a priest.

JW – Exactly. And the consequences of that theology have been that now our churches have, accept that, they want that, and say, if you don't provide that then we must not be a darling in your eyes.

DR – No matter what the quality of the lay leadership is.

JW – Exactly.

DR – If the priest isn't there then it's not true.

MK – Then it's not good. Then you're second. I think that we get, I don't know if it happens, because I don't know all of the history, but, it's back to that silliness we were just saying, where Trinity is the biggest. Physically and, you know, in a lot of other ways, and so there's always that Trinity thing to it. And I think, you know I don't know if that, it must occur at some level. There must be some defining point that one is always better, or leading the way. And maybe that happened too when North Dundas was coming together.

FK – There certainly was that element, having grown up in Hawkesbury, between Hawkesbury and Vankleek Hill, I mean Vankleek Hill was sort of the rural –

DR – Farmer's church.

(51:38) FK – Farmer's church. Blue collar doesn't really do it. It was the farmer's church.

JM – The plaid collar church?

FK – And, whereas, Hawkesbury was more white collar, uh, the aD.Min.istrators of the mill and whatnot. And that was deeply rooted. Deeply deeply rooted.

DR – I remember hearing the story when I was in Vankleek Hill twenty years ago, one of the ladies who was there, was present when the halls were built, because Hawkesbury and Vankleek Hill built their halls around the same time. And the story going around was, Vankleek Hill was having a hard time trying to come up with the money to get the accoutrements for the kitchen. And Hawkesbury was arguing whether they should buy sterling silver or silver plate.

JM – Well these are the questions of our time.

DR – That's the history.

JM – As I'm hearing you guys talk there's a big part of that rootedness thing. Who are we, and who were we, who are we, and who are we now in this new bit. I mean, so I, as your talking I'm just putting the pieces together like man, we need to spend some more time on the who are we. Who were we, who are we, and who will we be.

MK – That'd be cool, who will we be is a really important thing at this point. And you know, the elephant in the room in the seaway churches, and maybe in yours, is

when we're talking about the three seaway churches, Trinity ain't gonna close. I mean that's just, you know, a practical impossibility.

JM – Well what would you do with it, right.

MK – Yeah. What are you gonna do with it, it's one of the older ones in the diocese.

FK – The Bishop isn't going to let that happen.

MK – The Bishop ain't going to let it happen. It's got the drop in, and I'm here so like...

DR – With the cemetery and all that...

MK – From a heritage thing it ain't gonna shut.

JM – Oh it's a heritage too?

MK – It's not a designation but, it is...

FK – But it could be.

MK – ...it's blue plaqued. And it's got a cemetery you can't easily get rid of.

(53:48) DR – You can't, well I guess you could sever the cemetery off, but it wouldn't be easy.

JW – I think we're in a hole here.

JM – I was gonna say, cause one of the things, I've got two questions left and then I can refill everyone's drinks. And then we can, cause this is fascinating for me. Um, the fourth question is just, in a word or two or a phrase, would you say your churches are less open to change and transformation, about the same, or more open to change and transformation since the intervention.

MK – Oh, that's a good question. Shit.

FK – I would say a little bit more, but not a heck of a lot more.

JM – And as we said, early days, right.

FK – It is early days. They're still feeling their way around.

DR – I think for us the experience has been so far a positive one, so they are still very much, this is new. This is new. We've never been here before. This is uncomfortable, um, but maybe down the road we could think about something else. I think.

MK – I'd say that their potential, the potentially, you know, to be open to change is better.

FK – Yeah, that's a better way of putting it.

MK – I’m kinda with you, but I’m a little cautious.

DR – I’m not saying that they are going to look for change. But I think that, and the one place I know well is Hawkesbury. They know that they are not going to be the same. They know that, down the road, if things don’t change, in five years, ten years time, they ain’t gonna be no more.

FK – Goodness knows they’ve given up the eleven o’clock service time. Our Lord would come again in glory before that...

MK – I think that’s an essential element and its, I know I keep going back to this kind of identity, rootedness thing. But I think, if you know, that you ain’t gonna be closed, or if you know that you probably are, your world view is utterly different regardless. Both in the way that you accept this, and maybe that you, as an agent of Sacred Hospitality take it on. So I think ...

JM – There’s a transparency element too, right? Like, these guys over here, are terrified if they don’t change their finances they’re going to be shut in eighteen months, despite the fact that the Bishop, um PJ, ah, has said I have no intentions of closing St. James in Morrisburg because it is a pivotal point along the seaway.

(56:47) FK – Right. Like Trinity.

JM – Yeah. (blank) It’s not on their radar.

JW – And for St. Claire’s, again I think that, if you were to put St. Claire’s on a change scale... if there were such thing a thing as a change scale, I think it has gone to 85 or 90% change. And then there is a point whereby when you have got to that stage of change, you’ve got to solidify, you’ve got to form it up before you can go on and do any more change. I think we’re in that mode, how long that will be I don’t know. But I know that from square one, they are at square eleven on the change and now it’s, alright, let’s solidify. Let’s make this in now into concrete so that we can change again. So I would say, yeah, we’re not changing for a while. There’s nothing in the books that I can see.

JM – No, yeah, yeah. They’ve already done all their stuff, right?

JW – Yeah.

FK – Very understandable.

JW – Yeah. And that comes from a new build. Now, it’s, how, it comes back to what will our identity be. How do we want to shape it for the next change. Because they all respect that change is happening. The farms are getting larger, they’re not getting smaller. When you get a larger farm, just get a bigger tractor. So farmers I’ve talked to, they buy land for ten million dollars. They have no intention ever of paying it off. There’s no... the idea of paying it off is not even on the cards. But you go over to New Holland and you get a bigger tractor to cover that land. That’s what you do. So in the change mode, we’re not changing anything. We’re solid. We’ve done the change.

MK – I like that scale of change idea. You should market that.

JW – Yeah. I got that, I think it was snakes and ladders.

JM – So, last question, and it's a little bit, it's sort of a catch all. We've already touched on it a bunch of times but just in case. This is a polite version of, if there's anything else you'd like to say about it, for what you would do moving forward, please let us know. Uh, but the question is, looking forward, what kind of things do you think would be needed to inspire your parishes to more fully adopt the spirit and principles around Sacred Hospitality and transformation within their common life.

(59:13) JW – Learn the Beatles song Harry Krishna.

DR – I think before we move into any of the talks that we rushed into, there needs to be a time period of saying, who are we?

MK, FK, JM, - Yeah.

MK – I absolutely agree with that.

DR – Who are we?

FK – And a sense perhaps of who are we becoming.

DR, MK – Yeah.

JM – But grounding yourself before you begin the practice.

DR – Yeah. And who are we and what do we have to offer?

MK – And what do we want to be. Not just will we be, what do we want/need to be?

DR – Yeah. Because I think for the most part in our area, it was, we want to be a parish with no financial... we want to be churches with no financial difficulties. And that was the driving force.

MK – See, I'm gonna in, there's a thing that's come up out of Trinity too that's come out of this financial thing. Where it's, Trinity went in for the first couple of years, it's had to cost us a tad bit more for a couple of years in terms of, or the first year anyway. How the things are all divvied up. And it's, I will find that very interesting how that's reconciled across a larger plane. Because all of the benefits of this hospitality that were offered at the end sort of become distilled a little bit down to the money. And part of that because a strong narrative at Trinity right now, is we're running at a deficit we're closing in ten years. We won't have any CTF. Ok, and that is the narrative. We're closing in ten years.

FK – Yeah. And it, that worries me a great deal. On one hand people are waking up to the financial reality, but it's being communicated in a very negative way. And uh, it's not going to build a sense of hope, that's for sure. Um, I'm not sure what the answer is, because people need to know that all is not well and good.

JW – But an interesting question; does sacred, is there a cost to Sacred Hospitality? A financial cost to Sacred Hospitality? And if so, if you adopt Sacred Hospitality you can expect to put out X amount of money. So that, if you walked into it with that

kind of understanding... But I have to totally agree with Frank, which is seldom that I do Frank...

FK – This is a red letter moment!

JW – Please write this down. But I have to agree with you, when you talk finances, finances are always negative. I have never been in a situation where somebody said, geez it's great, you know, it's always negative. So yeah, you know, you get that in the media, you get that at your own bank. You know. You sit down and do your RRSP's and buddy says you don't got enough. What do you mean I don't got enough? You don't got enough. So when you keep getting hammered that finances are negative, then everybody wants to make that their focus. So, you know, it doesn't matter if you've got, like in my case, you know, they're working their butts off. But what's the goal? Well the goal is to keep the doors open. Because, but your missing out on your mission. Your mission to the community that you wanted.

(1:02:44) FK – Mary Kate has harped on that before, and you're quite right.

MK – Yeah, I mean and that's the thing. And I think that all comes back for, to get back to this discussion, I think it comes back speaking specifically about Trinity, is that, we didn't define who we were in advance of this, and we had poor sense of self. So like, when I've been harping on the mission thing, they'll say oh no no, we have a mission statement. Well, yeah you do, and full marks, gold star, but it's a mission statement from five, or six, or whenever y'all did it, I don't know when you did it.

FK – Before I came, so it's over ten.

MK – Liar liar pants on fire. You told me it was five years ago. Oh they are bad people!

JM – So if I'm hearing you though, some of the stuff across the board you think you'd need, it can't be a rushed process. Time in the beginning to root yourselves well. Um, but also time afterwards, um, so you can actually say how do I rest and recover from the big change I'm about to go through. And transparency through the middle. Right, like everyone has to have accurate, consistent, honest information.

MK – And I think it has to be an acknowledgement, this is back to an early point from John, that it's not, some kind of either acknowledgement or assumption that it's not a process that ends. You have to have some kind of recognition that this probably will never end. It has to be renewed, or revisited constantly.

JM – Which is annoyingly Benedictine which is where it came from, right?

JW – What Frank was saying about the Sabbath part, the rest, I wouldn't call it a rest I'd call it a Sabbath to make it sound, listen, there's something sacred about this rest.

JM – Yeah, absolutely.

JW – It's not just simply we're lazy.

JM – Yeah, yeah yeah, you’re not...

JW – This is what you were saying.

(1:04:30) MK – This Sabbath is work. You know, but a restful work. An intentional thing.

JW – Exactly. And so, as such, there’s a viewpoint that this is a good thing. It’s not, oh geez, we’re just lazy toads.

DR – Where I think this process should have actually taken us five years.

JM – As opposed to, like, six months.

DR – Six months. Yeah, because we started in January/February, and by the end of our conversations it was July.

MK – My whole time here has been defined by this. I came here and it started.

JM – It was on. And well, one of the things I felt, I was heartbroken about in this whole thing, about meeting four, someone said “I know we agreed that our line in the sand was our buildings, I’m not sure I feel the need to keep my building any more.” And we had to, we acknowledged it, but we couldn’t respond accurately to it because the time crunched.

MK – And there should be more flexibility built into it, or adaptability, which is back to the time. Yeah, so there has to be, I think if you’re doing this, if you’re doing Sacred Hospitality, there has to be a spine of um, of the things you mentioned, adaptability, flexibility, whatever word you want it. Or an acknowledgement, you know, an acknowledgement of change or, you know.

FK – The irony is though, that yes, the process was rushed because our backs, there was a gun to our head in terms of that.

JM – You might get sent to West Quebec.

FK – Yeah. Right, that is scaring even me. But, the thing is, if the financial crunch had not been there, what incentive would there have been for any of us to engage in this dialogue.

JM – Yeah, and that’s what I was thinking, as you guys were talking, there’s an element to this in terms of actual leadership formation that says, parish leaders, be them clergy, or the corporation, or whoever, um, need to really take some time to take the long view. And have, like what’s the ten year? So you start those conversations from a position of strength, not a rushed frightened position of weakness, because this process, if you want to live it in its fullness, as far as we can tell, you need the time to do it and do it well. And some of that is going to be talking to people in the hallways of Trinity on a Tuesday morning because they didn’t go to any of the meetings and capturing all that data.

(1:06:55) MK – And then being able to answer the now what. It’s like, we were just talking about this with a planned cleanup at Trinity, right? Great plan, awesome plan, ok. Clear up Trinity. Nobody talked about how to do it and nobody talked

about how to get rid of the stuff so it sucks in terms of execution. And the long range planning just fails miserably. And, I'm not saying this has failed, or this will fail, but I know that the fears and the concerns, and this goes back again to Sacred Hospitality being more of a drop in or one time event, a window event, is that people are going, so what do we do now? You know, we got to here, what comes next? And if they had more of a rolling sense of it, or a sequential sense, I think it also starts to come back to, some of the, answer all of the scary things too. Whether its finance, or identity, or whatever it is.

JM – Well and if you're going to move out of the monasteries and into parish life, you actually have to have a flexible structure or framework that is adaptable to the realities of parish life. Um, Bethune does this awful and awesome story where he went to um, an Asian monastery and before he could meet the head of the monastery the daughter of the leader of the monastery made him sit quietly and pour tea every day for one year. And once he finally had it perfect, then she said you're ready to meet our head. And so talk about all the time in the world, right?

JW – And, and, I just caution when you say like a framework, because when you, when I look at framework, the first thing that comes to my mind is a square. And what I have discovered in my ministry is that framework can be eight sided, it can be fifty sided, it could be a circle, it could be...

JM – Yeah. It's not rigid.

JW – Exactly. But I betcha, if I hadn't said anything and I said well what's the image you have of framework, I betcha it would've been a square.

MK – Yup. I saw this cause I hate frameworks in my other, old world I hate frameworks. I hate boxes, ok. And so I tend to always think of spines, or like Christmas trees on which you hang things, and it just depends on what you're doing. But I see this, to me, without knowing a whole lot about this, it would seem to be that it would be a solid kind of a spine. Or a, you know, a pathway through there. But as a framework it probably makes me a little nervous.

DR – I think, in reflection, this is in reality, this is the second time I've been through this process. Um, because I was in Brockville when they went through their amalgamation process. And how that started was, the Bishop of Ontario said I want you to meet. There are three churches in downtown Brockville. In a year's time, there will be one.

JM – Wow. That's a crunch.

(1:10:04) DR – That's basically it. And there are still two Anglican churches in downtown Brockville.

FK – Because one simply refused to be a part of the process.

DR – One refused to be. But it took from the beginning of the process until the... from the beginning of the process when, let's say there's Trinity and there is St. Peter's Brockville. That they started working together, til the time when they actually said we are a parish, was five years. Even though the process from when they started working together, from the time the Bishop said, you have X number

of time until you are, the vestry that said we are, was less than a year. It still took five years for them to say we are St. Mark's.

JM – So I mean, that gets a bit back to, cause I also struggled with the framework word, Fabreze before I switched Directors, Fabreze would say, I used to say the practices of Sacred Hospitality and he would chastise me every time. And he said no, these are principles, they're an ethos, they're a way of being, and he said you know, it's not that you just say, here is this thing go do it. Um, it's how do you find the appropriate way to live it into whatever the community is. So it fines, he said it might be a pillar, that finds it's own spot in the natural frame, the natural order of whatever your parish looks like. Um, but you don't just sort of build the hospitality box and push people in it, um, you try to organically insert principles and an ethos into the community and see if and where it comes up.

MK – I did, with research, non-church research, things I called guiding principles, and the whole reason it worked, with my research was because it wasn't, it, you know, you could tell what was going on because one of those principles would be way out of whack. You know, either there was a kind of an even thing and it meant one outcome, and you know, another was out of whack or, you could sort of start to track it back to... principles are a super flexible way and a super rigid way all at the same time. They're strong enough to hold the structure but they can move.

MK - Can I ask a question about, how do you measure the success? I mean we're talking about measuring the success of, broadly, of Sacred Hospitality in terms of these church groupings or amalgamations or comings together, ok. But how do you measure, if a parish just takes on Sacred Hospitality as a part of their life of a parish, how do you measure the outcomes of that? Is it because it's a healthy church? It's a sick church? It didn't work, or... how do you know?

JM – Ah, it's early days. Uh, one of the hypothesis I'm working towards um, will be that, if rural parishes to some extent um, embrace these principles, it doesn't mean they're always going to be thriving in the sense of there's 500 people every Sunday or anything like that. But it will allow them to make informed and intentional choices about their future, um, so they can say, uh, you know, cause for us here, effectively, if we had three buildings all pretty much doing the same thing, different cultures in all of them, um, and we had sort of said, well, we're probably going to go to Iroquois cause it's the easiest building to maintain, um, we just all assumed it was the cheapest building to maintain, it was all one level, it would be great. We spoke with, we invited, the same thing we did in North Dundas and said, if you've never been to this church please come for lunch, we want to hear what you think. Um, and so, folks from the hospital came, polices services, fire services, local businesses, uh, local charities and outreaches and all that sort of stuff.

(1:14:00) JM – And ah, they said ah, you can't, you can't move the building from here. You guys have this lunch that everyone's welcome to, you have your Apple Tree Ministry that is rooted in this place, and...

FK – You're speaking about St. James.

JM – Yeah. And he said, all of your poor people are here. Poor people don't have cars to go to Iroquois. And someone said, do you know if it costs more? To function, operate this building? And we just, we just assume it does it's a giant barn. And you look at the numbers it doesn't, it's like \$400 difference a year, with

the heating and everything, it's \$400 bucks difference. Um, it's still a big barn, but, so when we collected all this data, and we said what do you guys need, too? Like, if we have a barn, a pretty barn, but a barn, what do you need? And they said um, we need a community gathering place, not like a community centre but like, and arts and creativity place. Like a place to go for dinners, and theatre, and for the community to gather together and be like, man this is accessible, beautiful, experiential, all that sort of stuff. So at the moment, um, the Bishop and I and PJ and some of the parishioners, and we've been talking with Stone Crop Winery, uh, we're gonna, we're meeting with Humble Beginnings Brewery in Ingleside, ah next week, and we're gonna meet with Johnstown Distillery, um, and we've met with the Sheep's Head Bistro and the guys over here, and we're actually looking at, when St. John's sells, taking that money and repurposing it and having a community restaurant pub, that also does...

MK – You need a building assessment report.

JM – Yes, oh yeah, it's on the PJ Hobbs radar but we need the money first. And actually having a place that, it would be run by volunteers, um, they've all agreed, if they have, if they have access it would be their product we would use here. And I'll just, we'll put a new kitchen, ah, and bathrooms on the top floor, yank the pews, put chairs in, ah, get some nice tables, all of that. And do everything from theatre, ah, the theatre house over there has said, they would come over and run some of their plays out of our church, uh, and go from there. So we're looking at turning it into a community, ah, gathering and entertainment place. Um, and so that, that's sort of been how that's, that's... But, we could have found out, cause what they also said, uh, Iroquois's like Morrisburg. You've got six churches and you're all doing the same thing. Uh, we need one church, maybe two. So just get rid of it. And so community that does that work could find out, if you don't have the numbers to support it for the people who are there, and if the community says we don't actually need you, um, maybe you get rid of your building. And you do what PJ would call covenant communities, where you have a group of faithful Anglican Christians that you meet in Doug's place. Um, and you take some Sabbath time to heal up, to recharge, and say so what comes next.

(1:16:53) JM – Cause it never has to die, but it might need, it might need to fully shed it's stuff before it comes back again.

DR – I think the principles of Sacred Hospitality need to be in place before we do things like we have done.

MK – Yeah. Yeah I agree.

DR – That, it probably would have been a lot easier if each of our communities had already been practicing the act of Sacred Hospitality.

JM – If as their, who are we, well this is part of who we are.

DR – Yeah. That um, I think the starting point before we even begin any conversations needs to be, what does it mean to be the church – the Anglican church – in this community?

MK – And how can I respect you if I don't know who I am?

DR – Yeah, yeah.

JM – Well how are you going to tell them who you are?

MK – Well yeah, exactly. And you're just going to be different and weird, so I don't want to talk to you, you know.

JW – Just have a talent night. Everybody comes up and tells what their talent is.

JM – That's true.

DR – And I think that's where, down in the next year or so, that's where we will be going, is ok, what gifts do each of our churches have, where do they fit into the community, and why are they there?

JM – What is fascinating for us, out of all the other five churches in town, when we said so, should we just pack up shop here and just go to the united church they said no, you guys are centralized, this is known, you would have to, rebranding wouldn't work. You have to keep this place because the people who don't come on Sundays know who you are and what you do. It was fascinating.

JM – Is there anything else I need to take away before I fill up drinks and stuff?

DR – I think this has been a really good conversation.

Mk – Yeah, I mean, it's like cautionary, the thing, Sacred Hospitality can, you shouldn't be putting too much on it, in a way, but it can, but the, even if it just shines a single light on something, that is an outcome that is in and of itself.

(1:19:01) JM – Absolutely. And this will be like, this big of a slice of a pie that people coming after me, and us will build. I was saying to uh, Lorraine who's my director, and she said, how are you feeling? And I said, I kind of don't even want to finish the program. She said why? And I said, cause all the work we've done which was cutting edge, or felt cutting edge like a couple years ago, I said you know, now people have already moved passed it. They're living the realities. Like I almost want to scrap this and I want to be like, how do we put a structure, how do we make this predictably successful in parishes. What are the, you know, all that sort of stuff. And she said yeah, this is the point in the work where it's recognizing the work you and your colleagues have already done, and so then it becomes part of the literature. So then someone else is going to come along and say, ok this was done, what's the next piece.

MK – But if it's just doing some part of it, that's by no means, like it's not fair, I think the fact that we know that just the light, the little bit of the view as opposed to the panacea thing, or the placebo, is an important, if that's all you get out of it, is that just flashes of insight come out of this, then I think you have a hell of a dissertation, you know. You don't need to show how it works all the way along. I mean that's great, you will but...

JM – My personal development will be like, how do I put some structure to this so I can, but for the paper it probably will have, I might make some recommendations for other people to follow up on. But you can be sure when all this is done I'll be

like, alright guys let's sit down and bang out, like if someone asked any one of us to go and do this again what might that look like?

MK – That's a good dissertation.

JM – Thank you everybody, it was very helpful.

Interview – The Rev. Patrick Stephens

Clergy Interview – Patrick

Clarification – Patrick’s parish wasn’t part of the initial conversation and so weren’t a part of the decision to put buildings first. Patrick doesn’t think that his parish’s decision would have been different, and sometimes parishioners use it as a “well they made this decisions”.

1. The most successful part was the sharing of time together. Lay leadership from different parishes and got to know each other in the context of representing faith parish communities. It was an immediate opportunity to speak and hear each others thoughts. They could experience the gathering of so many people who were invested...not just 5-6 people. There were almost 100 people!!! Open to everyone. That was quite meaningful for people to see they were in this together. There was a lot of room for story telling. Those stories became part of the common story of the larger group. Difficulties, successes, concerns.
2. So far they are all still at play. With the clergy roster, the clergy, even though we are in theory a team serving three parishes, realistically we still represent the communities that we launched from. I’m still seen as a Christ Church priest. However, CC is happy to lend me out, and the other churches welcome me and appreciate the differences I bring. CC is happy with the diversity in the clergy that have been on the roster.
3. N/A – However, some people would like to see more collaboration. It’s coming. We’re just moving cautiously.
4. More open. Although, I’m not sure I’d credit the intervention itself. There was a situational reality that also was a factor. As we came to know our neighbours, we became more open. The early gatherings of deanery wine and cheese, cursillo also were positive tools here. Brought people across parish lines. Alpha as well. It opened the parish up to another parish. That was in the early stages. Jason’s departure also seemed to help that parish open up...and it introduced an immediate need to that congregation. It accelerated something that would have happened slowly. Forced us to try it out...and it worked.
5. We’re doing well interacting with each other across parish boundaries. There continues to be a need for an outward focus...interacting with the community at large. Having leaders that are open and capable to lead in this open to change way is essential.
6. Anything else? It’s important to acknowledge that there was a lot of fear at the beginning. There was a lot of self preservation motivated rivalries. People quickly realized that if this is going to work, we need to make sure we all do well...not just protect ourselves. It’s the first time Trinity has partnered with another parish.

F.2 – Parishioner Interviews

DJ

EM – Ed Montano

DJ – Doug Jarvis

EM – I'd like to start by thanking you Doug for agreeing to take part in this research. Um, and as you will remember from the consent letter Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry, a degree from St. Paul University in Ottawa. Um, the question we are exploring with this research is, do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parishes and church become more open to transformation, so they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve. So that's the question. So if we can start by, uh, by asking you, can you describe the state of your parish before Jon arrived, in your own words?

DJ – I think that basically, we were a parish that ah, we were a rural parish and we were faced by, similar difficulties that most rural parishes are facing today. That we were declining in numbers, the people in the seats were all grey hair, it was harder to entice youth to be, to participate. And there was huge financial implications of keeping three congregations running, um, with the amount of money that was coming in and the number of people that were in the seats. Um, all of the people in the three points loved their churches. There was a strong, strong history there, family ties, births, deaths, marriages, all conducted in those churches. And so there was strong, strong attachments by the people there, even though the numbers were thin, the attachment was strong.

EM – Right.

DJ – Um, the challenge of course was, as we looked at three points, how could we continue to keep three points operating given our circumstances. And the difficulty also was to take a look at, um, how we could continue to be, ah, a reaching outward, or mission focused church and, with the numbers that we had. So there were a number of challenges prior to Jon's arrival. And so, what we recognized is that there had to be a change. Something different had to be done, and the challenge was, a) what was that difference going to look like, b) what was going to be the impact on the stakeholders that were there, and c) what was the best collaborative approach to get that done.

EM – Ok. Um, how would you describe the relationship between the parish church and the wider community?

DJ – I think that the, now are we talking about the single point or when we were three points?

EM – In general I think, yeah.

DJ – In general, so I mean basically there's always been a strong attachment, whether it was in Iroquois or Morrisburg, or Riverside Heights over the years. Um, we had been involved in many community projects, many dinners, many opportunities to bring people in and welcome them. We had a number of uh,

programs that we offered, vis a vis, alpha, cursillo. And so it wasn't, we were never just dealing with the Anglican community, but we were also outreaching and we were involving people from a number of different churches. And in some cases, we even saw a transition of some of those people into our church, because of programs like alpha and cursillo and so on. So there's always been a good, a good attachment with the community in South Dundas and surrounding areas, and uh, we want to continue that.

(4:11) EM – Right. So you would say that that community involvement was active rather than stagnant or nonexistent.

DJ – Well I think it was, there were also a bit of a wave in sense, that there were times when we were very active and very strong, and there were a number of programs going, and then there was a bit of a lull because what was happening was numbers were getting thinner, uh, and it was getting more of a challenge to be able to offer all of those things. Ah, also people's needs changed, I mean grandchildren came along and trips and things like that, and so there was an impact on people by the amount of time that they had. But I'd say that there was a strong, strong commitment to the greater community, uh, in years gone by but there was also a bit of a wave where that waned off.

EM – Right. So a nice little segue for the next question. Uh, how would you describe the life of the parish itself? Um, like, in your case it was St. John's I think

DJ – No...

EM – Oh, St. James, ok.

DJ – St. James.

EM – Was the life of the parish active, again, stagnant, was it dying, was it life giving?

DJ – And are we talking about now or historically?

EM – Before Jon's arrival.

DJ – Before Jon's arrival. Again, depending on how far back you go, we saw the wave. We saw a time when Jon's mom was here along with Bill Byers, and a number of things were happening. Ah, we had those, we had a lot of uh, programming going on, and there was a clear desire on the part of the community that many people in this community wanted to be fed. Weren't sure how to go about doing that, but the programs gave them a door and an entry way into the parish, and that, as I said that brought people. Jon's mom offered programs to, uh, people in the community that were challenged economically, challenged family wise and so on, and she was able to, with some other people, support the needs of those people and make a difference in their lives.

(6:40) DJ - And so as we went along through the years, there were times when we were really active and, uh, but then prior to Jon, there was a wane. And uh, those programs seemed to disappear, programming wasn't as strong as what it had been, and so again, we were in the lull kind of thing.

EM – Mmm, ok. Fair enough. Um, in looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

DJ – Sorry I didn't get that.

EM – Um, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

DJ – I think it's, I mean I was a school principal so I've dealt with teachers, I've dealt with parents and so on, I think any time there's change there's a certain percentage of your population that, that it creates fear. We like all organized, we like knowing what we're doing, we like repeating that same thing over and over again. And there's a safety in that for some people. I think there are other people that are looking and saying that, this isn't, this isn't working anymore. The way we used to do things 25 years ago is not gonna engage young people. We have to think outside the box. We have to see church in a new way. Church can't look like it used to 25 years ago and going to entice people in, so there's a challenge there. And for any priest coming in, uh, no matter how good or skilled or educated that they are, that's one of the big challenges that they're going to have to face. Is how do we evolve, change. Because if we keep going the way we're going now, we're gonna die. And the doors are gonna be closed. Don't know how long that's going to be, so we have to think outside the box. We have to start doing church in a new way. The book that we focused on at church would tell us, outreach, outreach, outreach.

EM – Mhmm. And so you're saying that there's a resistance to change?

JD – I think, I wouldn't say that for all people, but I would say that there are some people that would feel that there would be, um, challenges involved in changing things. But for other people, they recognize that we can't keep doing business the way we did it 25 years ago.

EM – Right. And that is very true. Um, now, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes to be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward to get past their immediate struggle. Uh, to do so Jon made use of the principles of Sacred Hospitality as discussed above. Uh, can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in that task?

(9:57) DJ – Yeah. Um, I think that's, that's a very important one, ah, that Sacred Hospitality, and I especially liked the part in there where it talks about, that we have to be open to others. And it can't be just our way. When we're offering Sacred Hospitality we can't just invite people in and want to offer them programs, but it has to be our way, on our time, when we want it, and how we want it. That's not Sacred Hospitality. At least not in my mind. So we have to be open to work with them, I mean, the openness, the Sacred Hospitality of bringing the Imam, for instance. When Jon did that, that was at a time that was critical because of the impact in the world, the things that were happening and when he was able to bring the Imam in, that gave people an opportunity to hear and see and participate and know that they were looking for exactly the same thing that we're looking for. That there's not a wall between us, they're not over there and we're over here, but we can work together and we can do things together.

EM – Right.

DJ – And that Sacred Hospitality, allowing for give and take, such a huge important factor.

EM – Mhmm, mhmm. So you think they were successful, those interventions?

DJ – I think definitely that the, that's a very important intervention, and that it met with success.

EM – Ok, good. Well that's very good. And thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of them?

DJ – The most significant thing to come out of the intervention and the...?

EM – Yeah, the interventions in general.

DJ – That whole aspect of collaboration. Of bringing people together. Of allowing people to speak. Of allowing people to reflect and exchange ideas, and to be open to support one another. That's the only way forward.

EM – Yeah. Very good. What changes in vision or parish practices, if any, would you say have come from these interventions?

DJ – What changes in our parish?

EM – Yup. Changes in the vision or the practice.

DJ – I think that Jon's openness to collaboration, I think that he brought... he came and had to deal with a very huge challenge, of trying to pull three points into one. And the way that he approached it, I think, with the collaboration and the offering input, and the developing opportunities for people to come together several times. And to share ideas, and to listen to other's ideas and to reflect on those ideas and build on those ideas, I think that that collaborative approach allowed more people to buy into the change, to the transition that he was hoping to effect here. And that it made them, rather than observers of the change, they were stakeholders participating in the actual change that happened.

(13:47) EM – Good. Thank you. Um, now, looking back, if the goal was to help the parish become more open to transformation and change, what would you say was missing from those interventions? What would you have done differently?

DJ – That's, that's a challenging question. (Laughter). I'm not sure that there is just one approach. I'm not sure that our approach was the only approach, or the best approach, but it was an approach that worked in South Dundas. It was an approach that allowed our people to get on board, and to participate. What would I do differently? I'm not sure that... I'm not sure that uh, that I would change anything dramatically through the process that Jon has evolved through. I think that, by his openness, I think that Jon has great ideas about thinking outside the box, knowing that we can't keep going the same way that we were going. Knowing that we have to reach out into the community, seeing him bring all of those organizations together soon after he got here, uh, listening to those that came and participated, uh, looking at the impact for us as a congregation, or how we could get involved.

And the teaching. He's a great teacher. And so, it was almost like a teaching model all the way through. And for me, from an educator's point of view, it was a great way to go. So I'm not sure I'd have changed.

EM – Fair enough, fair enough. Um, can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential that your parish is capable of at this time?

DJ – Um, I think that at this point in time, that all of us have come to a recognition that we need to change. And that we need to reach out into the broader community. And it doesn't mean that those changes are all going to happen overnight because we decided to do it. It's gonna take some time. We have to get in contact with young people, we have to figure out what young people are looking for, because right now most of the heads are grey. And so we need to connect with them. What is it that they're looking for? Um, are there people in this community that are divorced that need support in that way? Are there moms that need early years support? Are there people in the community that are elderly and lonely, and what can we do? We need to take a look at how we do church. We need to take a look at, what can we do that's going to entice people to come? Because if we're gonna grow our church, it's not gonna be by doing the same thing that we've been doing. We have to start to do differently. And Jon, I think came with that vision, uh, for our church, that we had to do things differently. It was time to bring people together. Are there challenges in that? Absolutely. Are there bumps in the road? Absolutely. But he's been very good along the way, of not only allowing for the collaboration and teaching and so on, but he's given people that sense of, I'm open. This is not the only way, that we can talk about this at a table and perhaps there is a different way that's better. We can do it.

EM – So the potential that the parish is capable at this time is good, in terms of acknowledging, if I'm hearing you correctly, in terms of acknowledging the need for change.

DJ – Yeah. I think that all of us now, uh, recognize that, if we don't, then as that book will tell that we worked through, that we become a dying church.

(18:28) EM – Now, would you describe, um, this parish, the parish potential, as having more, or being greater or lesser than before the leadership interventions took place?

DJ – Ah, I think, I think that it's greater now because of Jon's influence. And because of the leadership style that he chose to work with the people. I think that, uh, before we were kind of in a, before he arrived and brought us together and started the process, I think we were in a holding pattern. And that things weren't happening the way they had previously happened. And people were quick to harken back 25 years ago when things were great, and numbers were there, and programs were going, but now we just kind of keep going. And so I think when he came, there was a change. Marked change. In that we weren't just going to keep doing what we had been doing, ah, because that road was to termination. And so, because of the processes that he began, and because of looking at the points and the amalgamation and starting to deal with the issues that were on the table, then, yeah.

EM – Good. Um, now, finally, would you, what would you need from the parish leadership today in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

DJ – I think that, I think that we have to continue, it's an ongoing development. It's not where you flip a switch on and ok, we've got it today, we're ready to go, and guess what? Everything's beautiful. That's not gonna happen. Ah, but what, what has happened is the switch has been turned on and we've started the journey. And it's a journey together. It's not Jon's journey. It's not the wardens' journey, it's the journey of all of us together. And as the book would indicate, we have to work together. With the priest, with the wardens, with the congregation, it's all of us. It's about all of us. And it's not going to be fast. It's going to be a challenge. And it's a rural parish, we live in a rural area. We're not an urban city church that has access to thousands of people. We have 2,000 people out of which a fraction is Anglican. And it's not like young families are moving here every day. Most of them are moving away. So, again we have to take a look at our ideas. Yes we want young people coming, but we have to focus programs on the people that are here right now. And try to reach out to them. So, it's going to be a slow process, but the good news is, the process has started.

EM – Excellent. And that is very good news. Well Doug, I just wanted to thank you for your time and your willingness to take part in this research. Um, it will serve not only Jon but also the church, the church here in South Dundas and the church in general so thank you very much.

DJ – You're welcome.

EM – Ed Montano

JD – Jill Dumaresq

EM – Well good morning. We are going to begin the interview with Jill Dumaresq. Um, I'm going to start by reading a little bit on the nature of... Jill has already agreed and signed a consent form, which is very kind of her. So we're going to start by saying, as you know, as you will remember from the consent letter, Jon Martin is currently working toward a Doctor of Ministry degree from St. Paul University in Ottawa. The questions that we are exploring with this research is, uh, do intentional leadership interventions, based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality, help rural parishes to become more open in transformation so they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve. In other words, are these interventions effective, and do we think that rural parishes can actually do that.

EM – So, um, to start with, uh, to start, we, can you describe the state of this parish, your parish, before Jon arrived, in your own words. It doesn't have to be fanciful, or academic language, or anything like that. Just in your own words. How was the financial situation? How was the state of your weekly attendance, uh, of the parish? How would you describe the relationship between the parish, the church, and the wider community? Was it active, was it stagnant, non-existent? Um, how would you describe the life of the parish? Was it active, stagnant, dying, life giving, etc.? Again, if you have any questions throughout about anything just let me know.

JD – That's a lot of questions in one paragraph.

EM – Indeed! But we can break it down if you'd like.

JD – The state of the parish before Jon's arrival, we'd been through a number of, well a couple of difficult departures of ministers, difficult times in my um, you know a sense of betrayal in our time with Paul Donaldson. At least a sense of betrayal on my part, because he was a wonderful preacher, and charismatic, and had the ability to attract a lot of people, and when he left abruptly when it was perfectly clear that he'd been working on leaving for quite a while, um, that was a very, very hurtful time. And, um, when Sue arrived here, you know, wrong person and probably wrong place. When she announced on her arrival that she was planning to retire on 'x' date, May 30th, however, it was not exactly an invitation to, oh, let's go. And my experience of those five years was waiting out Sue. During that time, well, uh, Sue had some positive impacts I think, like her I appreciate and enjoy liturgy, and um, I don't think she would be intimidating for most people to talk to, it wasn't, it wasn't a time of us doing a lot of – in my memory – a lot of programming, which people here love to do. Um, programming, and learn, and invite the community in that way. And we didn't build on our outside relationships, and our congregation sort of drifted. If we hadn't lost people over the previous transitions, um, the congregation was drifting away. My own approach, long ago told by my mother, the church is bigger than whoever's the incumbent at any time and remember, it's your church. So, my pattern was, I'm hanging in here. I had some difficult times, but I'm hanging in here.

(3:43) JD - So, uh, when Sue did leave, and, I don't think anyone in the parish took active measures to try and make that happen until she announced that she was

planning to stay beyond her stated retirement date. At which point we kinda... um, but when we found ourselves without a rector, uh, another lady and I, you know, I think we don't like leaving, and I think a fairly large chunk of this congregation does not like leaving our fate in other people's hands, that hasn't necessarily worked out well for us. So before Jon got here, we had gathered the parish for a dream day to look at what was important to us, and how that could move us forward. We weren't sure that that was going to be well received, um, by the Bishop or the whatever, but we felt we had to do that for our own state of being if you will. That we were not waiting to be done. Um, so we identified some pretty clear objectives and directions for ourselves actually before Jon got here.

EM – That's great. And I think Jon is very much aware of that and is very appreciative of that. Um, he mentions it actually in one of his explanations there. Uh, do you remember the financial state of the parish?

JD – Oh, we had gone down in attendance and gone down in finances. I can't tell you what the exact numbers were now, but we had a pretty clear pattern of decrease in attendance, and that generally means a significant decrease in finances as well.

EM – Right. And you just answered my next question. Um, how would you describe the relationship between the parish church and the larger community?

JD – Well historically it has been very good. Um, when we've had leaders here who've been involved ecumenically, we've had at times wonderful ecumenic activities. With the Lutheran church, um, in previous times, and through Sue's time as a matter of fact, uh, we had services together, particularly around Easter time, or shared vigils, um, we've always been open to inviting, when we've had alphas we've shared those with other congregations, uh, we've always opened our programming, and then um, more recently, we probably expand more on that but we have included – I think – the community in our activities.

EM – And that is really good, I mean, uh, and it shows, because of the participation and the relationship that all you guys have with the other churches. What about the secular part of the community, the, you know, community centres, organizations, or anything...?

JD – Uh, we, I think that there is always room to improve on that, well, there's always room to improve period, full stop. Um, that we've done most of our interaction with the community collectively as churches like love South Dundas, and um, I'm probably forgetting some key things as I go through, but I think the opportunity is to... and, well, and I think the biggest, major source of pride is the Christmas dinner. And, again, it's not everybody from churches who's volunteered and helped with that. People from the broader community do that Christmas dinner, uh, and are involved. Could we be better at involving the wider, and we have done more things in Jon's time about getting to the community.

(7:25) EM – Excellent. So it would be um, before Jon arrived a little bit stagnant, or non existent, or was it a little bit...

JD – Well immediately before Jon's arrival it was certainly not at it's best, um, the five years before or four years before Jon's arrival were not one of our times of booming and growth by any stretch of the imagination.

EM – Right. Hm. And the life of the parish, again, before Jon arrived, you had mentioned quite a bit of activity or lack of activity or opportunities, but the life of the parish itself, how would you describe it, in terms of, was it harmonious, was it stormy, was it...?

JD – Well, I think that there's a strong community, we don't always all agree with each other, but I think we love each other.

EM – That helps!

JD – Uh, I think, I just want to mention one other thing about frustration before Jon's arrival. We had tried to change the situation around with Sue, and provide feedback. And I believe the wardens at the time had done appraisals, and had forwarded them to the Archdeacon, and there was nothing done at that level, to the best information we have, to provide Sue with any feedback or corrective action, which could have helped her be successful. And, I'm a human resources person, I think that's a heavy responsibility as a church we have, when we could have done things to help people in difficult situations. And we just let bad get worse and worse. It's disillusioning for people in the parish, and it's awful for the person who, you know, you and I, when we're given feedback, we can choose to take it or not, but at least we've had the opportunity. You know, so thank you for letting me air that.

EM – Oh, my goodness, absolutely. No, thank you for bringing that up. Um, nice little segue, looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

JD – The saying is, people don't like change, people don't like change they don't like.

EM – Oh, interesting. Can you..?

JD – Most people are quite happy to change for a new car, or go for something that's their choice, so, where they're involved in change or where it's something they want they're pretty happy with it. But ya, there's resistance to change when it's out of control, seen to be imposed.

EM – So, is there any type of positive attitude towards change?

JD – I think so.

(10:28) EM – Even if it would mean that it's change that they don't like?

JD – Well, um, I'm not sure I'm understanding you totally on that question Ed.

EM – Okay, um, you were saying that people don't like change that they don't like...

JD – Of things, you know, there's many things that people have a status quo thing, I like it this way so don't, I'm going to resist the change or I don't believe that's the right direction, but to blanketly say that people always resist change or don't like change is not entirely accurate, with generalities. Um, so, a key thing in trying to manage change is being strategic about it, and making sure that where possible

there's involvement of people, that you create ownership, that direction is clear, and that you sort of think about those.

EM – So when that happens, do you think the parish's feelings towards change could be more (what's the word I'm looking for), could be better, could be more conducive to accepting and working towards positive change?

JD – Yes, I think so.

EM – Ok. So it's not a dire situation that nobody wants to change here?

JD – I don't think so.

EM – Ok. Good. Well that's very good, actually. Um, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward and get past their immediate struggle, like you were just mentioning, most of us (myself included) don't like change. To do this, Jon made use of some principles of Sacred Hospitality, as discussed before. Um, can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in this task? The things that Jon has implemented, with the principles of Sacred Hospitality.

JD – Jon and Mel have been very welcoming with inviting people to the rectory and trying to bring people together in that way. Um, and Jon's preaching has been well thought and prepared. He has always brought in the bigger picture and the need for change, and my perception tried to focus us around the bigger important picture of what it is to be a Christian community, and it's kind of, my line is "It's not about me." Which sometimes is hard, cause sometimes we all want it to be about me.

EM – Yup!

JD – Um, so yeah, helping us to, and hammering that home, because we've had, it's been a challenging time as a church. It's not easy. We've had to be courageous in making decisions to close a church.

EM – Right!

(13:43) JD - Uh, the whole chapel thing, which is a completely different chapel situation from anywhere else in the diocese, which is why we struggle with it. Because it's not the normal situation for a chapel. Um, you know, most are a summer church or whatever. Um, so, I don't know that I would recognize it as Sacred Hospitality in principle, but the leadership that Jon has shown in his speaking, in his messages, uh, about building that picture of what our Christian responsibilities fundamentally are in that bigger picture, he's done very well.

EM – I think you understand a little bit more than you're giving yourself credit for. Um, you did mention the preaching series, and all that, do you remember when the Imam was invited to the parish?

JD – Yes.

EM – Did that have a good impact?

JD – Oh absolutely. And there was great support from our parish. We're, you will find that this parish, by and large, has a large group of people that are very interested in learning.

EM – Mmm. Good.

JD – Um, and understanding. That was a wonderful experience.

EM – And the most recent one was the, uh, the book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church. Do you think that had an impact, a positive impact, did that make people think, or?

JD – Um, it did, and it was a good choice in being relatively short and readable. My experience personally was there wasn't anything that was new to me in there. But it was well presented in a digestible fashion. We've done a number of studies that have moved us forward, Phyllis Tickle, we've done um, Fran Aird led a Brian McLaren one. Um, did Jon do a Brian McLaren one too? We've done a number of studies that, you know, bring us together around that message.

EM – Right. Good. Good. Um, thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of them?

JD – Well I think the um, you know, the learning opportunities and the messages give us a sense of being fed. Um, I should speak for myself. Give me a sense of being fed. In the long distant past I had some wonderful opportunities in the diocesan church to be involved and transformed by God's calling years and years ago. And it was really instrumental in helping me see the church as um, being Christ's hands and feet. Not the buildings and the, you know, being meant to serve the world. And I think all of the studies we have done and the hospitality and the messages are helping teach us all, or remind us all of that. And deal with the fact that the demographics in other situations are not what they used to be.

(17:00) EM – Right.

JD – You used to have a family, maybe you've got four or five kids. Now with a family maybe you get one parent and a kid. Or two. You know, a generation of people who were faithful church goers have died off, since I've been here in the parish in the last twenty, twenty-five years now, I guess. So in a lot of change, in, that we don't have any choices about, learning, and focusing, and equipping ourselves to deal with it is really important.

EM – So, it's something that I think, if I'm hearing you correctly, it's not just numbers, or it's not just, uh, structure, or it's not just a superficial picture, but it's something much deeper.

JD – Mhmm.

EM – So, personally, the interventions that we are talking about have personally helped you move in a way that is, like you said, you felt fed, and it makes you want to...

JD – Mhmm. And, well, before Jon got here I had bought, and there was a group of us doing a study here about conflict in the church. And we did that on our own. Um, that interest, and desire to improve things is here.

EM – Yeah, I can see that. Hm. Well. What changes in vision or parish practices, if any, would you say have come from those interventions?

JD – Well I'd like to say that, um, we've stabilized. I'd like to think that we're, we've made some tough decisions. We've tried to come together as a parish. Is it perfect? No. But, uh, I think, I think we're starting to get our feet under us a little bit. Um, we've developed community ministries, and, you know, if I have any, if there is something I could suggest to Jon that would make his life easier, it would be, um, sometimes more visible support for the outreach activities that are happening.

EM – How do you mean?

JD – In his attendance. Um, I've had parishioners, well, you know, "We're doing this," or "We're putting this on," or "We're running this."

EM – Mhmm. Fair point.

JD – You know, "Where is Jon?" And I know sometimes he has other things that are on. Um, but I know that, uh, it would encourage some of the folks who run the various programs, or volunteer in them, to see the physical presence as a support as well.

EM – Right.

(20:00) JD – Cause again, I know that Jon supports those things and he's very proud of what happens.

EM – Mhmm, mhmm. Very good. Now, looking back, if the goal was to help the parish become more open to transformation, and change, um, what would you say was missing from those interventions? Um, what would you have done differently?

JD – The, you know, the one thing I sort of see is, um, hands on, or a presence. He doesn't have to be running or doing the activity, but a physical presence for encouragement. And as I said, I know Jon appreciates everything that everybody does on that, but some people need to see him to know that. Um, I think that's it, at least at the moment.

EM – Fair enough, absolutely. Good. Um.

JD – Now it could be that I'm working us into a church that I don't necessarily want to go to, but (laughter).

EM – What would that look like?

JD – I'm, uh, I love traditional music and organ music and choir, and in the last few years we've lost the choir, we've lost our organist, um, I find that, I try to find that feeding in another direction.

EM – Oh, interesting.

JD – I like the formal liturgy. I go south in the winter and go to a wonderful church that has a fabulous organ and choir, and does bells and smells, and I get fed then.

EM – You know, you and I are not different in that.

JD – It's not that I dislike the other.

EM – Right. It's like, um, one of my dreams is when I'm retired and I'm like, seventy years old and I have my own little space at some church where we can do all the organ, and the seven part chanting of the whole liturgy, and that's what, gets me as well, so.

JD – Sign me up!

EM – Oh, yeah. You're invited already!

JD – Alright!

EM – Um, can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential of, that your parish is capable of at this time? Do you think, can you describe it as having more or less potential than before the leadership interventions that Jon brought?

(22:37) JD – Um, well I, I think that Jon is, Jon's intentional sort of teaching and so on is further educating and creating potential in that. Um, helping people have a wider vision of what the church is, for those who are sort of seeing it as all about themselves, and there still are some. Um, that we have opportunities to serve.

JD - Now one thing that Jon had started, and I mean to follow up on it, about doing some community consultation, and the last time that I was, probably over a year ago, maybe longer, we had a meeting in Winchester. And we've kind of fallen off a bit since then. Now some other folks are talking about, um, and it would follow up on that potential for partnership with the school here. And some other opportunities like that. We've had, thanks to Isabelle Delage's support we've had wonderful opportunities to do some music things that allow us to outreach in the community and provide a place for the community to come. Hopefully we can continue to build on those things. And find ways to use our space helpfully for the community, but also to support having the space. That we can find a balance there.

EM – Yup.

JD – Because it's not fair to ask, or expect that a group of about fifty or eighty people is going to fund, entirely, the space for all of the activities that the community is going to have. We create partnerships that allow that to happen in an effective manner for all of us.

EM – But you think that the parish has the potential to do that? And, maybe the willingness?

JD – I think so.

EM – Ok. That's great.

JD – And I should only speak for myself, but I think there are, there's a significant group of people who invest a lot of time and energy in the parish, and, I mean, there's ebb and flow in that. You know, I've been absent a lot more this spring because of my family situation, um, so, and that happens with other people too.

EM – Yeah, of course. Life gets in the way, right?

JD – Yes, exactly. But I think there is, we have to be careful not to burn people out and not to tire people out, but it's also, being successful at doing things is very energizing, and creates its own momentum. The upwards spiral versus the (pause).

EM – Yeah, very good. Do you think this potential has been, um, higher or lower since those, these interventions?

JD – Oh I think that, definitely, supports increasing potential, yes. The interventions, I think that the teaching that Jon has done has been very important. Those interventions, and painting that picture of a bigger vision, and a church that serves, as opposed to, waits to be served.

(25:48) EM – (Laughter) Very good. Wow. We're cruising through this! Um, I think this is the last question that I have for you. Um, what would you need from the parish leadership today in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

JD – Well, we need to have an effective corporation and an effective council. Um, I see an opportunity, and I speak for myself, in um, because I am quite happy doing things on a solitary basis, this introvert is quite happy to plug away, but really, trying to think through and coordinate um, people doing chunks of ministry, and supporting them appropriately. I think one tremendous thing is Wendy Lewis's leadership, for example, Wendy's leadership in the church for children if you will, messy church and games nights and things, she's gotten, had the vision and gotten things set up. There's a possibility now for passing something over to someone to manage, run and develop that might not have had the interest or the vision to develop it themselves. But they're ready to take it on and run with it. And those are growth opportunities for the people and the parish. So the more we can do that, I think...

EM – How do you think leadership needs to support..?

JD – So we need to look at how we encourage people to do that. You know, what are the possibilities for chunking things we do. Can we ask people to take on different roles. In a way, Angela's departure may be an opportunity for us to look at, what are the chunks of this job that different people might be willing to take on? You know. It could be a little bit.

EM – Right.

JD – Can somebody send the readings out to the people who are the readers every week. It's not huge, but maybe there's, you know, that kind of thing.

EM – So, if I hear you correctly then, you're saying something about the empowerment, that leadership can help and support better.

JD – Encourage people, yeah. How do we make a considered effort to involve people to create that sense of ownership.

EM – And how, what would that look like? I’m just trying to figure out, to help the parish achieve the full potential they are capable of, um...

JD – To me, the leadership has a couple of roles, and one is trying to identify opportunities and help people find those opportunities. And another one is, where people identify opportunities is finding ways to enable them. There’s, those two pieces. When people have ideas and, most ministries, most good ministries in my opinion, start because someone is passionate about something.

EM – Very true.

(29:04) JD – And that’s contagious.

EM – So other than all of the logistics and the, uh, procedure and all that kind of stuff, do you think leadership should be a little bit of a cheerleader kind of thing?

JD – Well I think that’s certainly one of the roles, yes. To encourage people and to cheer them on, absolutely.

EM – Did you have anything else to add Jill?

JD – I don’t think so.

EM – Did you have any questions for me?

JD – I’ll think about that!

EM – Ok, well I just wanted to say thank you so much for being willing to participate in this. Um, this is, as you know, it’s for the glory of God, and to foster the church, and make the church grow, and I think your heart is very much on fire for that.

JD – And my, well, I want to say actually, to add one thing, and it’s about my personal belief. Is, that if we do a good job of serving, and outreach, we will have a church. If we try to fill the church, we don’t. Is my personal perspective on it. We have to be glowing so people want to come and be a part of the exciting things we’re doing. Not be focused on, we really need you here because we need to pay bills. That’s a really uninspiring reason to come and join a group of people.

EM – Exactly. I just want to say thank you again Jill.

JD – Thank you Ed. Thank you for taking it on.

EM – Ed Montano

JM – Jo-Anne Minish

EM – And I would like to start by thanking Jo-Anne for having agreed to do this interview and research. Ah, as you will remember from the consent letter, Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry degree through St. Paul's University in Ottawa. The question that we are exploring with this research is, do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parish churches become more open to transformation, so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve? So that is the main question.

JM – Ok.

EM – So for that, for the main theme. With that, I'm going to ask you a few more questions. Ah, to start, can you describe the state of your parish before Jon arrived? In your own words.

JM – It was broken. There was lots of disconnect. Um, it was, it seemed to be in little groups, like little cliques, I think.

EM – Ah, there you go.

JM – Yeah. That's how I felt. And there just wasn't the same family atmosphere as, yeah. It's definitely improved.

EM – And can, do you know how the financial situation was?

JM – I knew it was pretty dire at that time. Um, just from hearing, I had been to a couple of the AGMs and things, and knew that we had dipped into some savings and things like that. There were some different things that, we had to do some fundraising to get some things, yeah.

EM – Right, ok. And um, how, can you state, what was the state of the weekly attendance?

JM – Um, it had dropped substantially from what it was before. Like it was, ah, there was quite a full church at one time and then, over the I guess, past 10, 15 years it substantially dropped. It's definitely picked up now. It's coming around, yeah.

EM – And how would you describe the relationship between the parish church and the wider community?

JM – Um, I think our intention is to get known, but I don't know if we're there yet. Hm, I think people know of us but, yeah it's a hard... I think we need to do more community involved things because...

(2:29) EM – So before Jon arrived do you think the community knew we existed?

JM – No, I don't think so. No.

EM – Ok.

JM – Um, probably a little maybe, but less so than now. But I still think we need to work at community.

EM – Right, ok. So, you just said that there was like, nonexistent type of relationship between the parish and the community.

JM – Yeah.

EM – How would you describe the life of the parish? Was it active, was it stagnant, was it dying, was it life giving?

JM – It was stagnant, definitely. Um, probably on the verge of dying, but definitely stagnant. There wasn't any change, there wasn't any improvement, it was just going through the motions.

EM – Nobody wanted to do anything, or...?

JM – Um, I don't think it was that people didn't want to do something, but everything remained the same. There was no change, there was no chance at advancement. Sometimes you have to change things up and shuffle it up to get a little bit more action in there. Everything was just staying the same. It was very stagnant. Everybody was set in their ways, and it had to stay the same and, never improved.

EM – So, having heard you say that, looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

JM – Um, I think there's always going to be some that are going to buck it, but I think overall, everybody is pretty receptive and sees the big picture and knows there has to be change.

EM – That is now though?

JM – That is now. Then, change was not good. (Laughter).

EM – Ok, can you elaborate a little bit?

JM – I don't think change happened very much because so many people were bucking it, that's why it remained stagnant. Because somebody would come up with an idea and everybody would shoot it down just because they didn't want that change to happen. But ah, yeah, so I think just the development couldn't happen.

(4:46) EM – Ok. Now, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation, hm, talking about that, so that they could find a way forward and get past their immediate struggle. To do so, Jon made use of principles of Sacred Hospitality as we talked about. Can you say a little bit about whether you think the interventions succeeded in that task, why or why not?

JM – Why Jon’s intervention for change..?

EM – Whether or not those pastoral interventions, based on Sacred Hospitality, whether or not they were successful?

JM – I think they have been, yeah, definitely. I think Jon is the right person to come into our church to do the changes. Like we went from three churches down to one, we still have a chapel status at one of the churches that is associated with us, but, I don’t know of many people that could have come in here and just done that change. Jon is definitely the right person that was put in that position, and he seems to get people on board, and on a team that can promote and, promote that change. Yeah.

EM – How would you say, for example, can you give me an example of one intervention that was successful?

JM – There was, um, whenever we went from a three point charge to one, definitely successful because we had a whole church of people that had been at that church forever, and were really balking the system, and originally we wanted to have it in Iroquois but the needs were in Morrisburg. So, we had to, we moved it to Morrisburg and we ended up with most of those people in our parish, so that was successful in having that done. Um, and also we’ve done a bit of outreach.

EM – Oh, ok. Good. Um, now, thinking about those leadership interventions, the ones we’ve talked about, would you say, what would you say was the most significant thing to come out of them?

JM – I think we’ve grown as a church. We’ve become closer as a church community, willing to work together. People are less afraid about change I think now.

EM – Hunh, interesting. So what changes in vision or parish practices do you think have resulted from these interventions?

JM – We’ve been able to change our services a little bit, and not have uh, and yes there’s some services that people don’t like and do like, but we change them up. We’ve talked about moving the pews and things like that, and a lot of people are open to that. And I know that, from personal experience, my husband has been, was, totally against taking out pews and now he’s like, let’s get on board and get these pews out of here. Because that change, he sees that it will progress the church. It will move us forward. Because right now we’re just, we’re there, but we need to move forward. We’re moving forward slowly right now, but we need to move forward quickly, at a quicker pace.

(8:11) EM – Good. We’re flying through these questions here. Now looking back, if the goal was to help the parish become more open to transformation and change, um, what would you say was missing from those interventions?

JM – Looking in the past?

EM – Uh, looking at the interventions that Jon has made.

JM – That Jon has done. What was missing from them. I think they’ve all been rather successful so it’s hard to tell, and to pinpoint anything that was missing. I

think, had there been a failure... I guess, perhaps, not having Holy Trinity join, like, close down, there might have been something missing that caused them... but I think that was their personal feeling, which something just didn't tweak their interest, tweak their curiosity in their drive to become one church. But I think based on the results there wasn't a lot missing.

EM – Fair enough. What would you have done differently?

JM – (Laughter) I'm not sure I could have done the job to begin with, but I don't have that personality to make a decision like that and to be, that...

EM – Say, if I were Santa Claus, and I could grant you the one thing that you would have liked to have seen differently, what would that look like?

JM – Um, I don't know if there's anything that's really irked me about the change. I really like the way it was done. Um, I think I would have wanted people to be more open and accepting, I know there was a few people that didn't like the change. But as for what I would want Jon to do, he just did a grab job, I think. I've always said that. He is the right person that did that, because not many people could be in that position and lead those three communities the way he did and bring them to one.

EM – Ok, fair enough. Um, can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential of the parish right now, what the parish is capable of achieving right now?

JM – At the current moment, or am I looking to the future of what we could possible do?

EM – Current.

JM – The current moment? We could do a lot of outreach into the community, different events, I've seen other churches do community music in the park, concerts on a Sunday night or something like that. Things like that.

EM – You're saying community outreach.

(11:18) JM – Yeah. Community outreach definitely. Um, I see the Christian reform church does, they have like a, a different, an activity up there a few months ago about, I think they had a car rally and some different things like that, so...

EM – Cool. Would you describe it as having more or less potential than before the leadership interventions described above?

JM – Sorry, could you repeat that?

EM – So, do you think the potential that your parish has right now is greater or lesser than before the interventions that Jon implemented? Took place?

JM – Oh it's greater. We have more opportunity to do things, and people seem to be on board now, they're not, I think people aren't so afraid of change, because they've seen that positive...

EM – Ok. What would you need, um, what would you personally need from the parish leadership, right now, in order to achieve the full potential that you believe

your parish is capable of? Because, if I heard you correctly, you think that there's potential to do a lot more than what we're doing right now.

JM – There is.

EM – So what would you need from the parish leadership, that's not just Jon, that's the wardens etc.

JM – ...the wardens and, yeah. I think just promotion of the church and getting, getting people on board out in the community that we're not just this old people church. We need that, we need some young, vibrant things just to get that word out there that we're not old. We're young, we're vibrant, we're welcoming, and it's not the stiff, dress up on Sunday and sit in your pew and don't say a word that it used to be. We are a modern church. Yeah, I think that would...

EM – Mmm. Anything in particular that, like, how would we go about doing that? How would we go about asking the leadership for those types of things?

JM – I think it would be community outreach definitely that would help with that. Just getting people to know that we're doing more modern stuff, because people see church and they go oh yeah, church, stuffed shirt, but we're not. Like even, if they hear the music, the upbeat music and things like that, because we're not about the old organ hymns and the Gregorian chant age, we're about more upbeat stuff and we're about living and not about sitting quietly.

EM – Right. Good. I believe that wraps it up. And I just wanted to finish by saying thank you again Jo-Anne for doing this for the betterment of the church, your parish and your community at large. Thanks again.

JM – Thank you.

EM – Ed Montano

ML – Mark Lewis

EM – And we're starting thanking Mark Lewis for his willingness to answer the questions for the um, and as you know, Mark, you will remember from the consent letter that Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry degree from St. Paul's University in Ottawa. The question that we are exploring with this research is, uh, do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parishes to become more open to transformation so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve. So with that we can start with, um, can you describe the state of the parish before Jon arrived, in your own words?

ML – Um, I feel like we were in a state of transformation, knowing that we were in deep financial trouble. Ah, probably more so, and trouble with attendance or with numbers with parishioners, more Iroquois than Morrisburg I think. But certainly we knew we were in trouble, so we were quite willing to be looking at change. Change for the sake of, figuring out financial change more than anything.

EM – Ok. So, that segues very nicely and maybe even answers the next question, which is, what's the financial situation?

ML – Well the financial situation was, when Jon got here we were, we had already begun to live off of savings for lack of a better term, investments, um, and any time you start to delve into your investments you know that they're not going to last very long. So with a declining population and obviously declining attendance and declining finances you have to somehow find how you're going to go. So we were running some deficit budgets at that point in time, right before Jon came... not like we have recently but certainly we were on, down that track.

EM – Ok, uh, do you recall what the state of the weekly attendance was?

ML – Having been a parishioner in Iroquois, we were averaging somewhere between 18 and 25 on a Sunday, more towards the lower end than the higher end I'd say. You know, I can't speak for St. James but, you know in their hey-day they were running 110 or 120 people. And I know they were down significantly to about 60 I think, somewhere in that neighbourhood, maybe 70. But that's a huge drop off from what it had been, right.

EM – Right.

ML – Cause we, after Jon arrived we amalgamated into one parish, so until that point we were separate points, so I would be speaking from the point of St. John's in Iroquois at this point.

EM – Right exactly, of course.

ML – Yeah.

(3:01) EM – Uh, can you describe the relationship between the parish church and the wider community? Like, was it active or stagnant or nonexistent?

ML – I would say that our relationship with the community was good, I wouldn't describe it as active, I would describe it as, um, status quo would be a good term. What we had been doing, we put on a roast beef dinner every year, we had great attendance for that. We did a family Christmas Eve service, well attended, people knew who, when things were happening and that's when they came. Um, but in terms of us being out, vibrant, in the community, and active and providing things for the community, I wouldn't say that we were doing that.

EM – Ok. Fair enough. And how would you describe the life of the parish? Again, was it active or stagnant or dying, life giving?

ML – Right before Jon, because we're referring to Jon, right?

EM – Yup.

ML – Right before Jon got here, I mean, there's lots of history, so I can go back a few, but I don't think I want to go there. The previous rector that was here basically had been sent to do some healing, I think, from some hurt that had happened from the rector before her. And she, in my opinion wasn't motivated to do much in the parish to revive parish life, or to do educational, do any programming. Basically she came in and says, I'm just here to love you. And I think that we were ready to go, we needed to be loved, but we needed a lot more than to be loved. And we needed to get back to what we had been doing, and I think she didn't move us in that direction. From that perspective, with Jon, we weren't actively involved or doing adult ed, or doing anything that I could see, so I don't think that we...

EM – Fair enough. Not an active parish life.

ML – Yeah.

EM – So, now, looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

ML – Resistant. Um, I think everybody liked the way things were and didn't want to see one thing change, because that's where my comfort level is, and I'm really happy with that, and don't mess with things. A specific example in Iroquois was, um, had some, a couple of new members come in, a husband and wife team, really nice people, good people, wife's a strong leader, asked her to be on parish council. She agreed, came in, started coming in with her own ideas, kinda, she wasn't pushy in any way, shape, or form in my mind, but, hey we gotta get some things done here, we gotta do some work, and ruffled the feathers of the old guard because she was way too, let's go go go. Basically, she got run off. So, very resistant to... I want to run things. People had jobs in our parish for life. You know, I know that one guy, that had been the people's warden in Iroquois, had been the people's warden in Iroquois for 30 years.

(6:46) EM – Oh geez.

ML – Sorry, I apologize, the rector’s warden. He had been the rector’s warden for 30 years. And so, now, that’s a rector’s decision, but when everybody came in they said, well you know at some point you need to ask this person, or this person, you’ll need that expert, hang around, help them or whatever, but this is nope, I hung onto that job. And it wasn’t until we actually amalgamated as a parish that he decided that he would, he actually became the deputy rector’s warden for a year or two, and just this past year at our vestry... So for 35 years he was a rector’s warden. So, people got jobs for life. There wasn’t a lot of change.

EM – Right.

ML - My wife came in and she started to take on some of those roles. I had taken on roles, but I’m a huge believer in succession, so, I didn’t... Like, I would do whatever they wanted me to do, but look, we need to train new people to come in here because then we have a bunch of leaders in our building rather than just a handful of people that do the whole thing. People saw that example, but they didn’t follow that example, which is fine, it’s their prerogative, so...

EM – Mmm. Yeah, fair enough. Um, so, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation. And that was just to be, you know, they could find a way forward to get past their immediate struggle. Um, to do that, Jon used some principles of what was called Sacred Hospitality, uh, like we discussed a little while ago. Um, can you say a little bit about whether you think those interventions were successful?

ML – Jon Martin’s an idiot (laughter).

EM – (Laughter) How so?

ML – No, I say that tongue in cheek. He’s, Jon was very good at doing his research about who in the parish he needed to get. So he consulted with former rectors during, what we would consider the hey-day of our parish, and they gave him recommendations about who he needed to align himself with, and who he needed to get into leadership positions, and I think he was very strategic in that. That he, he got a group of leaders together that believed in, and had personal relationships with Jesus Christ that would set the way to move forward from a Christian standpoint, I think.

EM – Right.

ML – So I think that, from the outset, Jon put in Sacred kinds of Hospitality people into leadership roles, and then began to move slowly, because he didn’t know everybody, and that’s a chance too, right.

(9:47) EM – Right.

ML – Like, for me, I’m a different, I’m a different breed with Jon, because I was his basketball coach. So I had a relationship with him before, a totally different relationship, and I had a relationship with his mom too, because she was an assistant curate in our parish and so I got to know her. So that relationship is somewhat different than what normal people would be.

EM – Right.

ML – But, ah, I believe that that only enhanced what he was trying to do from a sacred standpoint. Because I think he knew, and the people that he chose as his rector's warden and who he wanted to be the people's warden, knew that they were very fundamentally sound Christian believing people. Not people who are church people, if you get what I'm saying.

EM – Hm. How would you make that difference though?

ML – Well I would say that church people are all about buildings and churches.

EM – Ok.

ML – I would say that Christian people are all about Christ. And trying to grow Christ's community, and trying to do things for the greater community as it were, rather than focusing on... and it's hard not to focus internally on what you're doing when you're in financial trouble. Like that's, you tend to, ah, ok, so if we're not going to be around because we have to close every door then how do we serve? So it's a double edged sword, it's a tough one right? So, um... but I think he put people in place that had that owned both of those pieces of it. And um, so I think, I guess what maybe the answer to the question is, I think Jon did a really good job about putting people in leadership roles that would enhance Sacred Hospitality. Does that make sense, I don't know?

EM – I think I understand, yeah. So all the initiatives that Jon put in place, or, you know, tried to work with, work through with that everybody that he chose to work with, do you think he was successful in trying to implement those initiatives, the Sacred Hospitality initiatives?

ML – Well, it's an interesting thing, because I'm not so sure that Jon wasn't sent, by the Bishop, to look at, how are we going to change things to keep this open, or how are we going to close it? Because I think that was maybe on the table, and I think the Bishop really wants to see a presence on the seaway, but because there was such a willingness to move forward and get things better, I think it almost caught him off guard.

EM – Hunh.

(12:44) ML – Like, I don't, he went through a bunch of change and amalgamation stuff in the previous parish he was in, and closing churches, so he was really good at the healing piece of things. But what happened that took him ten years or eight years before happened within two here. I think that caught him off guard, because I think that he was expecting more resistance to that, and I think there was a lot of, we need to be a church in the community and move forward. And certainly you're going to have fights around buildings and that kind of stuff, but the people in Iroquois kinda, and there's still bitter feelings, and there's people that are still upset about the fact that Iroquois did fail, because financially it would be the best building to be in, and you economically it would be the best building to be in.

EM – Right.

ML – And, we were kinda sold on a bill of goods, that the ministry was in Morrisburg because Morrisburg was a bigger place. And I tend to agree with that, but I'm not

completely convinced that we couldn't have done what we needed to do in Morrisburg out of the building in Iroquois. If you get... but I was one of the guys that pushed for the closing of Iroquois, just because my fear was the people from Morrisburg would not come. The resistance to change was people wouldn't come down to Iroquois to worship, and then you would lose a significant group of congregational members. And the people in Morrisburg in my mind seem to be a lot more open to change than the people in Iroquois.

EM – That's interesting.

ML – Like when we closed Iroquois, many of those people refused to come to Morrisburg and went to Riverside Heights where Holy Trinity is. They never darkened the doors of... and, you know, even though they're a chapel status they're working solely as... nothing's changed for them. Wendy and I had this conversation. Nothing has changed for them. They only had two services a month, they still have them. And actually they, it's better for them, they have consistency. And they have one guy that's coming, every time, preaches, they love him, they've seen attendance grow, they've seen all kinds of things happen. But chapel status is supposed to be a couple of services a year, and the Bishop was quite kind in allowing things to happen, to allow them to do twice a month, but it's hurt financially in a parish that's struggling. Because if you only have the one option in Morrisburg then people are going to decide well I'm coming to Morrisburg or I'm not. And so, it's hard. Anyway. I think that Jon's initiatives about Sacred Hospitality have been really good. I'm not completely convinced that they're all, have been accepted by the members of the parish.

EM – Speaking exactly about that, what do you think was the most significant thing that was to come out of them?

ML – To come out of Jon?

EM – To come out of the Sacred Hospitality...

(15:54) ML – Oh. Well we did see an amalgamation. We did see a group of people, willing people, to come together. And I think probably the best thing out of that is that, the Sacred Hospitality in my mind is to accept the differences of everybody and work within those differences. And I think there's a core group of people who took that on, and believed in that and moved forward with that. I'm not convinced, again, that we're not... amalgamated. Like we went through a thing on Sunday of the State of the Parish, and of course we did set the book around... something, I can't remember the name...

EM – Deceased...

ML – Autopsy of a Deceased Church. And like, I'm sitting there thinking we're dead, and we're dying, like, we've got to figure this out. And the people in the parish felt like we're really sick. We're a lot more than sick in my mind. But, I like the fact that they think we're really sick, because that means there's still a lot of hope there. We still haven't, we still haven't, um, moved people, certain people, to that point of acceptance, but we may never do that. There's still a group of core people that just believe, I need to be an Anglican, I've got to go to the Anglican church, this is my only option, I'm coming. Yet, they haven't bought in to the whole amalgamation and, I'm gonna jump in there with two feet, and I'm gonna just go. Like, when

Wendy and I moved, Wendy's my wife, ah, to Morrisburg, like, we just immersed ourselves. We didn't wait for somebody to hold our hand and walk us through the kitchen. We didn't wait for somebody to show us the Sunday School. We didn't wait for somebody, we just said no, this is our church, this is what we do, we go in and we do this because this is what the church needs. And maybe I'm... maybe it's my American upbringing, maybe it's my Texas upbringing, maybe it's my... you don't wait for people to help you, you just go and help other people. And to help other people you've got to understand the building, you've got to understand what you're doing. Because then it makes it easier for them to be welcoming, and you to come in. And yet we've still got a group of people that feel like they need an invitation, and yet it's their church and their parish, so I struggle with, why do you need an invitation if this is yours. It doesn't belong... yeah it does, it does belong to you now. So let's get over it doesn't belong to you, and let's get on with it. And yet they're not, they feel like they need an invitation from the people. There's still that group of amalgamating people. So there was a core group of people that came from St. John's, I'd say, 10 maybe? 12? There was probably another 8 or 9 that went to Holy Trinity. They got exactly what they wanted. And so everybody seems to be happy, and yet Holy Trinity is still a part of our parish, and yet they're really not a part of our parish. Which is a hard thing.

EM – Right. So you don't, you find it difficult that there are people still after however long it's been, that still have not moved beyond the status quo that you referred to earlier.

(19:35) ML – Right. With that said though, Ed, Jon reminded us on Sunday that May marked him and Mel's third year here. So you think all that's happened in this parish in three years, I'm ok with that. You know, like, right. They've had so much change in three years that, because they haven't come completely on board, I'm ok with that. Well I'm not ok with it because I struggle, I came right on board, but, it may, it's going to take them time. You know. People grieve in different ways, and people grieve for different periods of time. I mean, the building in Iroquois still hasn't sold, it's still got a for sale sign on it, so people are driving by it, there's still some hurt, there's still some pain. Even though I feel like we've been welcomed in, because Wendy and I just forced our way in and said, no you're going to welcome us whether you like it or not, this is what you're gonna do. And because Jon had actually wanted me to be the people's warden and there wasn't a lot of people that wanted that job at that point in time. I just, my natural, redneck, nasty, Texas way is just, I just force myself on people. And I don't give them an opportunity, they're either gonna like me or they're gonna hate me I guess, but I think my personality says, most of them can accept me, because it comes from love. It's not coming from, you're bad, or you guys are doing, it comes from, look, I want to get along with you guys and let's figure this thing out together, because we need to figure it out together, otherwise we're not going to be around. Divided we're weak, together we're strong. We just need to be together.

EM – With that in mind, you just mentioned that, you know, change does take some time and everybody changes at a different pace, having said all that, and you just mentioned that you're ok, because a lot of change has happened, and you know that change will take a little bit longer time, but, with that in mind, what changes in vision do you think, or parish practices, would you say have come from these interventions?

ML – Well I think one of the things that we went through on this past Sunday, that Jon did in terms of a State of the Parish, because they're quarterly, right. We never had that before. Now, maybe we just, again people want to just be status quo, vestry is what we do, and what he's trying to let people know, where we are quarterly so that, if we're behind in finances, like he's implemented a different kind of financial giving program where people have to pledge how much they're going to give. So if we're behind people need to know that. We don't need to know that at the end of the year when we're struggling, we need to know that, oh right, man I've got to get back up to my givings and get to where we're gonna go here, right. So there are certain things that have been implemented that I see that, and even though there were a number of people at that meeting on Sunday that didn't, hadn't moved as far as I would have liked for them to move, I think it was really really good that they were there, and felt welcomed and felt that they were participating in something. So it was inclusive rather than exclusive.

EM – Right.

ML - There's a long history in this community that I discovered working at the high school, that the people in Iroquois hate the people in Morrisburg. And the people in Morrisburg hate the people in Iroquois. Why, I don't know, I don't know what that history is, I don't know why that history is that way, but it's always been, "Well you got this", "Well you got that", "Well you got this"... Even when they amalgamated the townships there was arguing and bickering about where things were gonna go because people in Morrisburg didn't want to see things... Being a high school guy where this is one high school, I guess there was a lot of fighting and frustration when they decided they were going to put the high school in Iroquois rather than in Morrisburg. Because they closed down Iroquois high school and they closed down Morrisburg high school, and the people of Morrisburg were so mad that they put the school in Iroquois. They actually went, but I mean, cause they had no choices, but they don't... When I ran a golf tournament. My last two, three years at the high school I ran a golf tournament. Because I ran it at the Iroquois golf course, 75% of the money that I got for that golf tournament came from Iroquois and Mathilda. 25% came from Morrisburg. And people told me if I'd have run the tournament in Morrisburg, 80% of the money would have come, or 90% would have come from Morrisburg, and 20, the 10 to 15% would have come from Iroquois. Because they don't look at it from respect of, all of those kids go to one high school, cause that's the way I looked at it is, well they all go to the same high school, they're still getting... There's still this division between the two communities. And so, that's part of what we live with a little bit. And some of these old staunch people from Iroquois, they've been in Iroquois forever, they've lived that life, they're the ones that I think are the most resistant to... and need to be welcomed and need to be invited, I don't understand that, I guess I don't understand that, but, so those, that historical lack of trust, which I think is what it is, then hinders us moving forward a bit.

(25:41) EM – So would you say that, in terms of the vision, the interventions have not necessarily been very successful, but there are some concrete actions and attitudes perhaps that may be moving towards that, or?

ML – Yeah. The interesting thing, I think the vision, everybody agrees with. I think how to get there is where they struggle.

EM – Hm, good enough, fair enough.

ML – Like I think they really, because they, the people in Iroquois feel like they've already given up so much, and many of them feel like the people in Morrisburg haven't given up a thing. And the people in Morrisburg have given up a lot, because they got me (laughter), right? Because I'm the guy from Iroquois, so many of them have been displaced because they don't know where they fit any more. In this amalgamation where do I fit? You've got a guy like Jon who comes in, who already has a relationship with me, and has used me, and he and I have talked about that, he can't use me in his sermons any more. Cause that hinders people. And, he still does every once in a while and I'm ok with that, but, you know they get that there's that previous relationship, but many of the people in Iroquois have labeled me as a turn coat. Cause they don't, they think that I've been that guy that just supported everything, you helped close... no, it had nothing to do with that, it had to do with, if this is the decision we've made then how do we move forward. And I think that's the harder part, we've made the decision, it's all happened. I struggle with my wife. My wife really struggles with that we closed. And she may be right. In the end, down the road, she may be totally and completely right that we should have kept the building in Iroquois. And she still struggles with it because she and I were married in that church. We've been together 15 years, that's her history, that's who she knows, she knows all those people. So we've been the ones that have been split and splintered and disjointed, and I think Jon has done a really good job of trying to bring those people together. But old school, the Autopsy of a Deceased church says, people struggle with change, and people struggle with moving in a different direction that, even know they know, in their minds, that that's probably the best direction, they've got to change, they struggle with how to change.

(28:18) EM – Right. Now, looking back, having said everything that you've said, if the goal was to have the parish become more open to transformation and change, what would you say was missing from those interventions, and what would you do, what would you have done differently?

ML – I think my biggest struggle with all of it is, how do we re-engage people in the community, to see the importance of having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Because I think until people see the importance of that, you and I have been down really different, separate roads and yet our roads are really the same in many respects.

EM – Right.

ML - And so we see the importance of what that is. But people need to see the concrete reason why, and it's hard to put into concrete terms, what Jesus Christ does for you. And, how do we do that in such a way that we're, we don't come across as condescending, as holier than thou, as religious because I hate that term but that's a huge term, um, but I really believe that I don't know how to really engage or re-engage those people to come in to an environment of love and caring and concern. And I think somehow we've missed that. Somehow we haven't been either proactive enough to get people involved, and the only reason I say that is my, obviously Wendy is the children's ministry person and she has gone and done so many different kinds of initiative things in a rural place, free. Just to draw people in. Free. And they still won't come because it's attached to a church. So there's something about the church and religion that is scaring this generation X, or generation Y, or the both of those generations away from, and I think in many

respects they're so spiritual with other things, they don't know how to connect the two.

EM – Right.

ML – Like, they're a group of people that if you call them and say, hey look, we gotta build this playground, can you grab a few, there's be a hundred of them that show up and help you build that playground that day. But they're not going to show up every day, or every Sunday to church. Cause that's not their bag. And yet how do we get them to see the importance of being in fellowship with other people, because I still think that there's this perception out there that when you become a Christian you have to give up so much, rather than understanding how much more you gain in that. They don't get that piece, right. And it's not tangible, and it's not measurable, and it's not concrete for them. And they've grown up in a society that says this all has to be seen and heard... they've grown up in an age of technology where lots of their social interactions never happen like you and I are having a social interaction right now. It's all happening through a phone or through a social media platform. So how do I get that spiritual piece and that feeling, when all I'm doing is typing out my feelings on a keyboard.

(32:13) EM – Very true.

ML – I don't know. But I tell my wife I love her in the middle of the day, and I send her a text, I don't think it's the same when she sees me and sees that in my eyes and in my person, and yet that's the society that these people have grown up in and been raised in. So I don't know, how do we reconnect them with the human touch. I think we've missed that piece somewhere along the way. That human touch piece. That, I don't know, that's our fault as a parish. Some people might blame Jon, and maybe there's more he could do, because he's, whether he likes it or not, and he probably doesn't like it, but, he is the face of the parish. In an old school, old time, rural parish, the priest is the guy, cause he's the guy that's closest to God. In their minds. He may not be the guy that's closest to God, but in their minds he should be, cause he's got all the training, he's got the church, like he can go over there and get closer if he wants to, where I gotta go to work, and I gotta deal with this. That's just, again, another perception of how, what people have of who he is as a person. And I think Jon's very human and I love that about him, because it gives me a lot of hope for who I am. But for some people that's a stumbling block. That's a huge, because he's not as holy as they would like him to be, whatever that definition of holy is for them. And so his personality in certain respects probably has deterred some people, and even driven some people away. But I know I have too. So it's not a Jon problem. It's again an acceptance problem, so how do we, we've missed, we've got a lot of this stuff really going and yet now we're at that crossroads I think with, now how do we move to the next step.

EM – Right.

ML – That's going to be the struggle.

EM – And just nicely flowing into that, I mean, what do you believe is the full potential that the parish is capable of at this time? Would you describe it having more or less potential than before the leadership interventions?

(34:39) ML – My belief is that God and Jesus are going to turn this place upside down, it's going to happen. It may not happen the way I think it's going to happen, and it may not happen the way Jon Martin thought it was going to happen, but the beauty of God and Jesus is you just never know how they're gonna implement and put things into place, and I'm never surprised about that. Because of the power of what they can do. And I really believe that we have huge potential, and I think we have a willingness to move forward and, it's a huge group of hopeful people that really want to see this return to a place where we were really growing, and we were really influencing and bringing people to Christ. Not bringing people to the church doors to pay the bills. Not bringing people in because, well... it was a genuine love and affection, and this is what we want. And I still think there's a huge group of people in our parish that want that. They're all struggling with how to do it, because the way they did it now isn't necessarily the way that it's working. So 20, 10, 15, 20 years ago they were using alpha and all kinds of things, and cursillo, and now that's not what seems to be the driving force with young people to get them in. Young people want to have a priest I think like Jon. Young people want to have pretty contemporary but really good music. And we struggle with really good music right now, you know, we've got some lovely people who really try hard on their part, but they're, they're just not trained to do that. And I think we need to get away from a model of preaching and a message to a model of teaching. Cause I think people are really open and willing to learn, and willing to be taught. I don't think anybody in this day and age is wanting to be preached at. Or told how to do things.

EM – Right.

ML – And there are certain struggles, we really, there's really certain strength things that you want to, you don't want to get away from the morals and the values and the teachings of Jesus Christ cause that's what you've got to do, but put it in such a way that they understand that. I just think that there's a huge willingness, so there's a lot of hope for me, even though I struggle and I vent and I, I get frustrated very easily with some of the attitudes and the kind of stuff there. In my heart of hearts I still believe that there's... and maybe it's because that's all the hope that I have, because I live with a woman who has a huge ton of hope like I do, and we get frustrated when we see people that don't... we feel like they don't have the same amount of hope. But maybe they do.

EM – Would the frustrations be because you believe there's so much potential in the parish?

ML – Right. And it could be that we see we could take off and go again. We're struggling with how do we get that to go, and then because we don't know how to do it, then we get frustrated with other people that are, in our opinion, don't even seem to be trying to do it. And yet, maybe they are, we're just all feeling a little bit helpless right now about, what are the next steps to help us to grow and move in a direction that is going to be acceptable in the minds, in the eyes of Jesus Christ and God, and bringing people... you know, one of the things that really struck Wendy and I, I think me specifically is that, we need to really move again to an outward kind of focus. And Wendy's done that for years, but the rest of us have not. And we need to get more people on board and not be afraid to say, "Oh yeah I go to the Anglican church and it's great over there, we have this crazy minister and he's, curses like a sailor and lives his life like a human being, but man he teaches us great things over there, and moves us in a direction that's really positive and

happy.” Get away from the drama, get away from the negativity, get away from all this stuff that doesn’t work. Cause that just, in my mind, you lose so much energy. You’ve got to stay positive and focus, but it’s hard when you’re struggling financially and you’re struggling. You know, you can’t put that away, put that piece away and yet.. so...

(39:59) EM – Yeah. Um, so, if I heard you correctly, you think the potential has...

ML – We have a ton of potential.

EM – Has grown a little bit after these initiatives?

ML – I think with certain people. What I’m feeling is, the core group of people that we need to get moving and shaking again are the people that are being impacted by this, so yeah. I’m seeing a lot more positive energy and moving in a direction that’s going to be more helpful than hurtful.

EM – Good.

ML – And I think that there’s a time for everything, but I think we’re, there’s going to be a time where we just let some people go, and that’s going to be hard for us all because we love them. But, you know if you’re not moving forward then you’re just getting in the way. And so we gotta move forward, and that’s going to be hard for some of us to say goodbye to those people because we may not move in a direction or, we may be moving way too fast for what they can handle, and that’s hard but that’s ok. You know, that’s hard because you don’t... For us that whole love thing means you’ve got to love everybody, and so you don’t want to leave anybody behind, and yet if they’re not willing to move, or move at a pace that is going, what we need to be moving at, then they’re going to have to catch up. It doesn’t mean we won’t accept them back, bring them back on and all that stuff, but some people need to actually see that the changes that we’re making are good before they’ll step in. And so that’s what we need to do. Just continue on the journey.

EM – So then, what do you think the parish leadership, is needed from the leadership now in order to achieve the full potential of the parish, that you know the parish is capable of?

ML – Well I, I guess the next thing that needs to be happen is, we need to empower people to do the things that they want to do. And there are some people out there that have some ideas, and we need to let them go and let them be successful, or we need to let them fail. But we need to let them do. Because right now what we’re doin ain’t workin, necessarily, to what we need to be workin, so we need to try different things, and if it works great, and if it doesn’t well then let’s rethink that and go. But we need to empower them to do the things they want to do that they see are gonna move us in that direction. So that we give, you know one of the principles of leadership that I learned along the way from a good friend of mine is that, the more power you give away, the more power returns to you. And, you’re not looking to get more power, but because you’ve given your power away to people that are looking at you, then they see that as a real strength, and they just give you more. We need to give more power to some of our congregation, knowing that God is working through them, and Jesus. It ain’t my power, it’s Jesus’ power, it’s God’s power, they can think it’s their power, they can think whatever they want, but I know whose power it is. Let them go with that, and let God work

through those people and just get out of their way. And not be so worried about how that impacts me. Cause, you get real selfish and real self-centred real quick when things aren't going well, you take care of you. And so, sometimes taking care of you means letting go of things and letting other people do them so, and that's gonna take care of you in the end. But that's really hard to do.

(44:05) EM – That's really hard to do, yeah. Alright. Anything in particular that um, higher up so to speak leadership needs to do?

ML – Well no, I mean, what I feel like from a perspective of the Diocese is that they're pretty supportive of what we're doin, the ideas that we have. And I think they're probably as shocked as anybody at how quickly we're moving through things, and the ideas that are coming forward about what we want to do and how we want to do it, cause I don't think they get that a lot. They probably get more resistance than what they're getting in terms of positive stuff. So I think we just need to continue to have that kind of support, um, I think Jon's in a very difficult position right now. In that growing churches and moving in a direction of growth and enhancing is not something he's had to do. And so this is new to him, and I think that's hard. And you know, I think one of the fears that I have is, we know his mom's coming on board, and that's awesome, but I don't want her to be a crutch for him. Because he's got lots of, lots of strengths that his mother didn't have, in terms of dealing with the common man out there. And I think that my fear is that he is going to look at her to be so much of a help to him with bringing some of the older people that she had relationships with back in that he can't forget what his duty is. He is the rector of this parish, and he needs to move us in that direction and not get too complacent and depend on mom. Cause she's awesome, and he knows that cause everybody's told him that, and my fear is that that's beat his confidence down a little bit. And I see a lot of potential in him with his youngness and his energy, but he is young, and he's newly married, and he's still trying to figure out life, and that's hard. That's hard for anybody. And so I just don't want him to think it's going to be a breather, I think he needs to use Pat to get some things done, but continue what he's doing and put more energy into that too, because that's where we need to go. Pat may bring back some of the older people, and some of those relationships, but they're still gonna die. We're not going to live on because she came back and brought them back. We'll live on because of the new generation of people coming and what we can do for them.

EM – Good. Excellent, so I'd like to thank you for your time and your answers, um, if you have any questions for me, or...

ML – Nope, I've got none.

EM – Ok. Good, thanks Mark.

EM – Ed Montano

RC – Ron Currie

EM – Ok, thank you Ron very much for agreeing to do this interview. Um, as you are aware this is recorded and will be transcribed, and as you remember from the consent letter Jon Martin is currently working on, towards a Doctor of Ministry. Now the questions that I'm going to be asking you, um, have to do with the concepts of Sacred Hospitality and the pastoral intervention that Jon has already, um, done at the parish. So, I don't know if you have any questions. The main question for this interview is, do intentional leadership interventions, based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parishes to become more open to transformation so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve. So, I don't know if you have any questions about, ah, before we start with the formal questions?

RC – No no, so was that just a statement we're starting with?

EM – Yes.

RC – Oh ok.

EM – Exactly, that is the main drive for this.

RC - Oh ok, I thought it was a question.

EM – Ok, so the first question goes, um, to start, can you describe the state of the parish, your parish, before Jon arrived, in your own words. As far as you were aware, what was the financial situation, or what was the participation or involvement of the community lately, an overall picture of the parish before Jon arrived.

RC – Ok. Well, before Jon arrived, I wasn't very active in the parish. Um, I do know that, I don't know anything about the finances.

EM – Ok.

RC – Um, but I do know that, um, I don't want to say... I know that the parishioners weren't exactly happy with the way... there seemed to be discord. There seemed to be discord between the two churches, St. John's and, I won't talk about Riverside or Riverview or whatever it's called cause I don't know anything about it. But a bit of discord between the two parishes, seemed like there was a push pull type of uh, transaction going on. And I think that the, uh, Jon's predecessor, ah, maybe wasn't the strongest leader. Put it that way.

EM – Fair enough, yeah.

RC – (laughter)

(2:36) EM – Ok, um, alright, so looking back, um, how would you describe the parish, the parish's feelings and attitude towards change?

RC – Ok, so I'm pretty sure that it was a bit of a struggle – that's probably an understatement – for a lot of the parishioners, to first of all um, accept that change was necessary, and then once they saw that, the reality of the situation, um, they, it took a while to, well, I mean a while, geez. I think it was, some had, it was like pulling someone when they didn't want to be pulled.

EM – So what you're saying is that there was a lot of um, ah, resistance.

RC – Yeah, resistance is a good word. That I didn't use.

EM – Ok, fair enough. Um, so now, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help the parishes become more open to change and transformation so that they would find a way to get, uh, past their immediate struggle, which is basically what you just described.

RC – Right.

EM – Um, so to do so, Jon made use of the principles of Sacred Hospitality, um, as we discussed already, uh, can you say a little bit about whether you think the intervention succeeded in the task, why or why not?

RC – Well from my point of view it is successful. But, I don't, I can't speak for others, right. I mean I can only say what I think. And because I became more involved because of it, you know, that spoke to its success for me.

EM – Right, right.

RC – And I think from other people I have spoken to, who are not parishioners, and who took part in some of the um, you know some of the activities that were open to everyone, I think from what, from the conversations I've had with those people, that their eyes were opened as well.

EM – Hunh, how so?

RC – Well, and in particular I'm speaking of a woman who is Roman Catholic, who came with us, who came with me, to one of the sessions on, um, not the dreams to reality but the uh, why don't they come to church. Um, she was, and I think there were other people too that were not members of the parish who came. That's right, there were. And um, I think they had a, it was eye opening for them because, the discussion was really frank, and involved everyone. It didn't just involve parishioners who came to the discussion.

EM – Right.

RC – Yeah.

(5:49) EM – It was good for everybody, not just the parishioners.

RC – Yeah, that's what I feel. It was good for me, and it was good for my friend who I came with, the Roman Catholic.

EM – Right right, good. Now, thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of it?

RC – Hmm. I think, I think the most significant, I think that leadership is what came out of it. Whereas before there did not seem to be any leadership. And now there seems to be that.

EM – Can you expand a little on that?

RC – Yeah, I'm just trying to put it into words, um... I think ah, the changes that occurred, discussions that took place, have put people on to a pathway that's not as disparate as it was. I think people are, from my point of view, it seems like people are moving forward together. Whereas before it was, like I said, push me pull me, people going off in all directions. I think.

EM – Oh. That's very nice. Very nice indeed. Um, so, in light of that, what are the changes in vision that you think, that the parish practice if any right now, and would you say have come from these interventions?

RC – Oh God! Say that again? (laughter)

EM – What changes in vision, or parish practices, if any, would you say have come from those interventions? In other words, like, what kind of change in attitudes or perspectives do you see, um, that have come from these...

RC – Well, I think it's made people, were, I think it's made some of the parishioners stronger. Maybe more, how do I say it, more concentrated in their vision of what is to come. And I think there's a lot of expectation about what is to come. And that, now that the ball has really started to roll, that, it seems to me that, I hope I'm right, that people are willing. They're willing participants, they're not being dragged along against their own.

EM – Ah, interesting. Now, looking back again, if the goal was to help the parish to become more open to transformation and change, the interventions, what could have done, what would you have done differently? If you were the leader, of the parish and you would have it your way, what would you have done differently?

RC – I don't know if I would have done anything differently, but I might have had created more opportunities for more discussion, more public discussion if you know what I mean. Like maybe not just talk about why don't they come to church, um, and I know there are things here that I did not participate in so I can't speak to them. But, um, I think some, sometimes you get warmed up to the idea that there's something happening and then you want to be part of that. And so you want me of it. If you know what I mean, like if there were, if there were, you know more opportunities or more, well, more topics to discuss, more opportunities to have those discussions. I think it would be really great. And not just for the parish but for everyone in the town.

(10:13) EM – That's a nice point to a segue that I missed earlier, in terms of, how would you describe the relationship to the parish church and the wider community? And I think you're touching on that a little bit.

RC – Yeah I am. Because, well, again, it's so subjective, but um, I feel that there are a lot of people, younger people, that I speak to who are not members of the parish and who probably had distanced themselves or had no connection to the

church. And I think that, I'm not going to say that they're going to jump in and become parishioners, but I think they've had, I think they see the value in "the church", you know in quotation marks, there's value in that. They, it gives them, I think it gives people something to think about.

EM – Good. Good, thank you. Um, so, following up on that a little bit, how would you describe the life of the parish? Was it active, was it stagnant, was it dying, was it life giving?

RC – Yeah, yeah yeah. Well in my view, it was pretty stagnant, and it looked like it was dying. I mean, to be honest, and I mean, that's from you know, I know a lot of the older people in the church, and you know, my partner's mother was one of them, so I saw it from her perspective, of a ninety something year old, who had her own view of the church and, um, she was very progressive, and would point out to me things that hadn't worked in the past so why would they work in the future. So, you know, let's do something different, and I think, I mean, she's a bit of an exception because, um, you know, because she was exceptional, but, um, I think that kind of, that kind of thought, those thoughts that discussion about the progressivity opens everybody's eyes, you know.

EM – So, can you now describe for me what you believe is the full potential that your parish is capable of at this time?

RC – Well I think we're just discovering the potential. And I really think that if, um, if we progress the way we're progressing and go in the direction it looks like we're going, that there's unlimited potential. Um, especially to, to do things for people who don't go to church. People who, you know, who aren't part of the parish, because that's so clique-ish, it's so clan-ish, it's not inviting, and I think that it's more inviting. It looks like it will be more inviting in the future and that, you know those invitations extended to the community at large will result in a more cohesive community.

EM – Ok, so you're seeing the efforts being, uh, put into place right now, which is very good because the vision is a very optimistic one. There is much reason for hope. But what do you think the case is right now? What the parish is capable of right now?

(14:06) RC – Oh.

EM – Because from what you've been telling me, the interventions have been very positive, and you're actually seeing somewhat of a change in attitude.

RC – A shift, yeah.

EM – A shift, yes.

RC – Ok, um, so did you say the potential right now?

EM – Correct.

RC – Right now, at this moment in time, um, I still think a lot has to be done. Because um, well, I think people, it sounds a little bit schizophrenic but, I think people are finding their, their place in all that. They're finding their footing. And, you know, anyone who has been put off balance and has to get rebalanced, um,

with assistance to move forward. And I think that's what's important. To, to, um, well to keep moving forward obviously, but, to do so, I don't know, I want to say at a pace that, I was a bit, again, dichotomy, because we want to move forward more quickly, but not leave behind those who aren't moving as fast, if you know what I mean.

EM – Right, yes.

RC – I mean, that must be such a struggle. It is a struggle. I can see it. Because there are those who don't want to move forward at the same pace that others do. And yet, I think everyone, well I can't speak for everybody but, in my view, my view is, if we don't move forward then there will be no point. There will be no church.

EM – Right. Would you describe, um, what the parish is capable of right now, would you describe it having more or less potential than before the leadership intervention?

RC – Oh I think it has more potential, absolutely.

EM – Ok good. Alright, um, what would you need, personally, from the parish leadership now in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

RC – What would I need personally.

EM – Um, from the leadership, not necessarily personally, but what would you see that's needed for the parish to achieve what you described a little while ago when you said the parish is capable, it has so much potential, what do you need to see from the leadership to get there? To take us there?

(16:49) RC – I think just maintaining the course. Maintaining the course and not swaying. And moving forward, and I want to say almost in spite of the drawbacks. And the drawbacks being those people that don't want to move. But, you know, there will be no progress made if, there will be no progress made if everything is slowed down to accommodate the slowest. I mean, that sounds terrible, I mean, I don't know. It's, you know. It's, there's an expression about appealing to the loudest and whiniest, you know. I mean there's people with such strong opinions, um, about everything the church has to do and offer, and a lot of those opinions, though they're not my opinion that's for sure, I think they're becoming less relevant. Which is unfortunate, but those opinions are less relevant.

EM – Ok. Well, I think that pretty much covers it. I just wanted to say thank you very much for agreeing to participate. This is for the good of the parish and the church at large.

RC – Excellent.

EM – Thank you so much.

RC – Thank you!

EM – Ed Montano
WG – Wendy Gibb

EM – Well we'd like to start by saying thank you very much to Wendy Gibb for agreeing to do the, uh, to help us out with the research for Jon Martin's doctoral research. So, as you will remember from the consent letter, Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry degree from St. Paul's University in Ottawa. The question that we are exploring with this research is, do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parish churches become more open to transformation so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve? So that is the main question that, we have a few more questions that, you know, that should be addressing that.

WG – To narrow it down, kind of. (laughter)

EM – Exactly.

WG – Put it in sections, sort of thing.

EM – That's right. So, to start, can you describe the state of the parish before Jon arrived, in your own words?

WG – Um, we had some interim priests for a little bit there because there was, um, I don't know how to put it exactly, an issue with a previous priest, and there seemed to be a great deal of conflict, or issues, or different things. And some people were less willing to... accepting, and other people were saying no, it's gotta change. And so there was a sort of a... so this person left and then we had some interim preachers, and then Jon came to us. And one thing we knew, he was going to stay. Which made a difference. He was not just there... he was actually going to stay, and go through things with us, and deal with things together rather than, well I'm here for a short time.

EM – Right. Ah, how was the financial situation?

WG – Ah, difficult. Like most of the churches, traditional churches if you will, finances just weren't there. Um, we had buildings that were built in eras when, well to a large extent that the Anglican was the established church in the community and that's where you went if you were going to church, kind of thing. And now we have a very shifting dynamic, people, a lot of the people are coming to church are older, and trying to bring in younger people seems to be difficult. I would say that most of the traditional churches in this area have experienced a decline, and cause I'm working in the newspaper I've actually been to a number of closures and written the articles.

EM – Okay, so that's a nice and unique perspective.

WG – I've done, uh, Lutherans, two different evangelical and traditional Lutheran, and uh United, so I've been to, and even St. John's closure. So I've covered those.

(3:08) EM – Right, right. What was the state of the weekly attendance before Jon showed up?

WG – Hit and miss. Well, there were, I mean, those of us who went pretty regularly were there, other people chose not to come to show their disapproval of some things, or... and um, so it was declining. And as people passed away and families changed and people retired and some of them left, the sort of, who was coming changed too.

EM – Right.

WG – Cause I'd always gone, I live in Iroquois so I'd always gone to St. John's. So when I, I was one of the ones that said, well, I have to make the transition to St. James, that's the way it is.

EM – Ok. How would you describe the relationship between the parish church and the wider community? Was it a little bit active, was it stagnant, nonexistent?

WG – Um, it's... St. John's it was about two things we did in the community. Not, I mean, people did things individually, on their own, through the Lions or through different clubs and things. We had this roast beef dinner, but basically it was a fundraiser for the church. Ah, this kind of thing. There was, I think we got more community involved after Jon came. Like, we used to do a vocation bible school and that sort of thing when Pat was here, and then that kind of fell by the board. And ah, but now, you know, there's messy church and there's movies and there's, even the Taste of South Dundas are inviting people to come.

EM – Right, cool. And how would you describe the life of the parish itself? Again, was it active, was it stagnant, was it dying, was it life giving, was it dead? The life of the church, the life of the parish.

WG – Before Jon came?

EM – Yup.

WG – Um, I would say on hold. Like, nobody knew what the future was going to be, everybody was a little on the tense side, and it was, it was sort of, whoa where are we going to go. We can't continue to pay for things that we can't continue to pay for anymore.

EM – That's right.

WG – And what are we going to do?

EM – That's an interesting, on hold. That's pretty interesting. Now, looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

(5:50) WG – Uh, depending a little bit on your background, um, some of the members who were very long retired or used to it being a certain way found it more difficult. Not all of them, some of them said hey, I be 90 but I don't care, I can try something else. Um, those of us who are still more out in the community working and in the wider world, and had experienced I think more of the changes that are out in the bigger community didn't find it as difficult. Um, you know some people,

to them, going to church was... we talked about this at one of the worship meetings... going to church was a comfort place. You go in, it's the same, it's the same. It's the comfort, it's not, you know, you don't walk in and oh my gosh, somebody's tossed a bomb in here.

EM – Right. Ah, yeah. Now, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could find a way forward to get past their immediate struggle. And to do so Jon made use of principles of Sacred Hospitality as we discussed above. Can you say a little bit about whether you think the interventions succeeded in that task? Why or why not?

WG – You're talking more about the meetings and letting people talk about...

EM – Correct.

WG – There were a lot of meetings. I mean, there was never any attempt to hide things. It was always transparent. Here's the situation, here's what we're up against, let's talk. Um, there were, there was a small group of us who were sort of brought in, and I don't know what did we would call ourselves, I think the word is in here somewhere, the worship or the transitions or the... and they were from both churches, and also from Holy Trinity. And so, and people were encouraged. There were meetings after church, there were informal meetings, there were meetings at night, there were, people were encouraged to say what they thought. Nobody was ever told no, we don't want to hear you. Some people just used it to vent, but... well that's typical at any meeting.

EM – (laughter) Yes. Now um, focusing a little bit more on the principle of Sacred Hospitality that we looked at there, Jon was trying to, was doing some pastoral interventions using those principles. Do you think those specific interventions were effective?

WG – Not sure quite how to... How to answer a little bit. Going back, yeah, he invited others, um, a lot of people sort of rely on their internet a lot too. And he opened that up always and said... and one thing he did stress that I always thought was kind of important was, before you, ah how shall I put this... before you blow up, get upset, write nasty emails, or huddle at the back of the community hall bad mouthing things, ask what's going on. Speak to people. Don't assume that a rumour you heard was somehow true. Like, we had a lot of, I think, people who were whispering and chatting behind. I think that's why our bulletin now says if you've got a question or you want to know something, here's the people to ask. Don't just assume that what you hear kicked around the community is the truth. And I found that even being on the committee, I'd be at the committee and I'd be there, and I'd hear what was being said, and I'd go and hear a completely different version and I thought, wait a minute. Where did you get this?

(10:16) EM – Yeah. Ok. So it was, even though those interventions were aimed at showing the people what, you know, the parish, or the church itself not just the parish but the church itself needs to be doing in terms of you know, being engaged in the community and being of service to the community, there was still some resistance. Is that what I'm hearing?

WG – Ah, there was still some resistance, yes. There were some people that never seemed to reconcile to the fact that it wasn't going to be... there were people who

were, remain, very angry that St. John's was closed. Well why would you pick St. James? If you live in this community long enough, you would know that that attitude, Iroquois versus Morrisburg versus Holy Trinity has been around a long time. If Morrisburg gets something Iroquois says, well why didn't we get it? Iroquois gets something and Morrisburg says, well why are we spending our tax money on Iroquois? So it's not a strange phenomenon in this particular area. You ask people in the community and they go, oh yeah.

EM – And this was far beyond the spectrum of church.

WG – Oh absolutely. This was like, I mean if they get a stop sign. There's a thing, why did Iroquois get a roundabout? Because they needed a round... and now Morrisburg's going to have to have one too, you know. You'd be amazed at, and so... this, this us versus them a little bit goes way, way past just the church. It's just a, and you'd think after all these years we're all South Dundas now, but, not necessarily.

EM – Right, it was just like, I remember Ottawa before amalgamation. We were, let's see, Ottawa, Kanata, Nepean, Gloucester and Orleans, five different cities going into one.

WG – Yes. And did people always get along happily and cheerfully?

EM – I, it was a little bit more difficult to gauge because we're so much larger populations, but yeah there was, I remember certain things people were saying.

WG – Like this, we would just read letters we'd get to the editor every now and again, and just, oh my goodness, everybody, why are we always concerned with Iroquois? Why are we always concerned with Morris... and I come from outside this area. I come from Sarnia, so I'm looking at it going, what? What? I didn't grow up with it. Apparently if you grow up with it it's a real thing.

EM – Apparently. By the same token, you were saying that some people were actually, like you, you said ok, if this is what I have to do this is what I have to do. Given these interventions, so, it was, it had a positive effect, that's what I'm hearing.

(13:10) WG – Yes, it did because um, there are, now, Iroquois was very small, to start with. And the reality is, you can't support, and they make concessions here at St. James. They listen to some of the things that Iroquoians didn't want to see or weren't happy about. For example, we were never very touchy feely in Iroquois, and having to hold hands to say the Lord's prayer, is... and you know, bless them, they stopped that because that was something that, for whatever reason, they changed the time of the services a little bit to accommodate. Ours was always at 11 and theirs was always at 9 because the priest used to have to leap in, in their robes and fly down the road whatever the weather. So they adjusted the time to try to accommodate both. You know, there was, there was some serious efforts to try to please, you know, to make it so that everybody would feel comfortable together.

EM – Right. Now, thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of them?

WG – Well, the fact that we're still here.

EM – Fair enough.

WG – We're still here, we're still hanging on here. Um, we, more or less I think the Iroquois contingent has more or less adjusted to being, you know, to coming to St. James and working together with the folks at St. James. Um, and I like some of the things... it just seems to me that in the last couple or three years, we got a little bit more out in the community. Um, out there, like bringing the Imam in. We had a guy carrying a sign outside the hall, about Muslims kills Christians, marching up and down when Imam came to town. And I interviewed him. Like, he, very graciously sat down and did an interview with me. And Jon told me a little bit about him too. And the Imam talked to me, and was just, yeah, I'm fine. But that brought in not just Anglicans, but there were United, there were Presbyterians, and, interestingly, Christian Reformed. There were a couple Catholics that... but now, the Catholic priests don't seem to get, especially involved. But, um, it surprised me the number of religious leaders and people in the community who showed up.

EM – That's helpful.

WG – Yes. And to talk to him, to hear what he had to say. Some of them weren't, you know, were there because they had serious questions. And the guy walking around with the sign, pardon, I should say this, I've known him forever, he's kind of crazy... but everybody just simply walked by him and the Imam paid no attention, and he answered questions.

EM – Good. Good. Um, what changes in vision or parish practices if any would you say have come from these interventions?

WG – I like uh, one of the things that Jon in particular introduced was different kinds of services. Um, I'm not, a born Anglican.

EM – Neither am I.

(16:49) WG – I came up with the United church tradition and quite frankly I didn't go near a church for about 30 years of my life. I just made a decision one day to sort of come back, and I seem to have been back ever since. And I, to some extent chose Anglican because some very good friends of mine went there so, you know, to that extent I thought well. So they welcomed me in, I had somebody that said come on in, sure! But um, one thing I liked is, I do, I'm also a history person and I love the old ceremonies, the connections to the past. But by the same token I rather enjoy some of these newer things that are going on, you know, I like the different... they're not too radically different, but they're not, it's not always the same. Now again, some people didn't like that, but.

EM – I hear you.

WG – Yes.

EM - Looking back, if the goals was to help parishes become more open to transformation and change, what would you say was missing from those interventions?

WG – I wish we could get more young people. I wish we could get, um, we did have a couple of younger families in Iroquois, and, but, it's the old thing they're so tied up in so many different things. For the longest time in this community sports weren't scheduled on a Sunday morning, so a young family... but nowadays they're at hockey at 5 in the morning. Or they've got... but some of these young families while they don't attend the church regularly are bringing their kids to messy church or, seem to feel welcome there.

EM – Interesting.

WG – So I wish, wish there were more or people of, younger than I am anyway who like, you see in some of the more evangelical or whatever churches you see a lot of young people. Teenagers, and I wish we could... cause there used to be a very active, very strong, sort of teen group in the church. But same problem. They grew up and moved on.

EM – Right. What would you have done differently?

WG – Oh, I don't know. (laughter) I mean, given all of the situations I think Jon sort of leaped in there with both feet. And he knew I think, he had a pretty good idea, I think the Bishop made it pretty clear that there were some issues. And I think he stepped in and, like I'm not sure that you're ever going to reconcile some...

EM – The two places?

WG – Well, I don't know if you're ever going to reconcile some of the attitudes, like accepting... same sex marriage was a big issue. But uh, I think Jon and to some extent you do it a little bit, talks about inclusivity. You know, somebody chooses to live a little bit differently than you doesn't mean they're not welcome. And this kind of thing.

(20:22) EM – Ok.

WG – And whether I'm just answering your questions or beating all around the bush here.

EM – You're doing great. (laughter)

WG – Says the good interviewer!

EM – I appreciate the compliment coming from a professional.

WG – Oh, not very professional but, I just get really interested in stories that people have to tell.

EM – Right, exactly. Wendy can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential that your parish is capable of right now?

WG – I think right now, I like some of the reaching out that's going on. I like that we are trying the messy church, we are trying to be visible at different things. I like this idea even of Taste of Dundas, because it's kind of tied to us. I like the fact that maybe they're talking about doing a little theatre or... and I love the fact that the church is becoming a bit of a focal point for the symphony orchestra. For the

musicians, for different people to come in and feel comfortable and welcome in this building.

EM - Very good. Um, would you describe it being more or less potential than before the leadership interventions described above?

WG - I think, hm, I think there's probably more potential. I think it helps, without mentioning names, my, one of my colleagues in reporter business is not a church goer. Never has been, but, has struck up a very strong friendship with Jon. It feels, can talk to him about things, and has attended some of the men's breakfasts and things, and I think a young priest who sort of, like you know, Jon's played sports around here. He also wasn't afraid to, and anybody who loves Doctor Who can't be all bad. (laughter). But he seems to, and I think he's got, because his mother was also out there in the community too. Like Pat is a very, we did plays and activities for the Apple Tree Ministry, and filled the playhouse, and things like this, and I think Pat's thinking, well let's get some of this rolling again.

EM - Yeah.

WG - And it gets people, they sell, oh, those are the Anglicans, ok.

EM - And I think that's really good.

(23:08) WG - Yeah.

EM - And finally Wendy, what would you need from Parish leadership now in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

WG - Well, boy that's almost an unanswerable question. I think they're on the best path that they can be. I wish there was a way to go out into the community. I know that there's a number of families, especially here in Morrisburg... that was the reason for keeping things here in Morrisburg, is that there's a lot more I would say families in need. People who are in need in this community. I know one thing that Jon does is, he is on a phone list if a woman is in trouble with abuse or something like that, he's, this church says yup, you call our priest you come to us we'll find a place. We're helping, we're working with immigrants and new Canadians. We're, but just a way to, I don't know, to say to people, come on, try it, you might like it. (laughter)

EM - Excellent. Um, anything at all that you think the leadership, and by leadership I don't just mean Jon, I mean like the wardens and those folks...

WG - Yeah, I think we have some very dedicated people who have put a lot of... I, I mean I used to do the music for St. John's, and this kind of thing. And I always found that kind of interesting. Um, and, I think, I've got so occupied with my job lately that, you know, I'm not on as many committees as I used to, but they've had some fantastic wardens around here. Some people who have gone above and beyond and done their... And I, the other thing is that they've always been open, too. You want to call them to discuss something, well call them. Don't listen to gossip or rumour, speak to the people, ask, is this what was said? And, you know.

EM - Good. Anything else Wendy?

WG – No, I think that covers everything that you wanted to do.

EM – I believe it does. I just wanted to say thank you again for agreeing to this. And this is going to benefit not just Jon in his studies for his Doctorate, but it will benefit the church at large as well.

WG – Oh I hope so.

EM – Thank you so much Wendy.

WG – You're very welcome.

F.9 - WL

EM – Ed Montano

WL – Wendy Lewis

EM – I would like to thank Wendy Lewis for agreeing to do this interview to help with the research for Jon's, um, doctoral work. And as you remember Wendy, from the consent letter, Jon Martin is currently working towards a Doctor of Ministry from St. Paul's University in Ottawa. The questions that we are exploring with this research is, do intentional leadership interventions based on the principles of Sacred Hospitality help rural parishes, uh churches, become more open to transformation so that they can meet the ministry challenges within the communities they serve. Now, to start, can you describe the state of your parish before Jon arrived in your own words?

WL – The parish was three churches, really three separate identities in one rural, short community. So, Iroquois, Morrisburg, and Riverside Heights operating as three separate parishes underneath the guise of being one parish.

EM – When you say a guise of being one parish what do you mean?

WL – Well, they were supposed to be one parish with three parts, but instead they were three separate parts, they weren't really operating as a whole parish working together.

EM – Ok. Um, are you familiar how the financial situation was?

WL – Yes I am. I think that all three parishes were financially struggling.

EM – Ok, and what was the state of your weekly attendance.

WL – Um, I was attending at St. John's, and our attendance would have to be somewhere between 15 and 25 on a regular kind of thing, I think the average being about 20. Uh, the average being about 20.

EM – Ok. Um, can you describe the relationship between the parish church and the community, and the wider community?

WL – So, I can speak to the Iroquois one, is that the church did do some outreach ministry with what we called, um, messy church. And so we had started engaging the United church and the Presbyterian church and ourselves, and so we were doing some interfaith stuff. We would do, once a year a barbecue, each church would kinda do a Sunday barbecue, we did some stuff around Easter, ah, and the messy church stuff as I said. Doing nothing with the Catholic parish in Iroquois. In Morrisburg, over the past years, I know that the Pentecostal church and the Anglican church worked together to do a youth group, um, I believe Riverside Heights, even though it was located next door to a Lutheran church, didn't do anything with any other parish.

EM – Mmm, ok. And what about the community, like, not necessarily just churches in the community but what about, um, other things in the community in general?

(3:03) WL – Um, I think that the churches, in connection with the churches?

EM – In the community, not just the church, not just other churches...

WL – Ok. The community of Iroquois has become predominantly a retirement community, I would say that um, 50 and over are the prevailing age groups. Now we have had some subdivisions that have gone up and we have had some younger families move in, but not that reflected in the attendance at churches. I believe Morrisburg became more of a community of higher needs where a lot of lower socioeconomic families landed. And Riverside Heights is really more of a tourist kind of area with Upper Canada Village being in its scope, so there was some cottages, some camp ground stuff, but I think it was mostly transient except for maybe the few families that lived very close to the building.

EM – Ok. And how would you describe the life of the parish? Was it active parish life, or stagnant, was it dying, was it life giving? Those kinds of things.

WL – So, the church in Iroquois, and I, really probably the one I'm speaking more to that building simply because that's the building I belonged to, I had long started struggling with the fact that all we were doing was putting money on the collection

plate so that we could cover the costs of the bills. We didn't, we weren't able to do outreach, we weren't able to give money to the food bank. Now, we had other people who were support the food bank, the food share as it's called now, and we had other people supporting other ministries, myself and my husband were supporting Mary Sherwood and the Madagascar school project. But as a group we had no money to support any outreach. We basically were in, we were becoming internal, we were drawing off our GIC's to pay for repairs that needed to be done, we were um, we had an active ACW group that was quite enclosed. They started, the met in the evenings at first but then they moved it because of the age of the women to the afternoons, and so then it didn't include anybody out from the external community, and it didn't include anybody of a younger age that was still working. So it became more enclosed, the whole group did. And, it really hindered its own growth. The Sunday school, we had um, we had about six children that would come on a regular basis, and they slowly started aging out, and as we became this bigger parish, they didn't follow, down here.

EM – I see. Ok. Now, looking back, how would you describe the parish's feelings and attitudes towards change?

(6:09) WL – Well, some of the people had actually verbally said that they would not, they would NOT be going to Morrisburg to worship. That their money and their bodies would not be helping that parish at all if that was the thing. Which made me realize that they were not operating as one parish, they were operating as three singular parishes, because they actually saw that building as their parish, not the whole three churches as their parish. Which left me very struggling. At that point I, actually, was very seriously thinking about moving to a different, new parish, a new denomination if I have to, that was more, going to be more inclusive and going to be more outreach ministry. I really um, didn't want my tithing to just go to pay for a heating bill for a building that nobody was using.

EM – Right. So people didn't like change, is that what I'm hearing you say?

WL – No, people didn't change. People actually became more, I found more negative, and more closed off than, actually than I thought they would. I thought that once the changing started coming that some of them would come around, and I found that some of their attitudes were actually so negative that they became toxic for others.

EM – Mmm, ok. Um, the initial goal of the leadership interventions was to help parishes be more open to change and transformation so that they could, you know, find a way forward, and get past that struggle. To do so, Jon made use of principles of Sacred Hospitality, as we talked about. Can you say a little bit about whether you think those interventions succeeded in that task?

WL – So, in my own view, Sacred Hospitality did not work for St. John's, because they had already decided who they were going to be hospitable to. They were hospitable to each other, and they were outreaching to each other. But, as soon as new families came in, which we did have, one of the Sunday school families I talk about was a new family, um, there was nobody outwardly inviting them to stay for our monthly potlucks, and when they did stay, myself and Mark and a couple of other people were the ones that would sit with them, and kind of take up the conversation and try to be inclusive. But some of the people that I had perceived as key people in the community, in that parish, were not doing that. They sat at a

table by themselves and were very enclosed. There were no extra chairs. Nobody pulled up a high chair to that table to invite the family with the baby, and so, um, I would say that they ended up being their own demise. And those, that really, if I look back and I see that table over there, that is the table that has not come along with us to Morrisburg, to the bigger parish, to do the changing that needed. Those people have either stopped going to church or have chosen to go to a different building.

EM – Ok. So, if I hear you correctly then, Sacred Hospitality was not successful in, at St. John's.

WL – At St. John's. It was not successful at St. John's.

EM – And what do you, do you see anything differently elsewhere?

WL – So, I, we've now moved here to, we've moved to St. James and we've come along. Um, I see there are some people who are very hospitable, but I also see some people who have not been really super open to the change. I also see a parish that's much older than I had thought it was, and some of the reasons the hospitality is falling is they just don't have the energy to do it anymore. Um, I find that there's a few people that are doing a lot of work, but they, for myself so I have done messy church here in this church, in St. James, and I've needed people to help, and I have lots of people who are willing to come out. They're not willing to take on the whole project themselves, but they don't mind doing, helping with the work as long as you assign them a smaller task. That's manageable. So I would say that there are, the greater number are really trying to practice the Sacred Hospitality. Some of them have fallen off, like I said, but I think for the greater part the percentage is much higher here than it was at St. John's.

(11:17) EM – Ok, thank you. Um, thinking about those leadership interventions, what would you say is the most significant thing to come out of them?

WL – Well, the closure of the building. It was very significant. We um, and the loss of people was very significant. I would say the most significant things to come out are the closing of the building, the people that we've lost, and then the new friendships and the new groups that are forming at St. James since the transformation has gone on.

EM – Such as?

WL – Such as the messy church, trying to revive, revitalize the Ash Wednesday day, our family game night, our um, movies in the church yard. Now we haven't got a lot of support from the parish, but I think that a lot of the parish people support the ministry, and have come and asked how it's going, so they're just not people who want to go out at 9 o'clock at night and watch a movie. And I think that speaks to the predominant age of our group. It isn't that they're not interested in the ministry, it's just that it's not something that, when you're 75 years old you want to go sit outside at that time of night when the mosquitoes are going to start coming out and biting you.

EM – Right, right.

WL – You know? I get it. That wasn't the reason for the outreach. The outreach was to get the parish, the movies in the church yard, the purpose was to draw in some of those families that we knew needed that kind of an outlet. The people support it, they don't support it by physically being there, but they do support it through prayer I feel.

EM – Yeah, ok. Um, what changes in vision or parish practices if any would you say have come through those interventions?

WL – I'm not really sure I understand the question.

EM – Um, the changes in the vision or the parish practices, do you think ...

WL – Well I'd like to think the parish vision has changed from being insular to being outward. And I'm, insular meaning, I think through the readings of the books, through the um, the workshops that we've done, through those things I think that people see that the purpose for us is not to take care of just the ones who come on Sunday morning. But we have to have more of an outreach vision, and I think more of the people at St. James have kind of gotten on board and see that as what our greatest need is. Whether everybody understands how we have to go about doing it is another whole, we still are in the learning process of how do we do it.

(14:17) EM – Right.

WL – And how do we do it effectively. We're not sure how to get those families that are at need, to where we need to use, to do them. I have some of my own ideas down the road, but that's for another day.

EM – (Laughter) Ok! Again, looking back, if the goal was to help the parish become more open to transformation and change, what would you say was missing from the interventions?

WL – I don't think anything was missing from the interventions. I think what was missing is the spiritual piece from the people that we were trying to facilitate the intervention through. In saying that, I mean that if a person has already decided that they're not going to do something no matter what your vision is, or how good it is, you can't change their minds. And so we saw that. The people who didn't want to come left. They've fallen off, their donations are not there. The people who wanted to try to work towards change have come along on board, and they're doing what they can to keep it going. I do think that there are some of them who worry about, because they were such leaders at the other building, don't want to be taking on full leadership roles like they had before. They want to kind of lessen their load. There seems there's more of us, so we should be able to spread the work out a little bit more. There isn't 17 people sitting in the pews on a Sunday now. We need more, and we're hoping that some of those other people pick up some of those little pieces and shards that are kind of left behind.

EM – Mmm, ok. What would you have done differently?

WL – What would I have done differently? Well, it's interesting because I've thought about it many times. Cause there are sometimes when I pray and that I think that what I should have done differently is maybe made more of an effort to save St. John's as the building. One of my concerns as I've moved forward is the repair

costs of St. James. One of my other concerns about St. James is the basement, where we have to do ministry out of, not being a warm, inviting, easily accessible place. Whereas I felt that at St. John's everything was on the same level. Now, talk about building a hall, adding on to it makes me very happy, but I'm not sure financially that's the smartest way to go still, because we still have a \$40,000 deficit. Well this goes back to what I said I wasn't going to talk about. I think what has to happen now for outreach ministry is that all Christian churches need to realize that we have to work together. So I think instead of becoming the Anglican parish of South Dundas we have to become the Parishes of South Dundas, and start working on ministry as a group.

EM – Mhmm.

(17:23) WL – And I come from a children's ministry perspective. And if we all work towards getting children to know who Jesus Christ is and how he works in our lives, the buildings, we'll be able to sustain more buildings than separate. We can, by all being so diverse, I think it's going to come to working together more, and that comes to being the hospitality part. If we're hospitable to other brothers and sisters in Christ I think we'll see, we'll yield more results than we do as trying to stay insular as Anglicans.

EM – Hmm. Interesting. Can you describe for me what you believe is the full potential for your parish, and what it's capable of at this time?

WL – So, I kind of like, leading into that, I think my parish is capable of embracing the other Christian denominations in this community, and I believe that our potential is unlimited. If we work together, all the Christians in this community. I've had an experience this week where, my husband is working on um, 100 Men of South Dundas, and one of the men who were at the meeting, I heard him say to the group, "You guys over at the Anglican church are really doing some kind of, some amazing things, I'd like to be involved." He may go to the United Church, I don't know, he may be Catholic, I have no idea what church he goes to, but it's the power of us all working together that can accomplish more than us just staying as one building. Sometimes maybe buildings are our problem. Jesus never preached in a building. Today's sermon told us that, he fed 5,000 and he was on the side of the mountain and I think the place they talked about was the grass.

EM - (Laughter) Yes. Um, what do you think your parish's potential is today? What is today capable of?

WL – I think our parish right now is only capable of sustaining itself. It is not, it isn't capable of growth right now. I think we have a lot of work before we get to that point. I think we need more people on board with the growth piece, and then I think we will see what we want. But I don't think yet, we're not there yet. We don't have enough, there is a few people doing the work, and there has to be more because all we're gonna see is burn out.

EM – Having said that, would you describe it having more or less potential than the leadership interventions described above?

WL – I think we have more potential now. I think that um, we are now seeing who the leaders are in the buildings and the people who are going to be staying around to help do the work. I think those people need to be prayed for and supported. And

I think that they need to be able to go out and find the people in the congregation who will support them in doing their leadership roles. Because there are workers and there are leaders. And I think that we're, we're finding out right now where everybody fits. Cause we're still really young in this process, we're like toddlers in this process right now. We have not grown to that mature status. And we may never get there. If we, it may be a slower process than we would like. We need it to happen faster probably, but I think we have some innovative ideas, Taste of the Seaway is hopefully gonna help us get out of some financial difficulties, but getting out of financial difficulties cannot be our only goal as a church family. Our church family has to be, how do we take care of those that we are being called to take care of. So, I see the roles coming around, and I see people starting to look further down the road, but like I said, I think we're still very young at this.

(21:42) EM – Good. And finally Wendy, what would you need from the parish leadership now in order to achieve the full potential that you believe your parish is capable of?

WL – Prayer. I think we need prayer. I think our prayer life, after reading the Autopsy of a Deceased, um, congregation or parish...

EM – Church.

WL – Church. I believe that prayer is going to be our first most valuable thing. I think that coming together in prayer is going to be huge for us. I think we have some really strong leadership in that area. And I think we need to get those people in a position where they are teaching others how to pray without fear. Because right now I think a lot of people are still like, well, I'm not worthy enough to pray in a big group. I just, I think I just witnessed that downstairs, where everybody was waiting for somebody to volunteer to say the closing prayer. Anyways, I think that we need those people kind of right now to step up. I think prayer is key. And I think outreach projects that we can get more people involved in. Outreach projects that will showcase some of the skills that we have in this parish. Cause we have a lot of skills, a lot of gifts are here, and if those gifts are being used to the glory of God I think we're going to be able to achieve a lot more.

EM – How can the leadership of the parish help with that?

WL – I think the leadership of the parish is already working towards it. Um, and I see things like the men's breakfast starting the 100 Men of South Dundas coming as one of them, I see some of our smaller projects, movies in the church yard, I see things like Taste of the Seaway showcasing that, I see the Tilted Steeple showcasing those things. We're, we've got some good ground work going on. We need to build on it, but I think that we've got a good starting point. We've probably got a better starting point than we've had in the last 15 years.

EM – Good, good enough. Well, that's all the questions I have for you Wendy. I would like to thank you very much for your time and your input. Thank you so much.

WL – You're welcome.

Appendix G – Holy Week Retreat

Holy Week Retreat – Sacred Hospitality

1. Opening Prayer
2. Welcome and Introductions
3. Christian Hospitality – A Short History
4. Sacred Hospitality and the Benedictine Life
5. The Four Principles: Rootedness, Respect, Invitation, Openness
6. Our Parish Through a Hospitable Lens
7. Small Group Discussions
8. Large Group Feedback
9. Closing Prayer

Appendix H – Sample Sermons

Epiphany 2014:

I think it must be a Christmas miracle. Every year, on this Sunday, priests everywhere look at the readings and think to themselves, “I have a story about the celebration of a baby, where people of different spiritual beliefs come from near and far, because the joys and hopes of this new child are so important the most unlikely of people will end up in the most unlikely of places so that they can celebrate and honour this child.”

I am so pleased to have you all here as we, people of different faith beliefs, from different places gather to welcome Xavier into the household of God, and in a cultural way, have a rite of passage that marks the joy and hope of his birth.

I am also really excited because this is the perfect opportunity to highlight the story of the Wise Men from a different perspective...which also happens to be a major part of my doctoral thesis...so thank you Eric and Angele...as the results of your intimacy also manages to help me with my homework ☺

This morning is the perfect example of how our world has changed over the years. Several hundred years ago we lived in an age where, as Charles Taylor puts it, “it was virtually inconceivable that that people wouldn’t all have a rather similar view on who God was, and what it meant to consider something sacred in the world.”

Today we live in a world that is very different. Not only do we have a multitude of different spiritual beliefs, practices, and philosophies, but we also live in a time when people within the faith(s) have vastly different concepts of what sacred practices and rituals mean.

Take this morning for example. In the days of old (depending on how far back you go) baptism would mean different things. At one point it was believed that baptism was the washing away of sinfulness, and for a short period of time, it was against the law to not have your child baptized within a short period of time after its birth. For others, it symbolized the dying and rising with Christ, being reborn into the life of faith.

For some it has been a public declaration about a way of life that they are choosing to follow, and for others...it’s has been a family tradition...a way to keep grandma and grandpa happy...a time to publically celebrate a new baby in the community...and for some, it’s simply making sure all the bases are covered...just in case.

I imagine that in this room this morning, we probably have each one of those beliefs present...everything from deep faithful concepts, to keeping others happy, to celebrating Xavier’s birth, to simply making sure everything is covered...just in case.

The thing is, I actually think this is a fantastic scenario to be in. It gives the church a chance practice a new form of hospitality (that doesn't insist on conversion and judgement...or superstition), and it gives people from the outside world a chance to (hopefully) feel welcomed within the church community...for who they authentically are.

Notice that in the story of the wise men, when they find the Christ-child, they are never asked to convert and leave their authentic selves or faiths behind...they are welcomed for who they are...as they are. At the same time, they are able to honour and celebrate the baby Jesus...and to recognize that there is something special about this moment, even though it will turn into a way of life different than their own.

This is one of those moments of true hospitality...when people can welcome, and be welcomed by, those who are radically different, and in that exchange, find they might just deepen their own faith philosophies...and reconnect and share in our common humanity...to see each other than more than the labels and assumptions we might have about each other.

This morning, Xavier has managed to gather all of us here together...from near and far...conservative and liberal Christians, traditionalists and progressives, spiritual but not religious, atheists and agnostics...we have all gathered as people called by God, or called by Angele...to come and celebrate the hope and joy that is his new life...a life created out of love...and it is this love that is able to join us as one community, despite all of our differences, in one place today.

This morning Xavier will be formally welcomed into the household of God and the family of the church...whatever that means to each of us. In its most simple form, it means that Xavier will be raised in a way that teaches him to treat other people, and the planted with love and dignity...he will be taught to explore the mysteries of life and the universe...he will be taught to be a person who has hope for the world and chooses to try his best to love everyone...even when that might not be so easy...like when he gets grounded for the first time...or Eric and Angele discover there was a secret sleep over they weren't aware of...☺...this morning is also the formal declaration of the church that no matter where he goes, or what he does, he will always have a home here...this community, and the church at large will always be there to make sure he knows he is loved...and that he has a safe place to go.

This will be part of the Christian tradition that we pass on to him this morning. However, as we mentioned about hospitality, it is also important to recognize the needs and beliefs of those you welcome as well...so, instead of a formal prayer this morning, I'd like to switch it up a bit and use a piece of music. It's a song that speaks of hope...even in the darkest of moments...I think that's a message that is important no matter what our different faiths are...and it also happens to be a song that I very much associate with the story of Eric and Angele...the story of hope...that lead to love...that lead to the birth of this magnificent child...

This morning, the story of Epiphany is our story as well...no matter where we come from...a child born out of love calls us together to be people of hope...and while it's not exactly an angelic hymn...there is a song that I think fits very well...

Easter 6, 2014

A team of scientists decided one day that they were going to build a net that allowed them to finally discover all the mysteries of the deep ocean. They hired a boat that took them out to the deepest regions of the ocean and they lowered their newly built net that with net holes as small as 3 inches, they were sure would give them all the answers they were looking for. Afterwards, when all the new sea life had been discovered, a reporter asked what had surprised them the most about their investigation. The lead scientist replied, “The most amazing discovery we made, was that even in the deepest recesses of the ocean, there is no creature smaller than 3 inches.”

Obviously, with net holes that were 3 inches big, it's not that there wasn't anything to find, but rather, anything smaller than the net hole would pass straight through...so the scientists would have no idea what was really down there.

I wonder if there was a level of humility and understanding that was based on this principle that inspired the Athenians to build an altar to an unknown God. There is a wisdom that suggests that we as humans will never understand everything...in terms of the sacred, we can't possibly know what is true for anyone other than ourselves...and that if we are honest with ourselves, it's even tough to be sure what's reasonably true for ourselves.

That's why our religion is based on something called faith, and not knowledge. Objective knowledge is something that is based on proof, scientific processing, analyzed information...it gives us answers that we can generally say are true in most situations...our hearts pump blood through our bodies...we need to eat and drink to survive...we need to breathe oxygen...those sort of things.

Faith, on the other hand, is based on something else. I would suggest that while scientific knowledge is based on things we consider facts; faith is based on our experience, our feelings, and our emotions. Because of this, it makes trying to figure out what is true about God, very difficult. While some of us have gone through life making better decisions than others, none of us have been perfect. Some things that seem like good ideas, turn out to be not so good. Some things that felt like the right decision at the time, end up being something else.

When it comes to faith, this struggle for truth is more obvious than ever. Maybe that's why the ancient Athenians had that altar...maybe they realized that no matter how smart they were, how wise they were, or how faithful they were...there was always a chance that they missed something...that maybe they didn't fully understand...maybe they didn't have all the truth on the sacred.

Because of this openness, Paul is able to bring the truth of his new experience of the risen Christ...he can share his story...and for those who would be seeking what he was offering...it provides a place for healing, wholeness, and growth...and it couldn't happen if both sides were open to listening, respectful dialogue, and be open to learning something new.

One of the major changes that has taken place in our church over the years, is that we have begun to let go of our history of trying to "protect the absolute truth" and have taken up the practice of dialogue between other denominations of Christians...and have even opened up multifaith dialogue...because many of us are starting to find that we don't own the truth...that others, no matter how different...seem to have learned about God in a new way...and that where we once tried to get everyone on the same page on the path to God...we now see there being different paths to the same home.

While they aren't always as well known as we'd like, there are several major breakthroughs that the ecumenical and interfaith movement have accomplished. At this time, all of the major churches of Christianity have agreed that they recognize the validity of one another's baptism. They have agreed that they will not try to proselytize or "sheep steal" from one another, and most remarkably, the theological differences that caused the protestant reformation have now been solved. Despite other differences, that great historic split, at least in terms of theology has been put to rest.

On top of this, the mainline churches have also agreed to be in dialogue with other faiths. They acknowledge that there is something validly sacred about them, and have also agreed to uphold the idea of "freedom of religion". This means that the churches have agreed to not try and convert people of different faiths.

If God created such a diverse universe, surely part of that diversity involves engaging different peoples in ways that work for them...and not trying to make everyone into the same spiritual person.

When we look back to when the religions of the world have been at their worst...those times when killing has been done in the name of God...and we've all done it...Israel, Islam, and

Christianity as well...these evils have come at times when some felt they owned religious truth...when they were so sure that they were absolutely right, that they would rather kill another person than admit they might not have all the answers.

My hope is that we are moving into a time when we realize that God is bigger than all of our experience...all of our truths...and that we'll never have all the answers...the nets of our experience and lives aren't built to capture all of God.

So what are we to do then? If there are no absolute tools to know what is absolutely true about God...and if we must admit that we can't ever pretend to know what is best for other people in a spiritual sense...then how are we to try and figure out what is true for ourselves?

I think our Gospel reading for today hints at the answer. Jesus talks about the spirit of God being within each of us...that spirit will help us to try and feel our way through finding truth in our lives. Now, this is far from easy...just because something feels good, doesn't mean it's actually a good thing. Any of us who have watched someone struggle with addiction will know that while the other person feels good...it's far from a good decision.

I like to think of it in musical terms. You know those moments when you're playing an instrument with a group of people...or when you're singing with a few people...and it's that moment when each of you hit the right note...and a chord is formed...and not only does it sound right...you can feel it...and you know you've got yourself right where you need to be. This is not to say that just because it feels good then it is good. I mean that it's a time when our lived reality of truth, our discipline, critical thought, and emotions all line up with one another.

I think that's what God's spirit feel like when it works with us to discover what is true for us...and I think it recognizes the same spirit in others...no matter how different they might be...and when we can keep ourselves from letting walls and emotions stop God's spirit from recognizing itself in things and people we find different...then we begin to explore the depth of God with a different kind of tool.

If we can allow ourselves to remain humble and open...if instead of judging others who are different...we decide to listen openly with respect...and allow ourselves to share our truth in turn...we may find that even though we think we might have explored the depths of truth...that there really are many other mysteries to uncover...and way more to God than we ever expected.

Advent 2015:

Almost all of the great stories have it. Conan the Barbarian begins with, “Between the time when the oceans drank Atlantis and the rise of the sons of Aryas, there was an age undreamed of. And unto this, Conan, destined to wear the jeweled crown of Aquilonia upon a troubled brow. It is I, his chronicler, who alone can tell thee of his saga. Let me tell you of the days of high adventure!”

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy...” is the well known beginning to Star Wars.

"It began with the forging of the Great Rings. Three were given to the Elves; immortal, wisest and fairest of all beings. Seven, to the Dwarf Lords, great miners and craftsmen of the mountain halls. And nine, nine rings were gifted to the race of Men, who above all else desire power. For within these rings was bound the strength and the will to govern over each race... But they were all of them deceived, for a new ring was made. In the land of Mordor, in the fires of Mount Doom, the Dark Lord Sauron forged in secret, a master ring, to control all others. And into this ring he poured all his cruelty, his malice and his will to dominate all life. One ring to rule them all. One by one, the free peoples of Middle Earth fell to the power of the Ring... But then something happened that the Ring did not intend. It was picked up by the most unlikely creature imaginable. A hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, of the Shire. For the time will soon come when hobbits will shape the fortunes of all..." is obviously from The Lord of the Rings.

And finally, my personal favourite, “In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.” It’s the opening line from Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

The great stories of our world seem to have a tendency to begin by rooting themselves in a history of uncertainty, or fear, chaos or oppression...a time when nobody can be sure what’s going to happen, or if there is any reason to have hope. Then something happens.

The authors seem to write the story of something or someone insignificant alongside, and intersecting with the great and overwhelming story of earth changing events.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas...

It was into this time of political chaos that Luke chooses to write about to seemingly insignificant people...John the Baptist and eventually, a baby born into scandal and vulnerability.

As one author puts it, “Luke dares his readers to ask, what does the birth of two small children or the ministry of a misplaced prophet have to do with kings, emperors, and governors?” And his reply: “*Everything!*”

This is the time when we begin to learn Luke’s ideas about how God works. Two vulnerable children will actually manage to change the whole world. The powers and principalities of the world are broken and corrupted...God is about to show the world a new way...and will do so through the most unlikely of people.

This is the way it is with the Gospel – it seems so small it’s easy to miss. More than that, God’s mercy comes disguised as human weakness – two vulnerable children who will grow up to change the world, an instrument of Roman torture turned into the means by which God reconciles the world unto God’s own self. Yes, there is always something of the mustard-seed

about the gospel – it creeps in, unawares, small and insignificant, until it grows and spreads, infesting whole fields and inviting all kinds of creatures to take refuge in its branches.

So Luke begins his story by making the outrageous claim that God is at work in the weak and small – babies and barren women and unwed teenage mothers and wild-eyed prophets and itinerant preachers and executed criminals – to change the world. And, to be quite honest, God's not done yet. God continues to work through unlikely characters today – unpopular teens and out-of-work adults and corporate executives and stay-at-home parents and underpaid secretaries and night-shift workers and police officers and volunteer baseball coaches and even burned out clergy and church volunteers – to announce the news of God's redemption.

It's a promise that's easy to miss, but when we hear it – and even more – when we see it taking place in our own lives – it changes us along with the world. Luke, quoting Isaiah talks of a story that will tear down the mighty from their thrones, all the world's inequality will be leveled out, and a world that is based on God's values of compassion and forgiveness is on the way. And, as we've already said, the main characters who will change the world, are two children...practically nobodies...they will stand against all the darkness in the world.

It's worth mentioning, because I imagine there are times when we also feel overlooked, insignificant, and small, surrounded by insurmountable problems, people, and challenges. Maybe it's not an Emperor that makes life miserable, maybe it's just a difficult colleague or unhappy marriage. Maybe it's not a Roman procurator that oppresses, but instead a struggle with addiction to alcohol, drugs, food or spending money. Maybe it's not governors that threaten to destroy, but instead feeling lost at school or work with no real friends. Maybe it's not rulers and priests that overwhelm, but instead a struggle with depression, grief or loneliness.

Whatever it is, Luke shares the gospel promise that these things, too, will pass; that in the end they will be but a difficult and distant memory; that over time they will become mere footnotes to a larger, grander, and more beautiful story of acceptance, grace, mercy, and life. The waiting can be hard, which is why Luke reminds his community and ours of this promise that is so easy to overlook but big enough to save and audacious enough to transform.

It's a great story of hope...and it's also a challenge to each of us...especially to those of us who may feel unworthy or incapable. Remember this:

After Luke runs through this litany of big shots, he says a startling thing: "A word of God came to be upon John". A "word of God" did not come to any of these powerful, corrupt, bizarre, rich characters living in high style in elaborate palaces. It came rather to the "son of Zechariah" in the "wilderness."

It's a reminder of that surprising subtlety that God uses...yes, the world can and will be different...but it will be through people like you and me that God will accomplish this new world. Those of us who feel abandoned or worthless are reminded that God puts his entire faith in us...and that means we must be amazing creatures indeed...we need to just find a way to be that amazing person...to prepare the way of the lord...within ourselves...so that we can become the next set of unexpected but world changing characters.

Promises are powerful things. That's why it's appropriate that our second character of Living into Community is a value called promise keeping. Catherin Pohl reminds us that church

communities, indeed the entire Christian faith, is built on promises, and the faith that those promises will be kept. Imagine how heartbreaking it would be if one day God said, “Sorry, I’ve changed my mind. Something came up and all that hope and justice I promised...yeah...that’s not going to happen.”

Our faith, and our churches only have credibility because we are people who strive to keep promises like God keeps promises. Just look at all the damage to the church when we hear stories about clergy abusing children...leaders stealing money from the church...institutions being rich when they are supposed to be providing for the poor. The reason these stories make the news is that a broken promise by a church feels like a major betrayal. We have promised to be the “good people” in the world. At our baptism we have promised that we will love God and neighbour...respect the dignity of every person...we will strive to be in right relationship with our planet and the environment. When we keep these promises, we can be a light to the world. When we break them, something else happens...

Promise keeping can start small. Maybe we’ve agreed to sign up for Sunday duties...maybe we’ve promised, through being a god-parent, to make sure a child is raised in the faith community...maybe we told someone we’d come and visit them...this morning we are challenged to ask ourselves how we are living up to those promises. As we have been asked to prepare the way of the lord...for the day that God will fulfill everything that was promised...and will use people like you and me to do it.

This is what Advent is about...waiting with expectation...and preparing for the time when we will play our part in an ancient story that began in a time long, long ago...in a country far, far away...when a gift was given that enabled all people to have the strength and the will to govern over each other...corruption still continued to seep in...and at times it seemed like it would swallow everything up...but then something unexpected happened...into every generation there would be chosen ones who would stand against the forces of darkness...we are those chosen ones...it is our time to take our place in the great story...so let listen to the Advent narrative and find our place in this tale of high adventure.

Appendix I – Transformative Hospitality and Leadership Tool

Openness to Transformation

- What can you let go of?
- What might you keep?
- What might you let come?
- What might God be calling you to?
- What is emerging?

Rooted Identity

- What was our history?
- Who are we now?
- Who are we in the larger picture?

Intentional Invitation

- Who isn't here?
- Why aren't they here?
- Where are they?
- Go find out
- Welcome in, Go out

Respectful Engagement

- Listen to understand
- Be curious
- Don't convert/correct

