

ISSUES EFFECTING INCREASING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP:
A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE VOCATION
TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

A PROJECT/DISSERTATION

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by

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Dedicated to

Norma, my wife, Pam and Christine, my daughters.

With much appreciation for their
tolerance and patience over the years.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify and examine the attitudes of lay and ordained leaders in an Anglican parish in a suburban neighbourhood towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members into their parish. The research employed the tools of qualitative inquiry to interview particular leaders, and to examine parish documents, especially minutes of parish meetings and annual reports.

“Attitudes” in this context includes thoughts and feelings. “Attitude - a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one’s disposition; opinion.”¹ For the purposes of this study I assume that attitudes influence behaviour and are generally made up of personal experience, personality, beliefs and convictions.

This study examines some of the interplay of feelings and thoughts of those interviewed, and thoughts based on participants’ understanding of words like ‘evangelism’ (Matthew 28.19). The study explores the relationship of these attitudes in an attempt to identify what these leaders mean when they talk about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members in their parish.

Related questions to be explored in this study include; What do the words “Evangelism” and “Church Growth” mean to parish leaders? Is “Evangelism” something Anglicans really want to do? Finally, the impact of the organisational life of the church at all levels, local, regional and national is also considered as it effects the shaping of attitudes. What role do these constituencies play in the development of “evangelism” at the parish level?

¹ Neufeldt, Victoria. Editor in Chief. (1988). Webster’s New World Dictionary. Third College Edition. New York: Simon & Shuster. 88.

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Throughout this project I have been continually aware that it has been the succour, encouragement and confidence of others that has provided much of the motivation to continue with it.

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The administrative assistant in the parish of St Laurence, Marilyn Cantlie, assisted with the transcriptions of the interviews and proof reading the chapters. Marilyn also managed the office in such a way that I could work on this project without that added pressure. Risa Kawchuk agreed to work hard and long to manage the final edit of my work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM	1
THE PRIMARY QUESTION EXPLORED IN THIS STUDY	1
BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION	3
OUTLINE OF SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS	6
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SETTING	
FOR THIS STUDY	11
BACKGROUND TO THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM	11
STRUCTURE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH	13
THE STUDY IN THE NATONAL CONTEXT	15
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD AND THEORY	28
VALUE OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY AS THE METHODOLOGY	
OF THIS STUDY	27
ASSUMPTIONS	29
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	30
INTERVIEWING.....	32
CONFIDENTIALITY	33
CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS	34
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	35
VALUE OF THE STUDY	35
SUMMARY	36
CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESIGN.....	37
INITIAL DESIGN	38
FINAL DESIGN	38
THE PARISH, AN OVERVIEW	39
CRITERIA FOR CHOICE OF RESPONDENTS	41
CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE LETTER OF INVITATION	42
PERMISSION TO EXAMINE PARISH DOCUMENTS	43
THE INVITATION ACCEPTED	43
RESPONDENT REVIEW	44
A TIME OF TRANSITION	44

RECORDING THE INTERVIEWS	44
INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIEST	45
INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTURE OF THE PARISH	46
A COMMENT ON THE INTERVIEWS	46
TRANSCRIPTION	47
ITERATION OF PURPOSE	47
CHAPTER FIVE: MATTHEW'S GREAT COMMISSION	49
HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND MATTHEW 28:16-20?	50
LORDSHIP AND LEADERSHIP	61
PATRIARCHY IN THE CHURCH	63
PATRIARCHAL CHARACTERISTICS FOUND IN THE GOSPELS	64
CONCLUSION	66
CHAPTER SIX: THE PARISH AS A COMPLEX ORGANIZATION	67
INTRODUCTION	67
ELEMENTS OF SYSTEMS THEORY AS APPLIED TO THE PARISH	68
SYSTEMS THEORY EXPLAINED	69
PRESSURES AND CHALLENGES OF THE ORGANIZATION IN THE PARISH	71
FURTHER SYSTEMIC TRAITS THAT EFFECT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION	78
EVANGELISM MEANS	80
NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS	83
CHAPTER SEVEN: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS	88
INTRODUCTION - RELATIONAL DYNAMICS IN THESE INTERVIEWS	88
THE PRIMACY OF THE DATA	90
CATEGORISATION IN THE DISPLAY OF THE INTERVIEW DATA	90
CHALLENGES OF TRANSCRIPTION	91
TERMS OF OFFICE AND ORGANIZATION	92
PERSONAL ANGLICAN HISTORY	93
THE IMPACT OF EARLY CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH	94
THE EFFECTS OF LONG TERM MEMBERSHIP	96
THE PARISH IN A TIME OF TRANSITION	97
ACTIONS INDICATING A DESIRE TO WELCOME NEW-COMERS	100
PARISH GOALS AND DIRECTION	101
EVANGELISM AND THE GREAT COMMISSION	103

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF INVITING, WELCOMING OR INTEGRATING A NEW MEMBER	108
THE IMPACT OF VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF PARISH ORGANIZATION	113
AN ASSIMILATION TEAM	115
UNORGANISED EFFORTS TO WELCOME NEW-COMERS	116
LEADERSHIP	117
THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM	119
THE DIOCESE AND NATIONAL CHURCH.....	121
THE DIOCESE	121
THE NATIONAL CHURCH	125
THE LAST QUESTION	126
CONCLUSION	136
CHAPTER EIGHT	138
INTRODUCTION	131
GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT ANALYSIS FROM THE DATA	131
ASSUMPTION	133
PARISH RECORDS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL STATISTICS	134
PERSONAL ANGLICAN HISTORY	136
FRIENDSHIPS IN THE PARISH	138
THE INCUMBENCY OF THE PRIEST	139
VISION VERSUS THE STATUS QUO	141
GRIEF AT THE LOSS OF MEMBERS	142
EVANGELISM AND MATTHEW'S GREAT COMMISSION	145
EVANGELISM AS OUTREACH OR SERVICE TO OTHERS	152
EVANGELISM IN THE LECTIONARY AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH	153
THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM	160
METAPHORS WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS	163
THE GOLF SWING	170
RECAPITULATION	175
CONCLUSION	176
RECOMMENDATION	177
WORKS CITED	181
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186
APPENDIX "A"	191

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM

In the past two decades there has been a growing interest in increasing membership of churches. Declining membership in the mainline churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada, has added an incentive to this objective, as churches seek to maintain membership and the consequent income needed to underwrite the expense of operating a congregation.

In 1988, Anglican bishops from around the world, meeting in Lambeth, England, declared that the 1990's should be a "Decade of Evangelism." The Anglican Church of Canada has developed *New Members for Your Church: A Project in Congregational Development*, one of many "church growth" programs and strategies developed in North America in recent years.

THE PRIMARY QUESTION

My primary question is: what are the attitudes of Anglican leaders in one parish about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members? My study examines various aspects of this fundamental question.

Is inviting, welcoming and integrating new members something the lay and ordained leaders really want to do? What are the thoughts and feelings that shape these leaders' attitudes towards church growth or evangelism? What are the experiences of these leaders, both personally, in inviting others to join them at Sunday worship, and corporately, as leaders seeking to influence the membership of their parishes?

I chose this project for study with a view to improving our understanding of the attitudes and behaviours of lay and ordained leaders. I believe that for any church growth program to be successful, they should know first, what exactly it is that they want to accomplish, and second, what they, as a parish are willing to do. There may be a point at which many members and leaders, lay and ordained, are generally comfortable with their membership numbers and the amount of income this generates. There may be a personal reluctance to share one's faith and religious experience in a way that is intended to attract others.

To be successful, I believe that a commitment to evangelism should be made in vestry, by parish leaders as well as by individuals in the congregation. There is little value in importing a church program if the lay and ordained leaders, let alone the membership of a parish, do not have a clear commitment to evangelism. A study such as this can, therefore, make an important contribution.

BACKGROUND

Anglicans in Canada during the first half of this century did not have to concern themselves with evangelism or a program to increase membership. Membership increased as a result of immigration, first from Britain and then from various British colonies, combined with the legacy of the state church, where, in its most simplified expression, everyone was considered a member unless they specified otherwise.

Evangelism can, and often does, mean inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. Evangelism can also mean bringing the good news of what Christ has done in one's life to another through care, comfort and support. This latter meaning approaches what I would call a stricter definition of evangelism: witnessing to others in such a way that they are led to a confession of sin and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Evangelism can also mean caring, as a Christian, for another individual, or the efforts of a parish to respond to the needs of a particular group in society. These distinctions are explored in this study as respondents are asked what evangelism means for them.

The Anglican Consultative Council, in a study guide prepared to assist the church in carrying out the Decade of Evangelism, quote from a follow-up statement made by the primates of the Anglican Communion, meeting in Larnaca, Cyprus, in April 1989. They described evangelism as a call:

To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God;

To teach, baptise, and nurture new believers;

To respond to human need by loving service;

To seek to transform the unjust structures of society.

The Anglican Consultative Council, meeting in Badagri, Nigeria, in 1984, summarised the mission of the church as follows:

To evangelise is to make known by word and deed the love of the crucified and risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that people will repent, believe, and receive Christ as their saviour and obediently serve him as their Lord in the fellowship of his Church. (See also John 20:21; Luke 4:18ff.)¹

Alister E. McGrath (1993) says of the development of the significance of the Decade of Evangelism:

The mainstream prejudice against evangelism is gradually fading into history.

Evangelism is increasingly seen as a normal part of the life of the Church. And with this development comes a major stimulus to the renewal of Anglicanism – discovering what it is about the Christian faith that makes it attractive to outsiders in the first place.

The Christian gospel is good news, something that has the power to transform the lives of women and men and gladden their hearts. One of the most significant results of the Decade of Evangelism has been to force ordinary Christians to ask what it is about the Christian faith that makes it attractive to them and to others. The very suggestion that people might wish to *become* Christians is quite unsettling for many in Western culture, largely because of the dominance of purely pastoral and social models of the church. Many Western Christians react with surprise to the

suggestion that their non-Christian colleagues and family members might one day choose to become Christians.²

The idea and enthusiasm for the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism made at Lambeth palace in London, England, in 1988 did not come up through the church from the parishes. It was a top-down decision of the international meeting of Bishops. This raises the question of how much attachment parish leaders have to this declaration. Was there any support for the implementation of the declaration within parishes? How much did parishes share the enthusiasm of the bishops who declared the Decade of Evangelism?

There could well be a conflict of goals and direction, if this declaration did not fit with the goals developed locally in the parish. A conflict of goals, or goals not fully agreed to at various levels of the organisation, leads to confused expectations. Confused and conflicting views among the leadership of the Church leads to distress among its members.

Given the structure of the Anglican Church, leadership at all levels is important to the success of any program it implements, as is the co-operation and commitment of members. In my experience, it cannot be assumed that "evangelism" is something members of Anglican parishes naturally want to do!

It is important to unravel the causes of any feelings of apprehension, confusion, or uncertainty, looking as realistically and as comprehensively as we can at the current nature of the parish church, before embarking on any evangelistic program. It is simply not good enough to say that "evangelism is the primary task given to the Church" when there is very little agreement within the Anglican Church about what "evangelism" means and how it should be "done".

Among the changes and challenges new to the church in the latter part of the twentieth century is for the parish priest to become an even more capable manager of parish life. Loren B. Mead, a highly regarded student and teacher of congregational development associated with the Alban Institute, wrote in a recent work:

The clergy, as manager-leaders of the *institution*, badly need laity to help lead and support the institution (raise money, lead programs, etc.). Clergy I know are already torn because they know the institutional needs interfere with the genuine call of laity to be primarily engaged in family, job, and community. The result? Many clergy are painfully ambivalent - even schizophrenic - about what they want the laity to be and do. If they really succeed in getting laity invested in the mission frontier, it will disrupt the operation of the parish.³

How, then, do parish leaders, lay and ordained, respond to the various challenges of evangelism?

OUTLINE

In chapter Two, I explore the background and setting of my study. I examine the most recent impetus for evangelism in the Anglican Church: the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism. I then consider the national setting in which the parish finds itself, reviewing some of the current membership and financial statistics of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Chapter Three lays out the theory underlying my approach: qualitative inquiry. I believe qualitative inquiry is the research methodology best suited to my purposes, it best

affords me the opportunity to explore attitudes and beliefs as they impact on the behaviour of certain leaders in a parish, and deepen my understanding and appreciation for the role they play in welcoming certain programs.

Chapter Four carries the theory of qualitative inquiry into the parish of this case study. I present a description of the process from the original Project Dissertation proposal, through the Design phase, and into the gathering of data from the interviews and study of parish documents. I discuss key elements in this Design phase, arranging for the interviews and permission to study parish documents. I share experiences I had doing this type of research. I conclude the chapter with reflections on the interview process.

It is important here to acknowledge an obvious limitation of a study such as this. As it follows the conventions of qualitative inquiry, we cannot assume that the findings would be replicable. My hope was to move more deeply into the life, attitudes, feeling and thinking in the leadership of one parish than it was to go more broadly into findings that could be generalised to other parishes.

I also want to acknowledge again the significant role members of my committee played in helping me develop an idea from a pilot study I had done a couple of years previous into the design of this study.

Chapter Five examines a key biblical text in any discussion of evangelism in the church, Matthew 28:16-20. It is the primary New Testament text quoted by the Primates of the Anglican Communion from Larnaca, Cyprus in April 1989 in their statement about the Decade of Evangelism.⁴

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (*The New Revised Standard Version*)

In chapter Five I explore the social and theological background of Matthew 28:16-20, with a view to understanding leadership and evangelism in the early church. This text leads us into a consideration of one of the biblical models of leadership. I consider how the biblical models of leadership can help us to understand the kind of leadership required in the church today, by seeing if they fit our current situation. For a parish to move with real vitality, hope and expansion, the leadership in that parish has to be aware of the changes and their challenges, the pressures and dynamics at work in that parish. What kind of leadership does the church in these current circumstances require?

Chapter Five concludes with some thoughts about the social regime of patriarchy, and how it effects our understanding both of evangelism and the kind of leadership it encourages.

In chapter Six I examine some of the organisational or systemic features of the church only as they impact on the development of attitudes of parish leaders. My study only acknowledges some of the pressures clergy experience that also affect her/his attitudes about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members . A more comprehensive organisational

study or comprehensive systemic analysis is beyond the scope of this particular research. The bibliography at the end of this research lists a number of in-depth studies that go beyond the scope of my questions. It is important, though, to appreciate how the Church works as an organisation, how bishops, priests, lay leaders and members influence each other's beliefs and attitudes about evangelism.

The purpose of chapter Six is to put the current discussion of what is happening in a particular parish in the context of the scripture which has, over the centuries, given it its meaning.

Systems theory, organisational theory and object relations theory, among others provide us with perspectives for looking at an organisation, such as a parish. They help us to better understand what leads people to think and act the way they do in that organisation. The history, size and demographics of the parish, its internal structure, as well as the structure of the larger organisation of the church, all play a part in shaping attitudes and feelings within the parish.

Again, chapter Six is intended to articulate some of those organisational or systemic features, but it is not intended to be a full and complete organisational study of the parish. I simply acknowledge the dynamics of the local scene of the parish, as well as the larger church that are at play behind the expressions of those interviewed.

Chapter Seven is the hub of the research. It is the presentation of the data, mainly from interviews with the incumbent priest and three recently retired wardens in the parish. I also studied the minutes of vestry and parish meetings and statistical reports the parish made to the diocese each year about its life. The responses to the interview questions, the

important raw data, are presented under various categories that arose out its analysis. The questions in the interviews can be found Appendix A.

My study and analysis of the data forms the last chapter. In chapter Eight I discuss various patterns I discovered in the responses to interview questions, and share my insights into what some parish leaders think and feel about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

CHAPTER TWO HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SETTING OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I discuss the background of the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism, made by Anglican bishops in 1988, that gave new interest to evangelism in the Anglican Church. I then provide a brief description of the Anglican Church of Canada, and discuss the influence my own experience in this church had in shaping my study. I conclude with a discussion and presentation of some recent membership and financial statistics provided by the library of the national office of the Anglican Church of Canada.

BACKGROUND TO THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM

At the 1988 Lambeth meeting, the Bishops of the Anglican Communion declared that the last decade of this century be designated the "Decade of Evangelism." Participating members of the Anglican Church around the world were encouraged to develop programs of Evangelism. The bishops resolved that:

This Conference, recognising that evangelism is the primary task given to the Church, asks each province and diocese of the Anglican Communion, in co-operation with other Christians, to make the closing years of this millennium a 'Decade of Evangelism' with a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of his world.¹

The resolution, Resolution 43: Decade of Evangelism, came, in part, as a result of the enthusiastic reports from “third world” churches of the tremendous growth following intensive evangelistic efforts. These reports contrasted with those coming from the “first world” churches of declining membership, participation and commitment among their members.

The Anglican Church of Canada saw the need for renewed emphasis on its evangelistic mission a decade earlier, as noted in the workshop booklet prepared by the national church for Congregational Development:

In 1977 the National Anglican Church Long Range Planning Committee decided it was time for the Church to re-emphasise its ministry of evangelism. It affirmed that Anglicans have a distinctive contribution to make in evangelism. In 1980 the Synod [the national or General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada] enthusiastically endorsed the Committee Report calling for all parishes to focus on evangelism.²

The church in many Dioceses across the country responded to this call with a variety of programs of evangelism. At the national level, the church set up an office for Congregational Development and a workshop program entitled, *New Members for Your Church: A Project in Congregational Development* was developed between 1987 and 1992:

enabling parishes throughout the Anglican Church of Canada to grow and renew their congregational life and call to ministry by reaching out to the lapsed and un-churched, assimilating new members and assisting in parish start-ups.³

The workshop was designed to involve representatives over one weekend. In preparation, parish delegates gathered data on the parish as they currently perceived it, made

an assessment of the parish's demographics, qualities and attractions, and considered barriers to growth within the parish. In the workshop ordained and non-ordained parish leaders examined some of the structural barriers to church growth using Arlin J. Rothauge's, Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry as one of the tools for this analysis.⁴ They developed a set of evangelical goals suitable for a particular parish which were to be evaluated after a period of implementation.

STRUCTURE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

As my study explores the relationship of parish leaders with other layers of authority in the church, the diocese and the national structure, it is important to understand the basic organization of those structures.

The Anglican Church of Canada is built around a diocese, a region with a main urban centre that becomes the "see" of the Bishop of the Diocese. There are 30 dioceses in Canada organized in four "ecclesiastical provinces."

At the national level, the church is represented by the Bishops of the dioceses and elected lay and ordained delegates from each diocese. They meet in the General Synod every three years to set policy and national standards. Occasionally those standards become church or "canon" laws which are applied across the Canadian church.

Diocesan bishops and the synod of the diocese, that is, the bishop, elected lay and ordained delegates from each parish in the diocese, establish diocesan canons. The diocese and its bishop enjoy considerable autonomy which is respected by General Synod when it attempts to produce policy, standards, or programs to be applied across the national church.

The bishop is the authority in each diocese and is responsible for the appointment and licensing of all clergy to parishes. The parish priest, at her / his induction as incumbent, is reminded by the bishop in the ceremony that the care and responsibility of the parish is shared by the Bishop with the priest being inducted.⁵

A typical Anglican Church of Canada parish has two layers of local leadership. The senior layer, called the “corporation,” is composed of the incumbent parish priest, one or two lay persons from the parish membership elected to serve as “people’s warden(s)” and one or two lay people appointed by the rector to serve as “rector’s warden(s).” The election and appointments are made at the Annual General Meeting of the membership of the parish.

The other layer is called the “vestry”. It is composed of the corporation and other lay members elected at the Annual General Meeting. Whereas, corporation may be compared to the “executive,” vestry can be compared to the “board of directors.” Under canon law in the Diocese, vestry is to advise the corporation on all matters in the parish. With democratisation in the church, vestry is becoming more responsible for the internal operation, administration, and management of parish affairs. Although the incumbent is appointed by the Bishop and directly responsible to her / him, the incumbent also realises his or her responsibility to vestry and the parish membership it serves.

This is the structure of church life that I have known since childhood and in which I began to work as a priest when I was ordained in 1969. My ministry as a priest has always been in the context of a parish. I have, since completing a training period called an assistant curacy, been priest in charge of a parish, a rector or incumbent. Parish life has totally shaped my understanding of ministry. I have served in rural, multi-point parishes, small urban

parishes, and latterly, suburban parishes. It is not surprising then that the questions and challenges in this research come out of those years of parish ministry, seeking with other parish leaders to make our Christian fellowship attractive to others.

Some years prior to the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism, I was involved in a parish goal-setting weekend in another parish, in another diocese. On the Saturday morning the vestry of that parish set, as one of its goals to be worked on in the afternoon, that within the next five years the attendance and membership of the parish would increase by twenty per-cent. At lunch one of the real leaders in the parish said to me, "David, I have been thinking about it and I don't think there are that many Anglicans in town!" Without any real thought I found myself replying, "that is exactly the point." I began to wonder if we, as Anglicans, really have much understanding of how to bring others into the faith and membership of the church. It appeared that we seldom thought of inviting anyone but an Anglican to join us at worship on Sundays. That experience has stayed with me. It was the event that started me on this journey, and that provided the motivation for this study. It was then that I began to form the questions that would later appear in the interviews in this research.

THE STUDY IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Behind the efforts of the bishops at Lambeth and the General Synod to encourage evangelism is the recognition of declining membership. At the same time the costs of funding the church's programs are increasing. In 1993/1994, both the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal (i.e. Anglican) Church in the USA announced major cutbacks of

national staff, by as much as 30 per cent. Both Churches have also had to curtail much of their support of mission, development and aid programs in poverty-stricken areas around the world.

The following is the report of membership in the Anglican Church of Canada furnished by the library of the national church office in Toronto, which is provided with annual statistics provided by all the dioceses in the country. Members include those who attend Sunday worship at least a few times a year and are involved in one or more of the parish's ministries. Confirmed members are those who have some participation in the life of the parish, especially its worship, and are confirmed according to the rites of the Anglican Church of Canada. Identifiable givers are those who, during the year, make a financial contribution to the Church, either on a regular, weekly or monthly basis or periodically throughout the year.

year	Membership in the Anglican Church of Canada		
	Members	Confirmed	Identifiable Givers
1986	833,851	551,766	252,447
1987	808,220	545,939	252,151
1988	861,237	511,534	251,410
1989	852,890	516,233	251,299
1990	812,962	506,917	249,997
1991	801,963	487,760	248,260
1992	784,102	495,077	243,268
1993	771,615	470,661	238,741
1994	780,897	454,636	233,026

Table 1

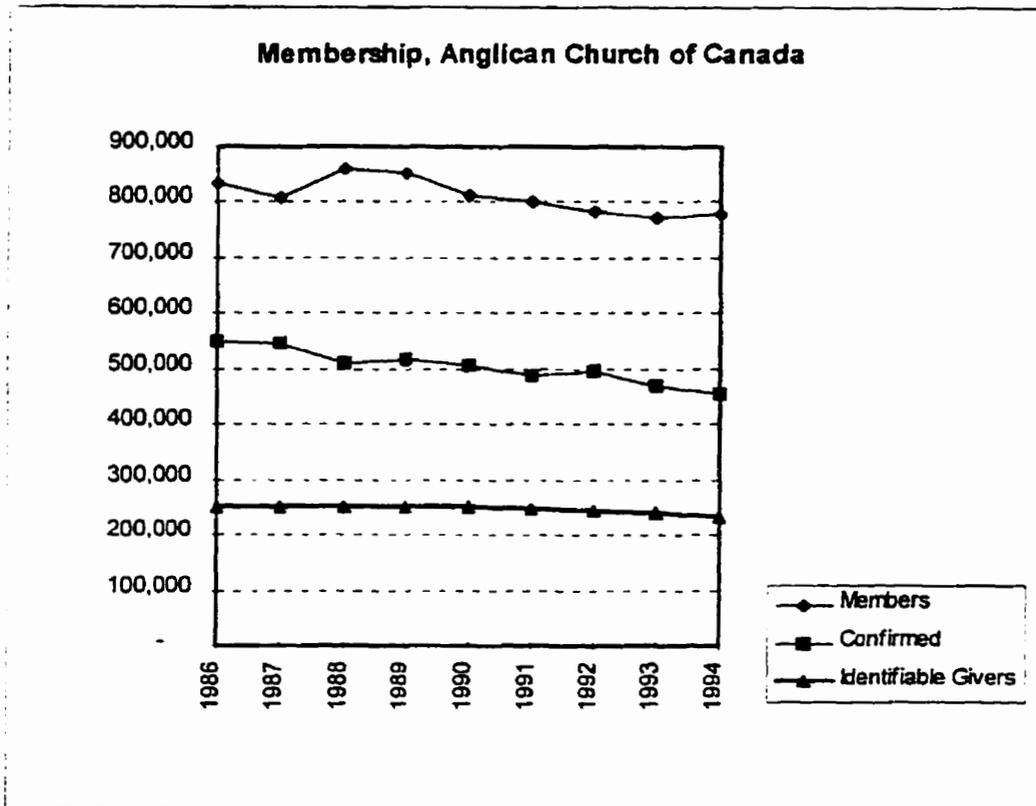


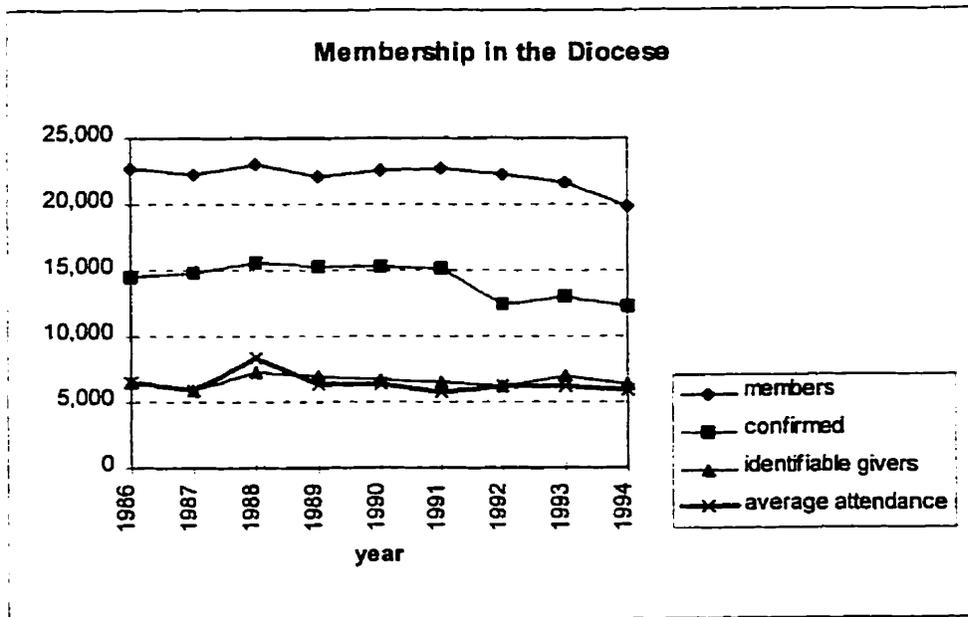
Table 1 tracks the recorded membership of the Anglican Church of Canada from 1986 to 1994. Similar statistics are presented in Reginald Bibby's, *Fragmented Gods*.⁶ The report on membership confirms what many lay and clerical leaders in the Church have been saying for some time: "we are now beginning to realise the true cost of having built all those parish churches in the late 1950s and early '60s!" That period saw a flurry of construction of church buildings, each neighbourhood optimistic it could support a local building and resident priest well into the future. Table 1 indicates decreases in membership, and in the number of Confirmed members and identifiable givers.

Below are the membership statistics for the Diocese and the parish in this study for the period 1990 - 1994. Even in this short space of time there is a decline in membership in the number of both confirmed members and identifiable givers.

Members in the Diocese

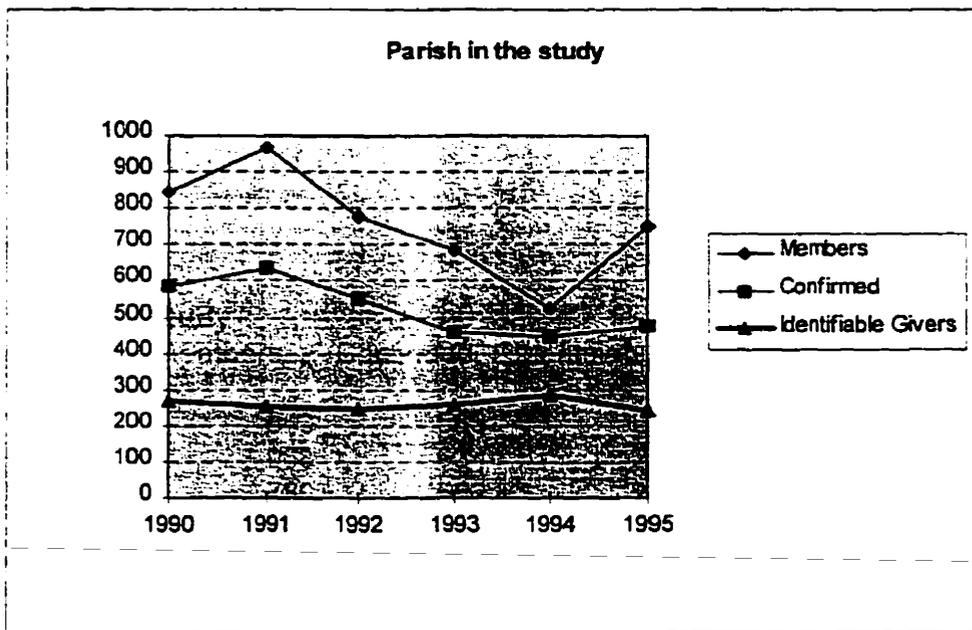
year	members	confirmed	identifiable givers	average attendance
1986	22,764	14,594	6,526	6,526
1987	22,286	14,895	5,854	5,854
1988	23,068	15,625	7,280	8,283
1989	22,060	15,372	7,015	6,368
1990	22,613	15,350	6,691	6,376
1991	22,699	15,157	6,521	5,776
1992	22,257	12,500	6,249	6,152
1993	21,602	13,084	6,994	6,176
1994	19,833	12,298	6,437	5,839

Table 2



Parish in study			
year	Members	Confirmed	Identifiable Givers
1990	843	588	271
1991	968	634	254
1992	780	552	247
1993	686	457	260
1994	525	450	285
1995	750	475	245

Table 3



In 1994 ordained and lay leaders in the diocese in which this study was conducted began to press parishes to look critically and realistically at their future. Both urban and suburban parishes are now being considered for closure and re-alignment with neighbouring parishes. Three older parishes that had a significant history in the city are beginning to consider ways in which they could be realigned, sharing resources and staff. The financial resources and membership support have dwindled. Reginald Bibby relates what he said at a

national conference of the Presbyterian Church in the fall of 1988. What Dr Bibby mused could also have been said about the Anglican Church of Canada!

I was there as a guest resource speaker and couldn't resist suggesting to them - playfully and warmly, I hope - that, in the face of their numerical problems, their rediscovery of evangelism amounted to their "converting a demographic necessity into a theological virtue."⁷

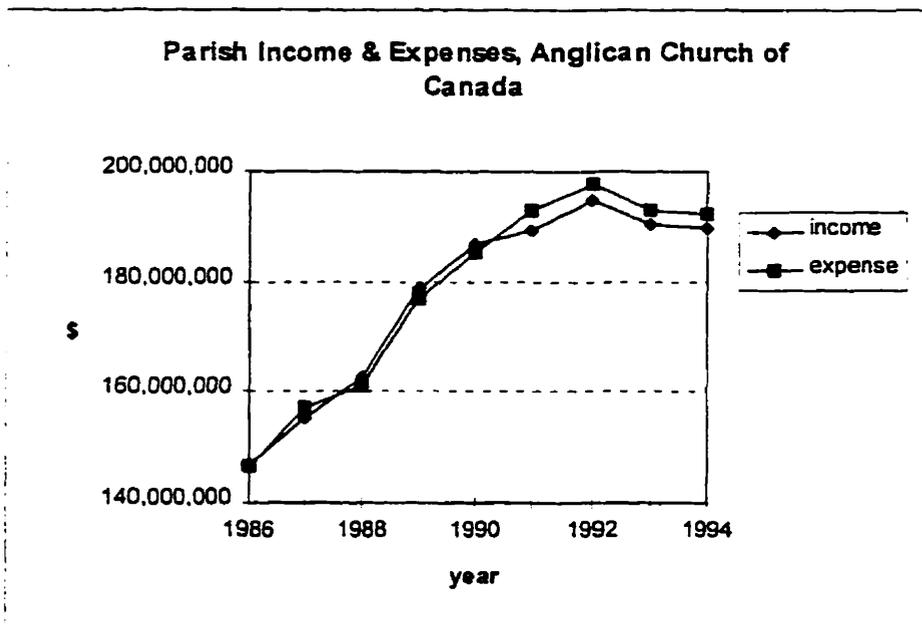
We frequently hear laments like, "Our parish is not growing!" "There are not enough people giving in the parish to keep up the budget!" "How can we get more people into Church?" "How can we increase the membership of our parish?" Behind these comments is the experience of declining income and increasing costs.

Table 4 below shows that although there has been some increase in the income at parish levels, it has been offset by a corresponding increase in total parish expenses. Increased stipends, salaries, and benefits for clergy and other staff, along with increased operating expenses, including utilities and maintenance of church buildings, have all contributed to more of the parish income remaining at the local level, leaving a smaller proportion each year for ministry and mission in the Diocese or beyond.

**Income and Expenses –
parishes in the Anglican Church
of Canada**

year	income	expense
1984	127,348,934	125,537,853
1985	139,749,240	137,381,286
1986	146,788,141	146,733,086
1987	155,355,880	157,159,855
1988	162,697,141	161,394,387
1989	178,712,417	176,938,424
1990	186,723,114	185,292,468
1991	189,556,222	193,095,132
1992	194,986,454	197,667,164
1993	190,532,603	192,945,591
1994	189,875,094	192,168,046

Table 4



Parishes in rural areas in particular are being closed or combined with other struggling rural congregations just to maintain an income sufficient to pay a full time parish priest. Other costs include a minimal administration expense and minimal programming

costs. Many of these parishes cannot afford to send money to the diocese or the Church beyond. In fact, some are receiving diocesan grants just to keep alive!

Many urban parishes are looking at cutting back on the funds they send to support the work of the Church beyond parish boundaries in the dioceses, and for the national operation of the Church. Some urban parishes have customarily maintained two full-time paid parish priests, or a priest and a deacon. Fewer of these parishes, employing two or more priests full time, exist each year. Diocesan leaders are now talking about having to close selected ailing urban parishes, seeking a realignment of financial and human resources, that better responds to new and challenging economic and demographic trends.

Stipendiary clergy
Anglican Church of
Canada

year	national
1986	1,679
1987	1,678
1988	1,692
1989	1,698
1990	1,685
1991	1,676
1992	1,660
1993	1,642
1994	1,622

Table 5

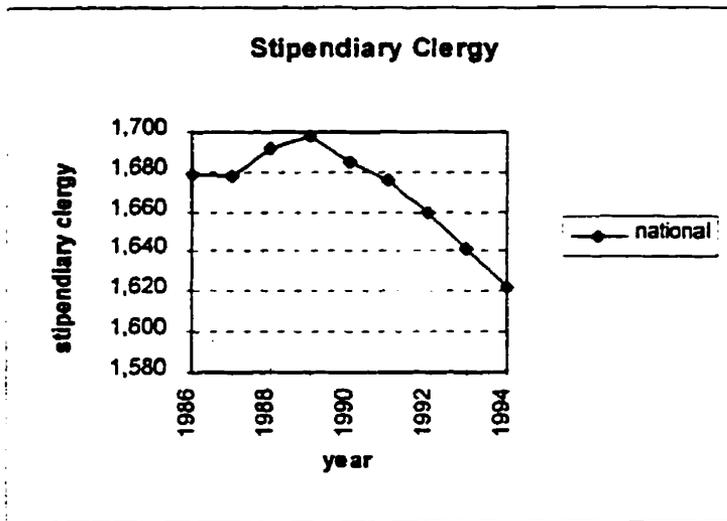
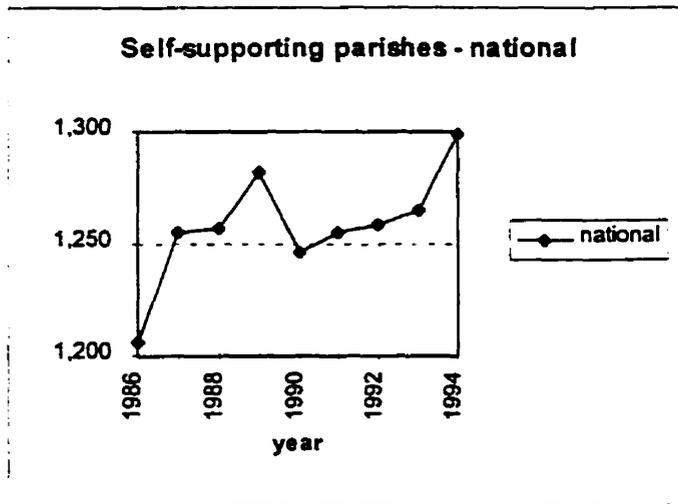


Table 5 concerns the number of stipendiary clergy. In the terminology of the Anglican Church, “stipendiary clergy” refers to those clergy who are employed full-time as priests or deacons in the Church. The decline in those numbers is, oddly enough, offset by an increasing number of self-supporting parishes which are able to raise enough revenue to pay all their local parochial expenses and provide some financial support to their diocese. The other parishes receive some financial support from their diocese.

Self supporting parishes

year	national
1986	1,206
1987	1,255
1988	1,257
1989	1,282
1990	1,246
1991	1,255
1992	1,259
1993	1,265
1994	1,299

Table 6



These are just a few of the challenges faced by parishes in the Anglican Church of Canada at this time. In turn, the pressures, challenges and changes within the church are causing fear and pessimism among its members. The resulting frustration can harm relationships between church members which are expected to be exemplary in the world.

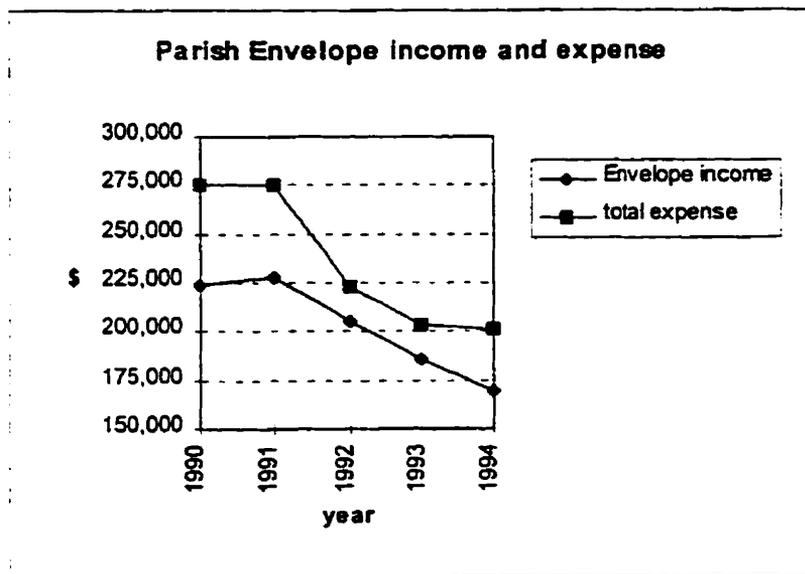
The current context in which the Anglican Church of Canada finds itself is one of mixed messages. The number of self-supporting parishes is up while total membership is down. Nationally, parish income is now being exceeded by national parish expense. The number of stipendiary clergy is showing a significant decline. Membership in the parish in this study shows a steady decline from 1991 to 1994, but a significant increase in 1995.

The parish in this study is also pressed to meet its annual budget. Their annual reports show a shortfall between “envelope income”, the income pledged and anticipated from members, and the total parish expense. The difference has to be made up with other offerings and gifts.

Envelope income and total parish expense

Year	Envelope income	total expense
1990	224,484	275,006
1991	228,384	275,852
1992	205,514	223,219
1993	185,794	203,745
1994	169,264	201,870

Table 7



Is the concern about dwindling membership and tight finances the major stimulus to invite, welcome and integrate new members? To quote Reginald Bibby, is this “converting a demographic necessity into a theological virtue”?

This is the national setting in which this study conducted. In the next chapter I lay out the method I followed in this study – that of qualitative research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD AND THEORY

Chapter Three is intended to present only those parts of the theory and conventions of qualitative inquiry that call for special consideration in this study. The theory behind qualitative research is extensive and, depending on which author one reads, varied. The range of studies that are considered qualitative inquiry are numerous, encompassing ethnography, cognitive anthropology and a variety of orientations that “include case study, interpretative research, microethnography and ethnomethodology.”¹ It was never my interest nor my intention to make a full discussion of the theory and conventions of qualitative research. Two texts that do this comprehensively are *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985) by Yvonna S. Lincoln & Egon G. Guba, and the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (1994) by Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln. I will, instead, focus on those features of this methodology that are specially important in this study.

The very nature of the primary and subsidiary questions I wished to explore pressed me to this model of research. I wanted, primarily, to “describe” attitudes. I learned that qualitative research holds interviewing to be a primary vehicle for successfully gathering credible data for a bona fide research project.

It is important for me to emphasise, as I did in chapter One, that I was not interested in a statistical study. I was not interested in what most or many parish leaders thought or felt. I wanted to explore more deeply into these matters rather than more broadly. This study is intended to add clarity to our discussions and planning, clarity about attitudes that greet anyone wishing to introduce a new program into the church.

In this chapter I present the method I used in this study and the theory of qualitative research that informed it. A central feature of any study, I had to learn over and over, was that it be focused on its primary question. It also must avoid all pretensions of being larger than it is. Lastly, it must be consistent with the research design, the conventions and premises on which that kind of research can claim credibility and acceptability.

With the assistance of my doctoral committee I was pressed to determine exactly what it was I wanted to know, what I wanted to learn or understand better. Initially I was concerned with, “meaning”. I wanted to find out, as precisely as I could, what “evangelism” meant to a small group of parish leaders. I wanted to find out what Matthew’s great commission meant to them, what church growth meant to them. In other words, to find out what it meant to them to invite, welcome and integrate new members into their parish. But eventually I came to see that I was more interested in delving into the attitudes of these leaders rather than “meaning.”

VALUE OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY AS THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY.

A study of personal perspectives like the ones I wanted to investigate is best served by qualitative research and its focus on the insights and opinions held by the participants

themselves. Qualitative research provides a way of drawing or teasing out the truths that govern individual behaviours in particular situations.

I believe, from my reading about and experience with this methodology, that this is due mainly to the attention given to the data. In qualitative research, “data is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (with apologies to King James).”² The data take priority over every thing else. Assumptions and biases are to be examined against the data from the very beginning of the research, in the design and testing of the research questions and in the gathering of the data through, for example, interviews.

The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalisations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour.³

The project is an exploration and description of that data which present the respondents “as they are” with what motivates their participation, at this point in time, in the church’s mission to bring others into the membership of that church. “If the question concerns the *nature* of the phenomenon, the answer is best obtained using ethnography.”⁴ Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin describe ethnography as “immersion in the field in which the researcher collects data primarily by participant-observation and interviewing.”⁵ Arthur J. Vidich and Stanford M. Lyman present a more grand description:

Ethnography, then, refers to a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood. Both descriptive anthropology and ethnography are thought to be atheoretical, to be concerned solely with description.⁶

I say, “grand,” because I have taken the principles, guidelines and criteria of qualitative research to a very small group of people (four) and in a very small population or culture – one Anglican parish!

This study is what is called a descriptive project, seeking only to describe the data found in the research process. Through it, I seek to identify those elements and characteristics that these parish leaders bring to their leadership roles which influence directly or otherwise affect the way in which the parish seeks new members and provides them a church home. The interviews explore the attitudes these parish leaders have towards the desire to have newcomers who are welcomed into the life, work, ministry and mission of that parish.

ASSUMPTIONS

My first assumption concerned those wanting to implement church growth programs – namely, is inviting, welcoming and integrating new members something leaders and parishioners really want to do. A related assumption is that members of the parishes are actively engaged in a process that clearly and consistently is aimed at increasing the number of active members.

Another major assumption of mine was that most of the interest in programs or projects for church growth is inspired by what Bibby calls “a demographic necessity.” Declining membership means we have to get more members simply to keep the church alive.

I also assumed that the leadership of rector and wardens had a direct and effective bearing on the success of any parish program inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

Finally, I assumed that when Anglicans talked about evangelism they were mainly talking about showing care and concern for others in society rather conversion and commitment to Christ.

The project, then, examines the validity of these assumptions. It is an investigation of the beliefs, opinions, interpretations and feelings that motivate these leaders in responding to the commission of the church to expand its membership as a primary function of its mission. A better understanding of these opinions and beliefs would allow the development of church growth programs that could be more successfully sustained within the life of a parish.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This descriptive study seeks primarily to record and present what a few church leaders think about matters relating to evangelism. I wish to gain a better understanding, a certain kind of truth.

This kind of truth is particular, but not necessarily unique. It is the grounds for action in a particular place and, with the intricate array of social contacts, relationships and personal theologies of the leaders. This *truth* is an expression of those relational and

ideological components that, though personally held, are shared and modified by components provided by the other persons in the parish network and community.

The concept of truth is an elusive one. Julienne Ford, in her delightfully whimsical book, *Paradigms and Fairy Tales* (1975), asserts that the term truth may have four different meanings, which she symbolises as Truth₁, Truth₂, Truth₃, and Truth₄. Truth₄ is the familiar *empirical* truth of the scientist; a claim in the form of hypothesis or predicate (and affirmation or denial of something) is T₄ if it is consistent with “nature” (or, in Ford’s own language, “preserves the appearances.”) Truth₃ is *logical* truth; a claim (hypothesis or predicate) is T₃ if it is logically or mathematically consistent with some other claim known to be true (in the T₃ sense) or ultimately with some basic belief taken to be T₁ (to which we shall turn in a moment). Truth₂ is *ethical* truth; a claim is T₂ if the person who asserts it is acting in conformity with moral or professional standards of conduct. Truth₁, with which we are most concerned here, may be called *metaphysical* truth. Unlike the case of a claim be T₂, T₃, or T₄, a claim that is said to be T₁ cannot be tested for truthfulness against some external norm such as correspondence with nature, logical deductibility, or professional standards of conduct. Metaphysical beliefs must be accepted at face value.⁷

“Metaphysical beliefs” might be too exalted as a description of what I take to be the important attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that motivate members of a parish to invite, welcome and integrate new members. In this study I am seeking personal or individual

truths. They may not be universally shared, but they govern the behaviours of the individuals as much as other truths. But like “metaphysical beliefs” described above, personal beliefs cannot be tested.

INTERVIEWING

I wanted to investigate these personal beliefs – to find out what parish leaders, lay and ordained, thought and felt in reaction to the call by the bishops at Lambeth for a greater emphasis on evangelism. The appropriate method for getting this data was by interviewing people.

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned about the individual’s point of view. However, qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor’s perspective through detailed interviewing and observation.⁸

It was important, too, to compare what was said in the interviews with significant records, especially minutes of vestry and parish meetings. This is called “Triangulation”: “the use of several kinds of methods or data.”⁹

Lincoln and Guba talk about three ways of building reliability in qualitative inquiry, establishing trust with respondents, persistent observation which adds salience, and triangulation. “The technique of triangulation is the third mode of improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible”.¹⁰

The value of triangulation was not only to validate or check what was said in the interviews, but also to discover the context in which these attitudes, beliefs and perceptions

were shaped. For example, in a pilot case study respondents sometimes could not recall discussions in their vestry meetings about a topic, yet the minutes clearly indicated that such discussions had taken place!

Triangulation with other data, like minutes of meetings, provides a more comprehensive picture of the research site. In addition to providing support for what was said in the interviews, it helps to flesh out our understanding of the decisions made by the corporation, vestry or full membership meetings of the parish.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I believe that decisions about the parameters of confidentiality are somewhat arbitrary. They are determined by the desire for respect and confidentiality on the one hand, and the nature of the study site and needs of the study itself on the other. Real names are not used. References to other real persons or parishes are altered in order to protect personal identities in the text of the interviews and the analysis of them. The issue of arbitrariness was raised for me when deciding if a piece of data would too easily reveal the identity of the respondent even when a real name was not used. Should this quote be used? How could it be presented in a way that would respect both the anonymity of the respondent and yet maintain a desire to present "rich data"¹¹? The church is a rather small community and it can be appreciated that not much detective work would have to be done by the reader to identify the parish.

CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS

With the assistance of Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis*¹² and Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman's, *Designing Qualitative Research*,¹³ I made an initial, broad design of the categories in which the various responses could be seen as related. Analysis of the interviews guided me to other categories and sub-categories, by what is called "emergent design". This technical term refers to the data gathering and analytical process in which "succeeding methodological steps are based upon the results of steps already taken, [and] implies the presence of a continuously interacting and interpreting investigator."¹⁴ I found this especially true as I moved from one interview to another. I would hear about perceptions of the parish that needed corroboration by another leader, or short accounts of certain parish events I was previously unaware of and valued the perceptions of these events by the other leaders.

"The category generation phase of data analysis is the most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun."¹⁵ The creativity came through as I discovered that original categories I had chosen had to be rejected or modified in favour of those which came out of the responses in the interviews. I believe it to be a major benefit of qualitative research that the data are given every opportunity to present what they hold, rather than be cut or modified to fit the pre-determined theories of the researcher.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study delves into the life of just one parish. Further, this project is, by design, restricted to the attitudes, opinions, views, understandings of the parish priest and three other parish leaders. There was no general survey of the parish, no attempt to compare this parish with others in the city, diocese or country. I do not argue that what was found here applies to Anglican parishes elsewhere. The results may offer insights for further study as similar questions are asked of leaders of other parishes. This study is meant to focus our appreciation for those attitudes that do effect the choices made in the area of parish programming and policy.

VALUE OF THE STUDY

Hopefully, what I present at the end of this study, the reflections on the data, will be useful in other sites. The analysis of the data is meant to provide a framework for other similar studies and glimpses into these complex social systems, webs of relationships and shared hopes, if not visions, for the communities these people represent. The analysis is meant to provide suggestions and themes for discussion in parishes that want to carry out such an examination of their own life and leadership in preparation for a church growth program. A similar exploration in each parish will provide the necessary understanding of the views of parish leaders about these matters, the bedrock that is in fact there, so that incorrect assumptions about the willingness and attitudes of parish leaders can be avoided.

SUMMARY

In this chapter I have not said all that could be said about qualitative inquiry. This is not a study of that research methodology. I wanted to draw out from the array of conventions and prescriptions for a successful qualitative inquiry those guides that were most significant in this particular research project, most importantly, establishing that my research would be best facilitated through interviews. I also discussed how the data from the interviews, triangulated with written documents from the parish, would carry me in an emergent design to the findings the study would present.

In the next chapter I outline a description of the initial design and the stages I followed into its implementation, based on the conventions of qualitative inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Chapter Four presents the decision making process upon which this study was built. I move through the steps of the design beginning with a pilot case study. I then discuss the initial proposal of my project design to my doctoral committee, and conclude with the writing stages of this dissertation. The process had a formal element: approval by the doctoral committee of, first, the project proposal, and then the project design. The formal grinding out of these two initial documents was a very real challenge to me. Committee members pressed me to say what I wanted to more clearly; they pressed me to be more focused. They also urged me to consider different ways of saying what I wanted to say. Leaving the meetings with them I was exhausted and dispirited. I see now, as I approach the end of the process writing this dissertation, just how valuable that experience was.

As I began work in the parish that was to be the site of this research there were many times when I had to ask myself, "Do I want to venture down that path? Is the satisfaction of this curiosity going to satisfy what I need to pursue within the limits of this study? Should I attend such and such a meeting? Should I interview others?" I was slowly learning to better exercise discretion and discernment on my own!

The preparation provided by both formal meetings and many informal conversations, phone calls and e-mail messages with my committee gave me a good base from which to move into the parish site. I made the appropriate requests in writing, asking for the permission I needed to enter into the life of that parish for this study. I was greeted very warmly and enthusiastically by those I wanted to interview.

INITIAL DESIGN

As preparation for this larger final study I did a case study in another parish, in another urban setting. This was done one year prior to beginning work on the initial design for the Project Dissertation. I followed a similar interview pattern in this preliminary study; I interviewed a parish priest and three wardens who served with him in the leadership of the parish. The pilot study allowed me the opportunity to refine my questions and examine my assumptions.

The initial proposal and design for this study included a plan to do two independent case studies. Two were chosen simply because, in consultation with my doctoral committee, I felt this was a manageable size. After committee members shared extensively in a revision of the design, approval was given to proceed.

In the fall of 1994, I approached the two incumbent priests of the parishes in which I wished to do the study, first in conversation and then in letters to them and the wardens and vestries. The letters invited these leaders to participate in the study with assurances of confidentiality and disclosure of my findings to them as the research progressed.

FINAL DESIGN

I showed the interview data from the first site to an outside advisor who believed there was enough data from that site for the kind of in-depth study I wanted to do. I received permission to proceed with this site and plans to do a similar study in the other parish site were postponed.

The interview questions were tested again, this time with one of the wardens from my parish, which not only allowed me to try the interview questions again, but to discuss with her anything she thought I might have overlooked, or any biases that may have been evident to her in the way the questions were asked.

The primary reason why I approached the rector of the parish in this study was that he is a friend of mine and I felt it would be easier for him to trust me both with the interviews and examination of the minutes and reports of parish meetings. He and I had both served as parish priests in another diocese, and both of us were concerned about the future growth of our parishes. We also shared a similar churchmanship, or view of the roles and responsibilities of parish leaders.

This friendship meant that I would have to be aware of it when looking at the data, being careful to note the biases of friendship and guard against allowing them to colour the findings. I was careful in the analysis of the data to corroborate by others the information he gave about the parish, excepting, of course, his personal opinions.

THE PARISH, AN OVERVIEW

The parish in this study moved from a small, initial church building which was first established in the mid 1960's. Its current site is on a major road running through a predominantly middle-class suburb that is home to a number of professional people. The homes within four blocks of the parish in any direction are single family units that are well maintained and attractive, and present a comfortable, peaceful atmosphere.

The current incumbent priest has been in the parish for just over three years. He succeeded a well-liked but strong-minded priest who had been there for a number of years. The contrast between the two is obvious; the current priest is more collegial in his leadership style, taking matters for decision to the wardens and vestry. Whereas, his predecessor was more prone to making such decisions on his own and had the right combination of personal charm and authority to have his resolutions accepted by wardens and vestry.

With a population of three hundred and fifty families the parish is on the border of what Rothauge, in *Sizing Up A Congregation*, would describe as the border between a 'pastoral' parish and a 'program' parish. A pastoral parish sees its life organized around the ministry of the pastor, the parish priest. A program parish has its life arising out of the various programs offered by the parish. Given its size, this parish had a full-time, and part-time, assistant priest who left shortly after the current incumbent arrived. This meant that the new priest, wardens and vestry had to find ways of providing ministry without a second priest.

This parish has a reputation for being energetic and alive. With a membership of 350 families and a variety of programs and projects in the parish, there are many opportunities for involvement. It is similar to other suburban parishes in its size, and draws most of its membership from the surrounding neighbourhood. As well, there is strong commitment to outreach along with an evangelical flavour to its worship and community life.

Familiarity with a research site is an important factor in qualitative research. The researcher who is acquainted with some of the people or features of the site before the

research begins brings those perceptions into the study. Another researcher, meeting people in the site for the first time, does not, of course, have such perceptions and brings a different perspective to the study. Familiarity with a site also presents reasons for caution; it is important that what is familiar and learned prior to the study does not bias the ways the data are gathered or analysed.

I knew something about the recent life and struggles of the parish, but these topics were, by and large, avoided in the interviews. Some of the avoidance was due to a reluctance on both my part and that of the respondents to discuss current crises in a recorded interview, especially when the purpose of the interview did not include an examination of these matters. I felt that there was a desire not to “hang out dirty laundry in public.” The current struggles, tension or crises deserve a study of their own and would have a focus quite different from mine. Some of the avoidance was also due to my concentration on questions concerning inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. I could not help but notice, though, that the psychic, emotional, spiritual and physical energy needed to deal with these internal struggles left little energy for evangelism in the parish or inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. I will have more to say about this in my analysis of and reflection on the data, in chapter Eight.

CRITERIA FOR CHOICE OF RESPONDENTS

In the initial stages of designing this research project I was asked why I did not intend to interview anyone who had recently become a new member of the parish. While I

think the experiences and reflections of this group are worthy of study, and would assist in designing a church growth strategy, I wanted to be more focused. Before anyone is invited, welcomed and integrated into the church fellowship, the members of that parish must make that invitation and be prepared to follow the process through. The qualities and characteristics that promote new membership have to be evident in the parish in order for anyone to feel welcomed by it. One of the axes around which people from outside feel welcomed into a community is the attitude and behaviour of that community's leaders. The leaders not only set the tone in their own conduct, but guide others in the development of a welcoming attitude within the community.

The most important relationships in a parish that wants long-term strength are not between the people and their pastor, but among themselves.¹

CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE LETTER OF INVITATION

The letter of invitation to the incumbent, wardens and vestry indicated that each participant would be asked to give consent to the interviews. The letter also gave as much assurance as possible that the confidentiality of each of the respondents would be respected. Confidentiality was difficult to completely assure as the more that was revealed about the parish in the presentation and examination of the data, the more likely it could be identified by others. The potential for this lack of confidentiality was discussed with each respondent, as well as the external advisor. They acknowledged the difficulty, but expressed no serious concern. They did not place any limitations on the study or the interviews.

PERMISSION TO EXAMINE PARISH DOCUMENTS

Permission to access written documents was given by the rector and wardens in the parish. In the Anglican Church the major documents consist of the minutes of the monthly meetings of vestry, notes from meetings of corporation (the rector and wardens) and the annual general meeting of the parish. There may be special general meetings of the membership on an infrequent and ad hoc basis. Every year each parish must submit a report to the diocesan office. This annual report – mainly statistical – is used by both the diocesan and national offices of the church for purposes of budgeting, programming and communication. The annual reports contain information about membership size, the parish budget, the size of various organisations within the parishes like, for example, the church school, youth and adult groups, along with the numbers of those baptised, confirmed, married and buried in that year. The written data, minutes of meetings and parish reports provided that triangulation I talked about in the previous chapter.

THE INVITATION ACCEPTED

The invitation was cordially accepted by the rector, wardens and vestry and their consent to participate in the research was conveyed to me by phone by the incumbent. The priest gave me the names of the retiring wardens which I requested to interview. I chose this group as they had the most recent experience of leadership in the parish. As the interviews were being done in February, the new wardens would have just been elected or appointed at the recent Annual General Meeting of the parish held in January.

RESPONDENT REVIEW

Assurances were given to each of the respondents that they would have an opportunity to go over the data I had assembled to verify its reliability and to give them an opportunity to suggest any changes. This design element was shared with and approved by members of my doctoral committee. Sadly, one of the respondents died before having the opportunity to look at the data and give me her views or comments. The other three each had the opportunity to study chapter Seven in which I present the data from the interviews, and all were pleased with the care I had taken to protect the identities of those talked about in the interviews. None of them had anything to add to what I had shown them.

A TIME OF TRANSITION

The priest's style, personality, interests and strengths were quite different from those of his predecessor. The past couple of years in the parish were clearly seen by all those interviewed as a time of transition that brought a kind of turmoil as former leaders left the parish and new ones began to show their potential.

RECORDING THE INTERVIEWS

The four interviews were tape recorded. Before I began each interview I asked the respondent if they would be comfortable with this and they all agreed this would not be a

problem. I knew from previous interviews that there would be many times in each interview when I would get caught up in what was being said, led somewhat astray by it to other questions and would forget exactly what was said earlier. I also did not want my note taking to interfere with the flow of the interview itself.

The interview with the parish priest was conducted in a small lounge area next to his office. The other three were carried out, individually and privately, in the homes of the respondents. I hoped, in arranging this, to make the experience as relaxed and comfortable as possible. I was not concerned about any consultations they may have had with each other and I did not suspect any collaboration that would skew the data. The interviews were done over a period of two weeks. This period of time allowed me to listen to the tape recording of each interview and make notes before proceeding to the next one.

INTERVIEW WITH PRIEST

The priest is a person willing to talk about his ministry and his parish, and is articulate about his perceptions. He had been licensed as incumbent by the bishop in his parish for just three years, and was still working with the new issues, challenges and patterns he was experiencing. I was conscious of the short time he had been in the parish and considered this in later interviews with the lay leaders. This is one example of the emergent design I referred to earlier. When I designed the interview questions I did not see the length of time a priest had served in the parish as a relevant factor. But in my actual interview with him I adjusted to this and his sensitivity to it.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTURE OF THE PARISH

The interviews introduced me to the culture of the parish. I was able to discern the dynamics of various autonomous systems: rector and wardens, vestry, the larger parish. There was talk about the “parish family.” Like all families or other coherent, distinct social groups, its system was an intricate web of social cohesion and tension, affection and disconnection that made it unique.

A COMMENT ON THE INTERVIEWS

It was not surprising that each interview took on a life of its own; they developed their own courses or flow as I reacted to things suggested in varied responses to my questions. One respondent would have a lot to say about one topic; another would have little or nothing to say about the same subject. Key elements remained, though, in each interview: the history of their entry into the Anglican Church; their perceptions of the meaning of evangelism and the great commission in Matthew’s Gospel; their understanding and perception of the leadership in the parish with respect to evangelism; and their personal experiences of inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. They were also asked about their understanding of and appreciation for the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism, and the role of the diocese and national church in supporting this declaration. Each interview ended with me asking if there was anything that they wanted to say that I did not ask about – anything they wanted to add that they felt they did not have an opportunity to contribute in the course of the interview.

Shifts, due to the varied responses in each interview, made the necessary categorisation for data analysis that much more difficult. The nuances and verbal contexts were different in each interview, as was the order of the questions which changed depending upon the direction the respondent wanted to go in. For example, near the beginning of one interview the respondent made reference to the Great Commission and that led, very near the beginning, to questions about its meaning for them. Normally, queries about the Great Commission in Matthew were left to the last third of the interview time.

TRANSCRIPTION

Transcription of the taped interviews was done by my parish secretary and reviewed twice by me for as close to verbatim transcription as we could get. The tapes are kept in a secure place separate from the written transcriptions. They are available to those who legitimately want to further this study. On the advice of my consultant, the parish secretary was encouraged to share her perceptions, and her interpretations were then seriously considered in my analysis of the interview data.

ITERATION OF PURPOSE

My purpose in the study of this parish site was to identify and describe the opinions, attitudes, and feelings of four parish leaders with respect to those matters directly related to or arising out of a consideration of evangelism, church growth or assisting others in their meeting with and initiation into a Christian community.

As this has obvious roots in theology, the next chapter will examine one of the relevant major sources of guidance and direction in the Bible towards evangelism: Matthew's great commission. As the Bible informs, shapes and critiques the life of any Anglican parish, it is most fitting, and a natural progression of this study, to examine a passage which is at the centre of the church's desire to invite, welcome and integrate new members.

CHAPTER FIVE MATTHEW'S GREAT COMMISSION, 28:16-20

The purpose of this chapter is to examine a text of the New Testament Gospel, Matthew, that is basic to the Church's teaching about evangelism. Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus giving his disciples what is called "the Great Commission," Matthew 28:16-20. It is a text that is often quoted when the church wants to encourage evangelistic activity in the world.¹

In the interviews each respondent was asked what Matthew's Great Commission meant to her / him. I argue that the text is based on a patriarchal, hierarchical view of society that reflects the society of the church at the time it was written. Since the church bases its teaching on the Bible, I believe it is important to examine a text like Matthew 28:16-20 in order to find the interpretation that is meaningful to church membership at the end of the twentieth century. What relevance does it have to our understanding of evangelism today?

I examined this text in the social, political and cultural context in which it was written. My first questions were: why did Matthew end his Gospel with these verses? What was his intention? Hopefully, this part of the study may help us with our interpretation of the text in this century.

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND MATTHEW 28:16-20?

I was about twelve or thirteen years old when our small town's Anglican parish had a guest preacher from the Canadian Bible Society. The preacher began his sermon by holding up a well known logo from a paint company. The sign showed a paint can pouring red paint over the top of the globe of the earth. Under the picture was the caption, "to cover the world." The preacher used this as the model for the Christian Church in its mission to bring the Word of God to all nations. After the service I said to two men I respected that I thought that it was not a good thing to use a sign like that while preaching,. It was an advertisement for a paint company, and hence it was inappropriate for a sermon text. They replied that it may have been. However, they were sure that I would not forget that sermon! I did not!

I also remember, as a child in Sunday Church school, being given, on the Sunday after Ash Wednesday, a small can in which I would put coins during Lent as part of my Lenten discipline and sacrifice. The money collected was to go to support our missionaries working among and for the many children around the world. The children of various races were pictured on the special containers.

From my earliest youth I knew of the injunction in Matthew's Gospel, the Great Commission of Matthew 28:1-20, especially v 19, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" It was the biblical text of the sermon with the paint can and the text accompanying the special offering containers we children got each year during Lent.

Over the centuries this verse has constrained and sanctioned very move of the Church to expand its influence and membership. It is direct, clear and powerful in its expression. It is the fullest expression of the mandate to the Church to grow, expand, and bring others in. Matthew's Great Commission gives one of the few job descriptions for the church in the Gospels. It also has about it the texture of a formula of the early church, about which more will be said later.

Over the years I have wondered more and more about the place of "the Great Commission" in the life of the Church in the last half of the twentieth century. With a greater tolerance among religions, growing pluralism in our modern societies, and major shifts in theology which allow for the accommodation of other religious world views, I ask myself what the "Great Commission" has to say to the membership of the Church today. What does it mean to priests and lay members of Anglican parishes? What role does it play in their Christian lives? For behind this final command of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is an understanding of "Lordship" that just does not seem to easily fit with our modern experience of Christ in the Church.

As this commission occurs in this form only in Matthew's Gospel, it is important to appreciate the theological assumptions and sociological influences upon this Gospel writer in order to understand the social context in which it was written. As the last words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, the commission is built upon an ecclesiological and christological framework that is Matthew's own. Matthew's Great Commission has, for instance, an elevated view of the Lordship of Christ.

"The most important christological title for Matthew was Son of God."²

How Matthew and his Church viewed the role, power, and mandate of the Risen Christ simply adds weight to the power, urgency, clarity and compulsion of this command to the disciples. The New Testament understanding of the title, the "Risen Lord," had a powerful effect on the Gospel writers and was a strong influence on their understanding of evangelism as well as a powerful motivator for them to carry out its work. Jesus, who lived, taught, performed miracles and died among his friends had become a powerful rabbi. In his resurrection, with its power even over the forces of death, his leadership was seen as universal, cosmic.

Before embarking on any program in any organisation there must first be clear and strong leadership, if the program is to be successful. In the church a study of leadership has to consider what is meant by "Lordship". The church recognises Jesus as both the Lord of life and the model for leadership within the Christian church. In Jesus "Lordship" and "Leadership" are inter-related, the meaning of one woven into the meaning of the other. Jesus is 'the Way'; he shows the way and leads the way.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. (1 Cor 15:20-25, NRSV)

In New Testament passages like this we see how the meanings of 'leadership' and 'lordship' are intertwined. Jesus, as Lord, has authority over all creation, and is the one who will return in judgement. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6) In this statement 'Lordship' and 'leadership' come together. Jesus is referring to his own life as the life that not only shows the way (leadership), but is the Way (lordship). I will explore this more fully later in the "Lordship and leadership" section of this chapter.

The title "Lord" has a very arcane place in our twentieth-century society. "Lordship" is used only in the formality of our Federal and Provincial Court systems. Even "Leadership" is being widely studied and written about as there is an almost desperate search for effective, trustworthy and visionary leadership by various groups in society. The Church also is struggling with meanings of these terms and titles as it seeks to fulfil its mandate toward the end of the twentieth century.

An examination of the literary and social context of Matthew 28:16-20 helps us understand how Matthew's conception of the "lordship" of Jesus influenced the intensity and power to motivate in these "last words" of Jesus. Because of the high christological position Matthew takes, hearers of his Gospel would be emboldened in the face of profound challenges to build their new Jewish Christian community. The church Matthew was writing to was facing pressure and persecution. Matthew's commission is much more decisive and authoritative than those found in the other Gospels. For example, Luke presents a 'kinder', 'softer', 'more joyous' mandate:

... and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:46 -53)

Comparisons of Jesus' commission of the disciples are taken here from accounts of the post-resurrection appearances, as it is in these accounts that the synoptic Gospel writers differ considerably from each other. It is, for each, the moment of concluding instruction for the churches to and for whom they were writing. The post-resurrection accounts can be seen as expressions of the main thrusts of each writer, the theological twist they put on their accounts in the Gospels. Matthew, for example, continues his emphasis on obedience to the all powerful Son of God, the "Lord" who is given all authority over heaven and earth.³

Mark, in contrast, continues his theme of "signs" of the kingdom and of the Messiah that is Jesus:

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. 16 The one who believes and is baptised will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new

tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:15-18).

Whereas Matthew's injunction suggests a cultic, formal commissioning with strong words about authority, teaching and commanding, Mark's emphasis is on the desire to "proclaim" this good news that is Jesus Christ. Luke, on the other hand, is concerned that "forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his (Jesus) name to all nations" (Luke 24.47).

This manner and expectation of Matthew is described by one commentator, J. C. Fenton, in the following way:

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is put before the reader as the one who makes the most complete claim upon a man that it is possible to make – the demand for his life – and as the one who promises, to those who answer this demand with obedience, the gift of eternal life. Obedience, as Matthew saw it, is more important than correct belief about Jesus; notice, for example, 7.21: *Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* Although Matthew uses many titles for Jesus, he is much more concerned that his readers should obey Jesus, by living in faith, hope, and love, than that they should be correct in their understanding of who Jesus is.⁴

Fenton says further that, "both in his enlargement of Mark, and in his revision of it, his purpose was to make clearer to his readers the claims of Jesus to be believed and to be obeyed."⁵

This stern, demanding quality of the commissioning of the disciples is wonderfully described by Francis W. Beare who had an informed and keen interest in iconography:

The Jesus of Matthew provides the fundamental lineaments of the formidable *Christus Pantocrator* who frowns upon us from the cupolas of Byzantine churches. The terrors of the Day of Judgement hang perpetually over the heads of Matthew's readers.⁶

Matthew's "Great Commission" is consistent in style and content with the Gospel he wrote preceding it. His "Christ" is one of great authority and power; his "Servant of Man" most closely resembles the Servant found in Daniel:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. (Dan 7:13-14)

In Matthew, "the Son of Man" is one of the chief titles of Jesus, and the "Kingdom" is clearly the central theme.⁷ Throughout this Gospel there is the confidence that Jesus is the "Son of Man" in whom God has acted to reconcile the world to the Divine. Given its strong Jewish influence it is not surprising to find considerable emphasis in Matthew's Gospel on authority, especially the authority of Jesus as "Lord", a title Matthew uses with care and only when the supreme divine authority of the Christ is intended.⁸

Daniel Patte illustrates the authority of Matthew's preaching in the conclusion of his Gospel:

Since the resurrection demonstrates that Jesus' teaching is trustworthy and a direct expression of God's will, it follows that the disciples must transmit this teaching and "make disciples" as Jesus did. Furthermore, since Jesus has received "all authority," he has authority over the disciples. He can command them, and they must submit to his authority.⁹

The elements or components of the Commission itself necessitate some consideration here. First, it is noted that this is the only time in the Gospels where the disciples are to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From Acts and the Pauline epistles, we gather that in the earliest days, converts were baptised "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38), or of "the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16); "into Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:3), or "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27).¹⁰

The formula, "in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit" very early in the church's history became the orthodox formula for the administration of Baptism within the church. This suggests that Matthew 28:16-20 could be a later addition to the Gospel text reflecting the current mind of the Church, its developed theology and ecclesiology. Whether it is a later addition or not, the possibility of a redaction leads one to ponder various ideological reasons for this particular ending of Matthew's Gospel. We have, for example, acknowledged Matthew's stress on the authority of Jesus, the authority of his teaching and the demand for obedience to it. Matthew 28:16-20 represents a particular church - in a particular location and at a particular time in the early history of the church -- which saw itself in conflict with other local Jewish teachings which were overtly contending with it.

Daniel Harrington, in his commentary, describes the social and political climate of Matthew's day as follows:

After AD 70 Judaism was very much in transition. Several movements arose that claimed to provide the authentic means of continuing the Jewish tradition. Among such movements were the early rabbis ("Scribes and Pharisees") and the early Christians (such as Matthew's community). The stakes were high (the survival of Judaism), the transition was at a very early stage (late first century AD), and tensions were severe (as Matthew 23 and other texts show). It is against this background that we need to understand Matthew's theological program, for it was intended as a way of preserving and continuing Jewish tradition.¹¹

We recognise, in our competitive world, how various strategies are used by leaders to build up their organisations or institutions. Matthew, as the other Gospel writers, was concerned for the security and growth of his Church. It is certainly possible that such concerns might be at work in motivating Matthew to support, embolden, encourage and persuade his followers.

Another motivating factor that predominates in each of the Gospels was the soon expected second coming of the risen Christ. There was a real urgency about Christian life shaped by this immanence. There was no thought of long range plans, such as preparing a Christian community and spirituality that would last for generations. Instructions and various commissions were all infused with this urgency – get the job done while there is still time!

One is led to consider the social-political and ecclesial context in which Matthew wrote in light of both the differences in the endings of the other synoptic Gospels and the different emphases one finds in the commissions of Jesus to his disciples concerning the message to be proclaimed. Floyd Filson says of Matthew's Gospel in this context:

Matthew is justly called the ecclesiastical Gospel, not merely because only this Gospel contains the word 'church' (xvi.18; xviii.170), but also because of its vital role in the Church's life and work. 'Matthew' wrote not to establish himself as a literary figure but to serve the needs of the Church in which he was an active leader.¹²

The experience of the early church in the development and formation of the Gospel accounts was influenced by ancient societal structures. The roles and titles common within the Jewish community at that time in the Roman empire provided the earliest models of leadership in the young Christian community. Out of the patriarchal and distinctive features of Judaism, Christianity had to adapt to its new audience, the gentile world with its Greco-Roman history, culture, social structures and religious philosophies. In *In Memory of Her*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza finds in this history, behind the hierarchy and the attendant repression of women, slaves and others groups, a Biblical tradition through both the Old and New Testaments that is egalitarian and liberating.

Thus in remembering that a nameless woman prophet has anointed Jesus as the messianic inaugurator of the *basileia*, the community also remembers that the God of Jesus is on the side of the poor and that God's future, the *basileia*, belongs to the poor.¹³

I mention this important work by Schüssler Fiorenza not only for its reconstruction of Christian origins, but also because of the way in which throughout chapters Seven & Eight Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges the patriarchal nature and structure of the early Church. This work and others like it leads one to ask what particular influences patriarchy, with its hierarchy, had on this "ecclesiastical Gospel". It would appear that Matthew represents a strong patriarchal presence in the high, powerful image he holds of the Lordship of Christ. The various images of this lordship, the tone, intent and language of the great commission all speak of a church with strong patriarchal influences. The church Matthew writes this commission for seems, in this sense, qualitatively different from the churches of Mark and Luke.

The Messiah that was expected would be received as the Lord of Creation, the Son of God, the King of Kings.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." (Mat 16:15-17).

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Mat 25:31-34).

The Christ proclaimed in all the Gospels is in ultimate and total control of not only the personal actions of individual women and men, but the whole of creation.

LORDSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

One challenge which the Gospel of Matthew presents to the Church is that of rethinking what it means by the roles of lordship and leadership, and the authority of scripture.

As Beare reminds us:

the title *Kurios* ('Lord') is seldom given to Jesus in Matthew. Except in the vocative, where it is generally honorific (as in common Greek usage), not cultic, it usually refers to God, following the practice of the LXX translators.... It is apparent from this that Matthew feels that there is something more than ordinary courtesy involved when Jesus is addressed as Kyrie -- it verges on the Christian cultic sense of 'Lord Jesus'. Only when they appear before him for judgement do the condemned call him Kyrie (7:22; 25:44), and then it is to hear him pronounce their doom.¹⁴

This view of the Lordship of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is consistent with the patriarchal nature of other aspects of the Gospel as noted above. We do not have here the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' of the child's prayer, but, as Beare put it, the *Christus Pantocrator*, the one who was to be obeyed because of the divine authority he had won through his obedience that brought him to his crucifixion.

It is Paul, more than the Gospel writers, who develops a theology of Jesus as Lord. The authority and honour given Jesus in his lifetime which earned him the common respectful title, 'Lord' now takes on a cosmic meaning.

Those who are still alive at the time [of Christ's second coming] will be caught up in the air to meet "the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). That will happen "on the day of the Lord," not the day of Yahweh but the day of Christ (1 Thess 5:12).¹⁵

Paul extends Matthew's faith that Jesus is the 'Lord' because of his resurrection and ascension. The Jesus in Paul's expanded christology is also Lord of the whole of creation. The future of creation is seen as dependent upon the Judgement of Christ.

We have moved, even in Matthew, from the use of "Lord" for titles of honour and respect to a more hierarchical one in which there is a heavenly rule of the "Lord" who is king. It is important to remember that Eastern Orthodox Christianity has not applied the title "Lord" to Jesus to elevate him to the same prominence as God. There has always been the insistence that one prays through Jesus, the Son, to God the Father, in the Holy Spirit. But within that Trinity, Jesus, the Christ, is the one at whom, "every knee should bow and every tongue confess". In this view there is the strong implication of a hierarchical and submissive relationship between the one who leads the church, the *Kurios* and those who are led, the disciples.

This hierarchical character of leadership in the early church presses one to consider the influence of patriarchy upon it. Such a reflection is important to our study as we consider how, in 1995, a parish can exercise the sort of leadership that encourages members to be inviting, welcoming and integrating. The biblical model we have looked at in Matthew

does not seem to fit the culture and climate of the church in the late twentieth century. Let us look a bit more deeply into the early culture of the church in order that we may better understand how today's church and its leadership compare with earlier models of leadership.

PATRIARCHY IN THE CHURCH

The Anglican Church of Canada, like Anglican churches in other parts of the world, is an Episcopal Church with a hierarchical structure running from Bishop down through Diocesan Synod, through to priests and parishes. This rather clean line of authority is somewhat disrupted by a more democratic movement, indicative of the current age, in which parishes and their lay members share not only increased responsibilities for the ministry and mission of the Church, but also have more of the decision-making authority at local levels. In the interviews for this research there were repeated references to responsibility at the local and personal level among the lay and ordained leaders of the parish. A resolution from the gathering of all the Anglican bishops from around the world, such as the one declaring the Decade of Evangelism, might therefore have little impact on either the desire for or the understanding of evangelism -- this is one clear example of that shift in authority. There are others as well as we will see in the report of the interview data, such as the priest lamenting the lack of response to his desire for a more open and welcoming faith community.

I believe the uncertainty, insecurity and lack of clarity about leadership in the church at the parish level is rooted in and reflected by the difficulty we have with the christological understanding of the "Lordship" of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of this title, governs our

reaction to various injunctions or admonitions in scripture. I argue in the closing paragraphs of this chapter that a "high" view of the Lordship of Christ was important to the evangelistic motivation of the early Church of the Gospels.

PATRIARCHAL CHARACTERISTICS FOUND IN THE GOSPELS

What Matthew and his church meant by the Lordship of Christ not only provided the necessary impetus and motivation for their evangelism, but also played a significant part in the definition of evangelism itself. Matthew and his church were familiar with a societal structure which was hierarchical. Rome's hierarchical model was the emperor, senate, on down to the local suzerains and governors. The Jewish religion knew a thoroughly hierarchical ruling class of priests. The Gospels are permeated with accounts of the fear that lesser strata in society had of higher ones. The parables and teachings of Jesus are often built around this struggle between those in authority or power and those who have no power or authority. The use of the word "Lord" would have been common, connoting the social and political reality of the time of the early church.

It can be argued, given the expected immanent return of their Lord, that the early church did not see any point in struggling to overcome oppressive social regimes. That would all be dealt with, or remedied in the "second coming". The emphasis was instead on personal and corporate preparation of the Christian community. This perspective softens any criticism about Matthew and the others not saying more about social change.

The seeds, though, of another understanding of reality – one which conflicts with the social structures of the day – are found in the very message of Jesus these Gospels convey. It is an appreciation for equality.

Here we find that the cornerstone of dominator ideology, the masculine - superior/feminine - inferior species model is, but for a few exceptions, conspicuous by its absence. Instead, permeating these writings is Jesus' message of spiritual equality.¹⁶

The emphasis here is on inclusiveness: all are invited and what they are invited to [by Jesus] is a feast, fulfilment, joy. The invitation is not to chosen individuals but to all.¹⁷

The ecclesiology in the Mediterranean world reflected this hierarchical political/social structure in its understanding of God and the supreme role of the Messiah. The Messiah was expected to establish his reign over all other kings and lords. This expectation resonated with the symbols of power, hierarchical power, "king", "lord", "army", and "rule".

It can also be argued that this very hierarchical structure – this social, political and religious system which was opposed by the teaching of Jesus – later became the patriarchal model for the early Church. The oppression experienced by members of the New Testament Church would present a hope for a "saviour" who would overcome the tyranny and oppression of other rulers, and elevate the oppressed to a status above their current oppressors. The Book of Revelation held out just such a hope. It was a hope not only for victory for the oppressed, but also for revenge against the oppressors. Under Constantine

the Church became “the power”, “the dominator” with a hierarchy and authority just as powerful as that which the writer of the Book of Revelation was railing against. It was the same state in both cases, but in the latter that state was now “Christianised”.

Conceptions of “Lordship” and “leadership” strongly influenced each other in the time of the early church and continue to do so. The political and social conditions of a time, the everyday experiences of the people, would be projected into their theological description of their salvation -- the hope-filled picture they would have of the one who would save them.

CONCLUSION

Che Guevara, during the time of the Cuban revolution, was reportedly asked about the meaning of sacrifice. He is said to have replied that, at this time in history, sacrifice was a meaningless concept. If personal sacrifice has become a meaningless concept in our modern age, can the same be said of such concepts as “Lord”? What does “Lordship” mean today? How do we understand the authority of Matthew’s great commission and what kind influence does it have in the minds and hearts of those who feel responsible for carrying the full message of the Gospel into the world? How much authority does this statement from a patriarchal and hierarchical society have in our modern church which struggles against the abuses of such structures?

CHAPTER SIX THE PARISH AS A COMPLEX ORGANIZATION

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I considered how a biblical model of leadership, centred on how Matthew's great commission, Matthew 28:16-20, forms the background for my consideration of leadership in a modern parish. The life of an Anglican parish is rooted not only in the life of scripture; it is shaped, modified and directed by the culture of the current community in which it finds itself. I will now move into the present century and discuss how systems theory can help explain the dynamics of leadership in a parish, especially with respect to the inauguration of a policy or program.

This is a broad topic and the subject of many studies as indicated in the bibliography. I wish to acknowledge only certain factors identified in a systems analysis of the organization of the parish and larger church. These are factors at play in the development of attitudes among leaders and members as they attempt to be more inviting and welcoming as a parish community. These systemic issues will be presented from within the context of the parish church. My study simply recognises a few of the features of the organization that impact on the attitudes of the leaders in this study. I do not attempt a systems analysis of the parish, diocese or national church.

This will be followed by the recognition that the church is changing as an organization and has new pressures and ways of looking at itself in the late 1990s.

I conclude this chapter revisiting the gospel writer Matthew's church in the light of our modern experience of the Christian community.

ELEMENTS OF SYSTEMS THEORY AS APPLIED TO THE PARISH

Behind the theological injunctions and ecclesial urgings to promote evangelism is the interaction between authorities at each of the different levels of the church. Within the parish are the views and desires of the incumbent priest, the lay leaders, and the members. There is also the interaction of the parish with the diocesan authorities, the bishop, the synod and its officers. Beyond that is the influence and direction of the church at the national level in the resolutions and decisions of General Synod. These resolutions and decisions have an impact first on the diocese and then, through the diocese, on each parish. Each component – the parish, its vestry and corporation, the diocese and the national church – is an interdependent entity, or system, and a subsystem of a larger entity. By “system” we mean a distinguishable entity made up of parts which are bound to each other in a synergistic relationship that seeks the security and future of the entity, which is greater than the sum of its parts.

The interaction between these systems and subsystems needs to be identified, studied and understood. The relationships and dynamics of the people involved at each level of the church have a profound effect on the direction parishes will take with respect to any program. This systemic life of the church leads to differing views, interpretations, hopes and

expectations within the church community. Each level of the church organisation has its own needs, not the least of which is financial and is vitally important to its survival.

SYSTEMS THEORY EXPLAINED

Family therapists, physiologists, engineers and other scientists have come to see the individual person or individual substance (in the case of physiology) as being directly tied or linked, to its environment. Further, these individual natures are interdependent providing nurture, life and energy for other parts of the whole of which they are part, and, in turn, they are nurtured, maintained and protected in what appears, on the surface at least, to be an independent life. The system is a “whole” made up of parts which, in turn, are distinct and specific. The relationship between the parts and the whole is synergistic. This synergism is explained in Mansell Pattison’s interesting study of parish organization.

Synergy has reference to the fact that the parts literally “work together”. It points to the state which exists when an organization is so arranged that an individual in meeting his or her own needs also meets the needs of other individuals and of the organization.¹

Many systems theorists would argue that given this synergy, individuals cannot act in isolation, and further, that their behaviour can be explained as only an extension of the influences of the whole. However, I prefer a view like that of David Allen’s:

I am not minimising the importance of social and ecological contexts in determining behaviour -- far from it. I believe that they are by far the most important

determinants. Even so, people do have separate, individual selves with independently functioning minds, despite appearances to the contrary.²

The innate desire of an organism or organisation is for its survival and adaptation to the world in which it finds itself. The maintenance of this state is called homeostasis.³ Evolution of the organism, central to systems theory, is also part of its survival. It is interrelated with other organisms (organisations) as sub-systems of a larger system. Systems theory, helps us to understand why it is very difficult not only for individuals but also families and churches to change. The natural state is a cautious maintenance of the status quo. Change, often radical and painful, is not joyfully greeted like the prodigal son! It comes to the family or parish system from a member who has become so “individuated” as to be free to hold and introduce the change, or because of circumstances in the surrounding environment which literally press the system to change; it has no choice but to change, if it wants to survive.

The systemic nature of the church includes all the personal characteristics of the local and regional leaders, such as their conscious and unconscious desires for power and influence. It also includes the capacity of the local and regional membership to effect improvements in their own social/economic/political conditions. The local system – the local congregations – struggles with its own goals and needs and in so doing influences the church at regional levels and beyond. Added to this are the influences of systems outside the church, such as the local and regional political and economic powers, and the cultural history of the region.

What the Becvars say below about systems theory as applied to a family can also be said of a church with its individual members, local congregations and regional groupings:

Since the components of a human system are interrelated, it follows that each family member's behaviour cannot be viewed and treated as an isolated unit. Rather, it must be considered relative to context, as both antecedent and subsequent to the behaviour of other family members.⁴

A significant principle within systems theory is the interrelationship of all the sub-systems in the development and definition of the larger system. The experience of hierarchy is not limited to a personal experience within a family, it influences and shapes the tribal, local, concepts of leadership which, in turn, are reflected in the larger, national political realms. Systems theory also includes the notion of "feedback" which, in this context, means that the national or state perceptions flow back to influence the social structure of families. In the development of the understanding of Lordship and leadership one of the key ingredients in the system is the struggle. Power is essential for the stability and growth of the system, one individual person, a family, a tribe, or the church at any level.

PRESSURES AND CHALLENGES OF THE ORGANIZATION IN THE PARISH

The challenges of leadership in any parish today, including the leadership of ordained and non-ordained members, are confusing and unclear for a number of reasons, not the least being systemic confusion within the church about its goals, objectives, and mission. On the one hand, there are the demands of the institution for its perpetuation and its

accompanying demands for financial resources. Programs, activities, and actions within a parish have to be aligned to meet this need. In the Anglican system in Canada each parish is charged an apportionment or assessment from its income to support the diocesan, national and international structures. These apportionments or assessments generally run between 15 and 25 % of a parish's gross income! At the same time, there are the fiscal demands of the parish itself. Operation costs, including clergy stipends or salaries, benefits, and maintenance of buildings and supplies, consume about 80 - 85% of budgeted income in many medium-sized parishes. This leaves little room in parish budgets to support strong church growth programs! In the midst of this national, diocesan and parish fiscal system are the special appeals from Diocesan and National Offices that collide with the local, internal demands of the parish budgeting process. Clearly, this says to all leaders in the parish, you must present yourself to your members and potential members in such a way that your parish is attractive to them. As a result, they too, can become contributors to a budget that requires care, time and attention. This is a clear example of systemic homeostasis described above. The real object of goal-setting workshops in parishes is the satisfaction of the financial demands of the institution of the church at all levels: parish, diocese, national and international. Maintenance of the organization is paramount within any system. To maintain the life of a parish money must be provided. Attention to this is an element of homeostasis, maintaining the organism as it is.

All of this means that the parish leader, especially the rector or incumbent is under considerable pressure from these demands for money to "do things" and behave in ways that are primarily conducive to increasing the parish income.

The parish leader, priest or warden, also brings to his/her leadership role other values and goals that are part of their experience within the Church including their interpretation of Scripture. The difficulty here is that within most parishes there is not a clear agreement about what evangelism means, in part because the church itself means different things to different people. There are those who see the Church as the place where people come for personal spiritual nourishment to help them through the week. Others value the experience of fellowship within the community and are nourished by that. Still others simply enjoy the worship and find it uplifting. Some hope to lead their parishes to greater social/political responsibility and action in the world, and present themselves as strong adherents of the social gospel. Others, particularly young families, come hoping to find a place where their children will learn right from wrong so that they will develop into good citizens. These are just a few of the desires that motivate people to find membership in a friendly and supportive church. Not all of these motivations indicate a clear link to "bring the Good News to those in need" and less to "go, baptise all nations, making them disciples."

There is also confusion about the ministry:

In congregation after congregation there is disagreement about what is the essential work of a minister. But the powerlessness experienced by pastors and lay leaders is that they cannot decide how that question is to be resolved.⁵

The conflict of the various sub-systems can thus easily be discerned. The national and Diocesan systems make their demands, overtly and covertly, for more money to support the parish and other sub-systems. The parish itself struggles with internal conflicts over budgetary priorities. The budgetary needs of the various programs and projects in the parish

are pitted against demands for money for such basics as building maintenance. These conflicting demands often run parallel with the conflicting diversity of expectations of the primary role of the Church: mission, worship, service or outreach. The budgetary needs of the parish for its local operation, the Diocese for its work, and the national church for its mission are often seen as conflicting claims on the same income source, the members. Parish leaders ask, what is the Church supposed to be doing? Where are its energy, effort and service to be directed?

The challenge of comprehending and responding to the various systemic pressures is further complicated by our current understanding of the Church as an institution undergoing radical change. Herbert O'Driscoll, addressing the synod of the Diocese of Calgary in April 1994, talked of the current church as the "wilderness" church and urged delegates to consider the Exodus model from the Old Testament as the model of the church they are living in today. Michael Peers, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada was the guest lecturer at the Trinity College Divinity Association conference at the University of Toronto, May 30 to June 1, 1994. From his comprehensive national and a well informed international perspective the church was also viewed as a "wilderness church."

I simply underline the point of Mead and others, that this paradigm shift is real and irreversible. What was, is dying. What is to come, has yet to be determined. We are in a transition time that might be likened to the Biblical 40 days or 40 years. It is taking a long time.⁶

Loren B. Mead, in his book *The Once and Future Church* (1991), perceives a major shift in the Church of the last three decades away from the Church of Christendom. He

briefly describes two previous paradigms, the Apostolic Church and the Church of Christendom established by the emperor Constantine in 320 CE. The third paradigm, the one we are just now moving into, is not yet completely developed.

The third way of being church has begun to be born, but its birth is not complete.

Once again the church and the individual person of faith are beginning to discover a sense of a new mission frontier. But that frontier has not yet become clear or compelling enough; we see the horizon, but the path we must follow remains obscure. Worse, the church's energy for mission today is conflicted and at war with itself.⁷

Mead's perception reflects those of others, O'Driscoll, Peers and Schaef. It is a time of great uncertainty for the church and no less so in how people perceive its primary mission. This lack of vision is complicated by the conflicting needs of the various levels of the institution, needs that are in themselves neither obvious nor conscious.

Mead does not consider this paradigm shift to be a quiet, predictable transition from one kind of church to another. It is more a radical transformation!

We are at the front edges of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for 1,600 years. It is by far the greatest change that the church has ever experienced in America; it may eventually make the transformation of the Reformation look like a ripple in a pond.⁸

In a parish, priests and others who are expected to provide the initial leadership face... "the disintegration of commonly-shared, understood and clear image of their role and purpose."⁹

Thrown into this mix are the unconscious behaviours and actions within parishes, between ordained and non-ordained leaders. I am talking here about “transference” and “counter transference.” Transference refers to the transfer of feelings a person has for one person on to another. This is done unconsciously, the person making the transference is not aware this is happening.

The patient transfers the feelings he had towards his parents as a child to the person of the physician. He blows the physician up larger than life just as the child sees the parents.¹⁰

A counter transference is when, for example, the physician responds from his unconscious feelings towards another particular person from his past.

Mary Anne Coate, in her study of clergy stress gives this description of transference: One of the things that is likely to be happening when we have persistent inappropriate feelings that will not go away is that these very feelings may not really ‘belong’ to this present situation but are *displaced or transferred* from another current or earlier situation involving different people.¹¹

A common transference to clergy is the authoritative transference in which the pastor is seen, unconsciously, as a ‘God-like’ figure, in control of life. The pastor can become, undeservedly, the object of the anger of a person who feels that life has not treated them fairly.¹² Old feelings or feelings brought in, transferred, from other relationships can lead to more stress and confusion, “when in some ways a pastor is expected to be all things to all people.”¹³ There are dependency transferences which make unreasonable demands on any priest or pastor largely because they come from unresolved issues of dependence /

independence of the dependent person. In the face of these is a corresponding counter transference, again unconscious, of the pastor. This mix is at work below the surface of all relationships within the parish and though unconscious, they are powerful and potentially dangerous and crippling if left unattended.

The confusion, the conflicting goals, the unresolved conflicts that arise out of various transference sets the church up to be seen as an addictive organization. Anne Wilson Schaefer and Diane Fassel took their experiences with addictive behaviour in persons, including their exposure to and development in the 12 step program of Alcoholic's Anonymous and applied it to what they saw in various organisations such as industrial, educational and service agencies. The church can easily be seen to have many of the characteristics or symptoms of an addictive organization.

Addictive organisations get into their most serious trouble when they forget to keep the primacy of their mission before them. They then lose contact with the reason for their existence, the contribution they expect to make to the society or what they want to do. Although it seems incomprehensible that organisations could be so out of touch, the confusion in the addictive organization often results in the company's pursuing a product line or strategy that looks good in the abstract at the moment without asking how it relates to mission, consumer needs or readiness.¹⁴

FURTHER SYSTEMIC TRAITS THAT EFFECT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Arlin J. Rothauge authored a booklet entitled *Sizing up a Congregation For New Member Ministry* (Education For Mission and Ministry Office, The Episcopal Church of the United States). In it he describes the dynamics within the systems of four sizes of congregations which he calls “the family church”, “the pastoral church”, “the program church”, and “the corporation church”. Each is distinguished by the size of the congregation within that church: “family” includes up to fifty active members, “pastoral” from 50 to 150, “program” from 150 to 300, and “corporation” from 350 to 500 or more active members. Rothauge describes the dynamics of each size of congregation, as well as the power points and the flow of decision making and authority. What is significant from his study and the reflection on it by Roy Oswald and Speed Lees in their work entitled, *The Inviting Church: a study in new member assimilation* (1987), is the barrier to growth in those churches wanting to move from one category to another.

We have noted in some congregations that members who have had good experience in a congregation of one size go to another and try to replicate that experience in a church where that kind of assimilation process won't work. It is obvious to members of small, single cell congregations that what works for big, old First Church Downtown doesn't fit their situation, and they will easily tell that to you, their pastor and anyone else who cares to listen. However, it may be much more difficult for the pastor coming from the pastoral sized church to understand or respond to the

different demands placed on his or her time in program-sized churches, both by the situation and by the members who may be proposing programs and activities out of their pastora – or family – sized previous experience.¹⁵

I have quoted at length here as I believe this points to an important systemic factor that is involved in the process of church growth and new member assimilation. The dynamics of each system are motivated by security and maintenance. To move, say, from a pastoral sized congregation of 50 to 150 to a program-sized church with 150 to 350 members means far more than adding pews or pushing out the walls of the church building. The systemic dynamics of the congregation changes. The priest and other parish leaders now take on new roles, and are perceived to have different responsibilities and relationships with the members. The members, in turn, relate differently to the parish church as an institution or small society. They expect different things from it and are asked to be involved in different ways.

All of this means that there is a natural barrier to growth from one type of congregation to another. One is not just adding new numbers to the parish list. One is also changing the whole nature of the congregation and there is a reluctance to do this; there is a natural fear of the extent of the change that has to happen to accommodate these new numbers. This means that the parish or congregation has to look carefully and comprehensively at any growth they seek in the membership of their parishes, to be aware of such natural barriers.

WHAT EVANGELISM MEANS

Finally in this analysis, and as important as any other factor, are the expectations of priests, lay leaders and members regarding evangelism, church growth and assimilating new members. First, there is the question of the personal understanding of evangelism as held by members of parishes. What do they mean when they talk about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members? What is their reaction to the injunction at the end of Matthew's Gospel to do this? How do they respond to the challenges of evangelism?

Further study is called for to examine in more depth how the Church works systemically; how bishops, priests, and lay leaders influence members' beliefs and attitudes about evangelism. Other useful and beneficial research could study social, demographic, and ethnic factors that shape what we mean by evangelism. My study is only a small part of that larger project.

The message of the Book of Revelation is very much influenced by conditions of early Christians living under a tyrannical and oppressive political rule that was not of their creation. As a result, the christological portrait was of a powerful, revenging God who would extract justice from the oppressors and administer dire punishment to them for their cruelty and injustice. This Book, like other books in Christian scripture, is an expression of the systemic life of the Christian community. There is, in the language of systems theory, the desire and need for security and stability so that the system – for example, the church – can simply continue to exist. To exist it needs members, both to maintain its current life and also to replace those who have died or otherwise moved “out of the system” by becoming

apostate. Inherent in the desire for survival is the press for growth. Expansion and extension are integral to the security and survival of any system, be it a biological one or a cultural one.

Generally, members of Anglican parishes are most reluctant to engage in “aggressive” evangelism that is seen by them as an intrusive manner of pressing people into membership. In fact, many walk away from an invitation to share in evangelism simply because what they describe as evangelism is neither attractive to them nor do they believe it should be attractive to the church. These descriptions are the “straw men” confronted by church growth efforts of parish leaders.

There have been many attempts to determine the particular character or personality of a congregation. This has become all the more important as more and more we see that it is the character and quality of the local church which is the primary factor in the attraction of new members.

In the age of the future church, with the mission frontier close to the local congregation, the flow of resources and attention needs to be reversed. Those in oversight need to shift emotional and functional relations with congregations by 180 degrees. If resources are to flow to the mission frontier, they must be flowing primarily toward the local congregation, not away from it. This is an enormous change.¹⁶

Referring to a survey used in their popular book *Where's A Good Church*, Donald Posterski and Irwin Baker say,

Only one-half of those surveyed indicated that the selection of a particular denomination was a high priority in their decision of what church to attend. The evidence does not support a rejection of denominationalism, but it does suggest that denominational association is a secondary consideration for many Christians, and that it is not as important as preaching, community, relevance and outreach.¹⁷

The quote from Posterski and Baker is valuable in its identification of those features people look for in a church. They echo Mead's "four dimensions of congregational life that need to be probed by those who would understand or change congregations".¹⁸ In those four dimensions:

- *program* is the sum total of the things a congregation does, including what is on its calendar.
- *process* is the way the congregation does what it does: how its leadership works, how its people and groups make choices and relate to one another.
- *context* is the setting in the community and denomination, the external forces that constrain or influence what the congregation and its members are and do; and
- *identity* is that rich mix of memory and meaning that grounds the congregation, defining who it really is in its heart.¹⁹

Identity is the focus of James F. Hopewell's study, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*. Hopewell stresses throughout this work the need to understand, comprehend and appreciate the personality of the local congregation.

Rather than assume that the primary task of ministry is to alter the congregation, church leaders should make a prior commitment to understand the given nature of the object they propose to improve.²⁰

Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrissey have used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to discover "different prayer forms for different personality types".²¹ A similar use was made of it by Christopher F. J. Ross of Wilfrid Laurier University to discover type patterns among various Christian denominations. This initial work, with limitations noted by the author, is most helpful in understanding Anglican parishes. Ross found, for example, "INFP's (introvert, intuitive, feeling and perceiving individuals) were significantly more numerous among Anglicans, and ISTJ's (introvert, sensing, thinking and judging individuals) and ISFP's (introvert, sensing, feeling and perceiving individuals) were over-represented among the Catholics."²²

NEW LEADERSHIP PARADIGMS

The current literature examining the future of the church does focus attention on the local scene and acknowledges the variety of congregations that are available for those looking for personal growth and fulfilment in a Christian context. Bibby, Posterski and Barker, Mead, Peers, and Hopewell, among others, encourage recognition of the character, gifts and liabilities of the congregational church as the initial stage in a strategy of mission.

This encouragement comes when these and other writers recognise major and, most frequently, disturbing times for the church in the latter part of this twentieth century. The

turmoil includes a serious consideration of the appropriateness of Matthew 28:16-20 in the context of the 1990's and the first decades of the twenty first century. Matthew's patriarchal presentation of the "Great Commission" no longer appears to have relevance for many Anglican parishes. It is not only the enthusiasm of the one who has "heard the good news" and wishes to share it that is anachronistic, but the style, manner, and social assumptions behind the injunction make it distasteful to many active and concerned members of the Anglican Church. This, in part at least, may be due to the 'personality type' of the typical Anglican parish with strong Intuitive and Feeling functions for whom such an SJ (Sensing, Judging) way of commissioning would be most uncomfortable. Matthew's commission can be regarded as a statement from and appealing to a person with strong Sensing and Judging functions in their personality. It would be more attractive to them than to other personality types.

While it is comparatively easy to discern the basic temperament (NF – Intuitive, Feeling, NT – Intuitive, Thinking, SP – Sensing, Perceiving, SJ – Sensing, Judging) of the writers of the four Gospels, it is more difficult to determine to which of the sixteen types they belong since we know little about their personality other than what we can glean from the Gospels they wrote. To hazard a guess, Matthew would be an ESTJ; Mark, an ESFP; Luke, an INFP; and John, an INTJ.²³

It may very well be that Luke's presentation of the commission is the only one acceptable to an Anglican parish:

"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all

nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. (Luke 24:46-51).

Matthew's presentation of the great commission was fitting, as he saw it, for his church, and that being the case, we should not feel guilty for not being able to subscribe to it. However, it is a manner of presentation that is not fitting for our church at this time. We should not feel guilty for not being able to "buy it" or be directed by it. Freeing ourselves of this guilty feeling would leave us open to seriously consider a formulation of the great commission that better expresses our own experience of church. Doing this would encourage us to consider more completely what it is we want to proclaim to others.

To venture into a new parish with enthusiasm for its growth the parish priest must become fully acquainted with the nature of that parish. What is it about that particular congregation that attracts people, that contributes to its vitality, its unique personality, and unique story? Further study and conversation with members then leads to an appreciation for the particular assets that parish has as attractions to newcomers. It is important that these are articulated, that the story of the congregation is shared by as many of the members as possible so that this story can clearly be seen to be their story, which then adds to their commitment to each other and aids them as individuals in being able to articulate to those outside why "this is a good church to come to".

In any time of uncertainty, of social and cultural chaos, it is essential that the parish priest and other leaders in the parish have a clear understanding of their vision. The vision has to account for the current disturbing uncertainty that faces the church both as an institution and as a meaningful player in modern society. It has to be a vision, therefore, which is comprehensive, exciting, hopeful and relevant. Warren Bennis in his study of successful leaders found that all shared the primacy of vision. Successful leaders had a strong personal vision that impelled them in their leadership. Bennis acknowledged, as well, a caution that is most appropriate at a time of “wilderness,” “exile,” and “journeying” which describes the current state of the church.

Ultimately, a leader’s ability to galvanise his co-workers resides both in his understanding of himself and in his understanding of his co-workers’ needs and wants, along with his understanding of what Hesselbein has called their mission. In such leaders, competence, vision and virtue exist in nearly perfect balance.

Competence, or knowledge, without vision and virtue, breeds technocrats. Virtue, without vision and knowledge, breeds ideologues. Vision, without virtue and knowledge, breeds demagogues.²⁴

As Mead in *Once and Future Church* recommends, and as O’Driscoll and Peers each endorse, these times call for a thorough examination of evangelism, but in a local context, with the local parish being the locus of evangelistic activity. For this to happen it is most essential to more clearly understand what members of local churches mean when they talk about evangelism, what they think about when they hear the great commission as presented

by any of the Gospel writers. It is what attracts them to active membership that forms the basis for their enthusiasm to talk about this parish with others.

My parish research project explores some of these issues in a single case study involving members of a suburban parish. The parish leaders face different challenges as they seek to carry out their mandate as they perceive it. The interviews will focus on what members think about and mean by evangelism within their own personal faith and Christian living. By becoming more aware of what evangelism means to these lay and ordained leaders, they will be more able to embark on a course that will attract others to parish fellowship which is, after all, what Matthew and the other Gospel writers reported that Jesus wished of his followers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION - RELATIONAL DYNAMICS IN THESE INTERVIEWS

Chapter Seven is the major constituent in this dissertation. Here many direct quotations from the interviews are presented in categories. The initial, basic categories arose out of designing the interview questions, and these were later modified as a result of the interviews themselves. I wanted to exhibit, as much as possible, the actual words of those interviewed. The challenge was to do this without losing the context in which those words were spoken. There were occasions when more of that context had to be added in order to give the reader a better understanding of what those interviewed were saying. As the quotations are presented under certain categories, this is, therefore, not intended to be a narrative exposition.

Notes from the minutes of the vestry (board) meetings and the annual general meetings or other special congregational meetings have been referred to where appropriate. This is the primary way in which the interview data in the study can be correlated; it is the “triangulation” talked about in chapter Three. References for the quotes indicate the coded interview and line number.

In my progress through this study and in the light of my growing understanding of qualitative research, I have come to appreciate that the data must have the largest voice; it

must have the most space and time to reveal whatever it wants to reveal to those who study it.

Within the naturalistic paradigm (and in an updated version of the conventional paradigm as well) data are not viewed as given by nature but as stemming from an interaction between the inquirer and the data sources (human and non-human).¹

As I moved through each interview, I came to see that the interaction between the inquirer and the person interviewed clearly distinguished this type of data from the type of data one would get from similar questions in a questionnaire. As I reviewed the tapes I became more aware of listening to what people wanted to tell me rather than to expected and direct answers to my questions. Each interview was followed by a preliminary analysis which then affected the arrangement of the questions for the next interview, as I was made aware of particular issues or items that I had not earlier anticipated. As Lincoln and Guba affirm:

Data analysis is open-ended and inductive for the naturalist, in contrast to the focused and deductive analysis common in conventional inquiry. Since the form of the data that will ultimately be produced by the human instrument is unknown in advance, the data cannot be specified at the beginning of the inquiry. Further, there are no a priori questions or hypotheses that can preordinately guide data analysis decisions; these must be made as the inquiry proceeds.²

As the final chapter, "Discoveries", focuses on my examination of the data, I have refrained, as much as I could, from making editorial comments until then.

THE PRIMACY OF THE DATA

I believe that the data, which have been painfully collected, should “be the star” in the relationship. By this I mean, the main focus in qualitative research is the data itself, in all its richness, breadth, and depth.³

CATEGORISATION OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

The data was originally organized by themes, moving from the respondent’s personal history in the church through their perceptions of this parish, to an exploration of their understanding of evangelism, and concludes with their perceptions of the Decade of Evangelism and of the role or support of the church in the diocese and from the national office. These rudimentary categories were based on a desire to move from the specific to the general, from the personal experience of the church to reflections on more abstract themes. I initially chose this structure, in the hope that it would be the most comfortable for the respondents. I found in the actual interviews, that beginning with the respondents’ personal story of membership in the church provided avenues for questions based on this experience; their personal history had an impact on the views and attitudes they expressed on matters of evangelism and inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

In the initial stages of analysis these earliest categories were revised and subdivided on the basis of the data that came from the interviews. The basic structure, though, remained the same:

1. Personal history of membership in the Anglican Church and particularly this parish.
2. Personal experience of inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.
3. Parish customs and vestry policy respecting inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.
4. Their understanding of diocesan and national policy or programs in the areas of evangelism and church growth.
5. The meaning for them of the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 28.19.
6. The impact of the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism on their leadership as priest or warden.
7. Each interview ended with questions like, "was there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to say about any of the questions I raised? Was there anything you think is related and important to you, but I did not give you an opportunity to talk about?"

CHALLENGES OF TRANSCRIPTION

It is always difficult to translate oral speech into written text. This is where the researcher develops the skills of a novelist. A novelist who is more interested in the flow of the text would take liberties with it, but here it is important to let the data speak. We are reminded that when we stumble with the written word it was originally, like Matthew 28.18-20, an oral transmission.

The quotes from the interviews have been transcribed into this chapter as they were spoken. Short quotes, direct from the interview transcriptions appear in quotation marks;

longer quotes have been indented to further identify them as full quotations from the transcribed interviews. Only minor grammatical adjustments were made to make them more readable in written text. No words were added and sentences were left intact so as not to possibly create something different in meaning from what was said in the interview. To protect as much as possible the anonymity of both the leaders interviewed and the other people they referred to, I have enclosed a reference in “ [] ” to indicate these adjustments, where necessary.

The responses and statements from the interviews are grouped according to the basic seven categories listed above. In this way we can see how each of the four respondents felt and thought about the topics raised in my questions.

TERMS OF OFFICE AND ORGANIZATION

Each of the wardens interviewed had just finished a two year term of office. I planned to interview recently retired wardens as the interviews were being conducted shortly after the parish's annual general meeting when new wardens would be appointed and hence the new wardens would not yet have the information needed to reflect on the working of the previous vestries. The woman interviewed had been rector's warden, appointed by the incumbent. The two men, elected by members at an annual general meeting, had completed terms as people's warden. Each had been on vestry at various times over the past twenty years, the retired man and the retired woman having been in the parish the longest. Both had

joined the parish before it moved from the old church building to the current one. The other warden had been in the parish since the mid 1970s.

PERSONAL ANGLICAN HISTORY

I wanted to explore whether or not one's earliest experiences of life in the church might provide the germs, at least, of one's attitude towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. Two of those interviewed were raised from childhood in parishes in the Anglican Church. They were, as one put it, "cradle Anglicans." One of these was a retired professional man, the other, also a professional, in his late forties. The other two came into the Anglican Church at about age 12 - 14. One was a man of about 48 and the other a woman in her late sixties. I wanted to know what their experience of joining an Anglican Church was like for them and, later, whether or not this had any impact on their attitudes towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

I asked the man, "How old were you when you became an Anglican?"

"11 or 12."

"How did that happen?"

The respondent described how a woman came, voluntarily, to care for his grandfather as he was recovering from an illness. After some time, the respondent asked her why she would want to do this. The lady replied, "this is what God wanted her to do. This is what Jesus was all about. This is what the resurrection was all about, loving your neighbour as yourself." The respondent went on to say, "and that is what appealed to me." LA4.13.

When the second was asked if she was raised an Anglican, she replied, “No, I wasn’t. I didn’t become an Anglican until I was 14 years old. My mother was Baptist and my father was Church of England. He was [a business man] and we moved around a lot.” The family went to different churches before joining the Anglican Church when they moved to another country, “and father, said, ‘Now we will go to the church,’ and so we went to the Church of England. The whole family went.”

“So, you were raised an Anglican?”

“No, well not really. I went away to boarding school and after a very strange confirmation preparation and basically the rector came and said now you are going to be dear, good girls and you can say the Lord’s Prayer, The Creed and the Ten Commandments can’t you? We said, ‘yes,’ and he said, ‘that’s good. Now the Holy Spirit is the person who inspires Michaelangelo and all the music of the world and you understand that now. Keep yourself to yourself and I will go and have a drink with Father.’ So this was about it and I went to boarding school a few months later in Canada. I was in Canada all during the war, but I always went to church which I now consider a particular [gift]of the Holy Spirit. LA2.5

THE IMPACT OF EARLY CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH

The attraction and initiation into the Anglican Church definitely had a profound effect on the attitude of one of the respondents introduced above. His personal experience of

the witness of the woman who came to care for his grandfather shaped his attitude towards inviting and welcoming others into the church, his theology of evangelism.

“Can you identify how that early experience and your coming into the faith, the Christian faith and the Anglican Church, has affected your attitude towards inviting and welcoming and integrating members into your parish? Has there been any effect?”

I think it has been the basis of my own attitude towards being open to anybody who comes to worship and not judging churchmanship style or how they worship or how they articulate their faith. I feel my own background has helped me tremendously, in that sense, in being very, very open to accepting the people who come in. I always make a point of trying to make them feel welcome. That has had a tremendous impact on me. I come with that open attitude. LA4.97.

The “impact” is evidenced in this leader’s whole approach to and understanding of evangelism, and the desire to welcome “anybody who comes to worship.”

I got very angry at the church. It made me very angry that here we were supposed to be a community of believers. Looking at the scripture, it says you love your neighbour. I said we are mouthing the words. Really, deep down, our attitude was very different. So I had to rethink and say I did my own discrimination because I grew up within a family in a [socially and culturally segregated] system. I think what it did for me was to bring about an acute awareness that it happens in our own society. It happens in the church. There is really no difference. LA4.201.

“What kind of priority is given in the parish by you, as one of the leaders, to the matter of inviting, welcoming, and integrating new people?”

I give it top priority. For me, personally, I feel that if anybody who comes here and worships and feels welcome, they will stay. LA4.228.

THE EFFECTS OF LONG TERM MEMBERSHIP

The three lay leaders were all long-time members of the parish. Each of the three talked about their attachment to this parish community in terms of the deep friendships that had grown up for them over those 20 plus years.

“What kept you then at [this parish]? Was there anything in particular that kept you here? Had you considered going to other parishes?”

“No this is home. It is where all our friends are.” LA3.47.

“We contemplated leaving once but we never did it because our friends are here.”

LA3.74.

Another replied:

We have a lot of friends who are church friends. We haven't deliberately gone out and made friends in this city who are parishioners but that is what's happened. You look at your best friends and they are all parishioners at [this parish]. Eighty per-cent of your friends are that way. We have a lot of evenings where we talk about the church and talk how things are going because it is important to us. A lot of us have been going there for 20-25 years. LA1.419

The third respondent affirmed the sentiment and position of the other two:

But I know [this parish] in the past has grown a lot, in fact, we had more than enough to do from the people who came. We talked to them and became friends with those who were involved in our life. Most of us, our circle of friends, and it certainly was true for us, our circle of friends was not entirely, but almost ninety five per-cent at [this parish]. People you played with, people you worked with, people you worshipped with. It was a very strong community at one point. LA2.171.

I was made aware, during each of these three interviews, of the depth and range of these friendships. The two older members, whose children are now adults, married with families of their own and living in other communities and cities, talked about their children being together in various church activities. They had been with each other as friends and fellow-members of the parish through difficult personal times such as when the spouse of one of those interviewed died.

We have known each other's children. We have a long history together, we have a long, solid history together. We care about each other as witnessed when I was sick; everybody has been incredibly wonderful. LA2.179.

THE PARISH IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

The four interviews were conducted at a time of transition in the parish from one incumbent priest to another. The current incumbent has been in that position for just over three years. Each of the lay leaders acknowledged this time of transition and the tensions such a change normally creates.

The depth of this involvement, personal interaction, support and sharing gave rise to a strong sense of parish family which made the departure of other members from the parish painful. The priest of the parish was most aware of this grief, "we have lost about 60 families. There is a lot of grief that has been going on." LA4.352. This was his way of perceiving the reactions of the members of the parish. The loss of fellow members, like the death of a loved one, occasioned grief.

Each of those interviewed, the priest and three wardens, were aware of the grief that had accompanied the loss of some members to other churches over directions taken by the new leadership, especially the new priest. The grief included anger, hurt, frustration, and bewilderment at not knowing how to "fix" things, and sadness over the loss of active members and friends from the parish.

To respond to the struggles of transition the parish leaders, incumbent priest, wardens and members of vestry have recently embarked on a course of self-evaluation called, "The Parish Revitalisation Process," which involves an outside facilitator. At the time of the interviews the parish was involved with that stage in which they were identifying, first their strengths and weaknesses, then developing a plan of action to work from their strengths and mitigate the effect of the weaknesses in that parish's life.

When one of the long-time leaders of the parish was asked, "why do you think people feel that way when somebody leaves? What do you think is happening here?"

He replied:

I think [members] feel badly because we won't be with those people, we like them. I think there is a real sense of loss and it is a loss because you feel they are not a part

of what you believe in very strongly, that they have sort of moved away for whatever reason. It is different when a person leaves a company. There are all kinds of aspects to that but when a person leaves the church I think it is a far deeper thing for people because they just hate to think that those individuals will be removing themselves from something that is very good in their lives. As I say, it is not a selfish thing. They are not saying, 'well, if he is going, maybe I should be going, too!' I don't think they do that. I think because people take their faith very seriously they don't like to see others just fading away for, perhaps, a lack of encouragement or what might it have taken to have kept them here? Have we, perhaps, failed them a bit with the fact that they have left? You would not want to think that but, perhaps, you do think about that a bit. Maybe we could have done something to make things more palatable? LA1.328.

One respondent was somewhat critical about this grief.

"A great many people left our parish."

"So I would imagine that a lot of your time on vestry and [with other] wardens was just taken up with that, I would think, dealing with the ramifications?"

We tried not to. Yes, there was a great deal of time taken up with it and a great many people are very distressed about it and there are still people in the parish who are distressed about it. Whatever my observations are worth, it seems to be that those people, ... their distress is not coming directly from there. I think they are projecting whatever internal distress that they have... LA2.465.

ACTIONS INDICATING A DESIRE TO WELCOME NEW-COMERS

In the midst of this current, unsettling time in the life of the parish, the respondents were pleased to remember a couple of small projects in the past that were vehicles for inviting, welcoming and integrating new members:

One thing that did bring a lot of people in was a young women's Bible study group, a young mother's Bible study group, that had a baby-sitting service. They could come and have time out with a Bible study and they became friends. They invited their friends to come. Now, I'm talking about a generation one or two generations behind me. They grew by leaps and bounds because people said, 'I go to the neatest thing, the neatest Bible study and we can take our kids and they are minded.' And some of our great parishioners have come from that. LA2.183.

An even more informal entrée into the parish was provided through various activities that involved men from the community.

I am just talking about people in general. I am looking back at times when we have had very strong men's group at different periods. When we have had a strong men's group they are generally quite good at inviting new people to get involved with the men's activities. They are not active right now, but they would have a men's weekend and an opportunity to fellowship and get to know people. Those were opportunities for invitations. We have had in the past some renewal experiences and those are opportunities when people again are invited to become members of the

church and have an opportunity to have the scriptures become more meaningful to them through this renewal experience. LA3.95.

This was supported by the other male lay leader interviewed.

I think the church is good, even such things as the men's club, I think, has a value because very often some of those men are not necessarily 'church - goers'. You can bring them in as a friend. 'Why don't you come over and meet these other guys, sort of thing. I think that is effective and are perhaps a reaching out to people who are normally not going to church. LA1.154.

Building maintenance projects offered another vehicle for connecting with men not fully involved in the life of the parish.

I have known three men anyway who have been encouraged maybe to do a bit of handiwork, to help out, to do whatever -- a bit carpentry, ... a little bit of whatever; and it has brought them into the church and they have become very, very strong workers and leaders in the parish. LA1.557.

The perceptions of each of those interviewed indicate some of the many dynamics of parish life that demand their time, attention and energy.

PARISH GOALS AND DIRECTION

I asked one of the wardens, "You are at the stage I gather that you are identifying the strengths, weaknesses and challenges. Is that where you are right now or has it gone beyond that yet?"

Well, last night we had another meeting of a similar sort to give priority in the various areas of church life, worship, Christian formation, education. Identifying priorities so that we would get on it. People can identify what they thought were priorities and then this would be enabled and people were asked to sign each of the groups input into this. LA2.323.

I suggested to the priest in my interview of him, "...what you are talking about is a difference of vision almost. How we should respond to new people?"

The priest replied:

Yes, my vision is different and it's not fully accepted. Somehow I haven't managed here to get a group together who are willing to work on that. Let's explore this whole thing. Do we really want new members or not? Are we just content with who we have here and [do] we want to be a very cosy community here? We talk about the fact we want new people, new blood, but even at the Parish Revitalisation meeting it came through strongly that, yes, you are new and we were new at one time. We did it this way and we can show you how. What I hear is, we are willing to teach you but you have to be open to listen. I don't hear anything saying we are also willing to be open to listen to what you have to say. I don't know how to break that. I don't know what vehicle to use, how to say to the person, 'I'm hearing double messages here! You say we want new blood, we welcome you but this is the way we got on board and you should really get on board this way.' I haven't been able to break that at all. LA4.643.

Clearly, the words chosen by the priest exhibit his deep concern about the matter and saw it as a challenge in his leadership. The priest's concerns, in the parish revitalisation process, were echoed by other's concerns about the "grief" over members who had left.

There is an awful lot of discussion about it, quite frankly. The terms 'pain' and 'grieving' are used a great deal in vestry. People are extremely anxious about that. They hate to see people who they feel dear to them leave for whatever reason. Yes, we have had a lot of soul searching type of interludes. Just recently we had one. We have had them in the past -- envisioning type of thing, the parish weekend type of thing. A lot of it is very hard to fight because there is a lot of pain in the parish. When you try to tie it down, well, whose pain and what pain? Where did it originate and it's sort of ephemeral. LA1.360.

EVANGELISM AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

In this parish of about 350 families we find leaders strongly committed to the life of their parish community, one in which they acknowledge deep friendships and a changing membership with new people.

"We have had 150 new families come in to the parish in the last 3 years. Now they have not all stayed. 100 have stayed 50 have moved on."

"What is your parish list in terms of number of families?"

"350."

"So at least 1/3 of your parish has come within the last 3 years?"

Yes, that's right. Now when looking at the vestry, what is happening is the new blood is coming into leadership roles. We are now just beginning to say, 'OK, we are here. How are we going to reach out into the community? How are we going to keep those people who are new?' LA4.323.

With former members leaving and this many new people coming in, it is not surprising that these parish leaders have given thought to what evangelism means for them.

The biblical text discussed in the interviews was from Matthew's Gospel:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NRSV).

Each of the parish leaders interviewed were asked what this particular passage meant for them.

I think for me it means regardless of who I meet that I need to be compassionate, kind and accept them at the level they are at. Now, out of that might come the fact that they might want to re-commit their life to becoming a Christian. They might make a point of saying, 'OK, I want to now regularly worship in a community.' That is how I would see it. It would not be me converting someone else, but being very open, accepting and loving of that person where they are at. That doesn't mean that I will not talk about God and not talk about accepting Christ as their Saviour and so on. In the conversation it will come up from time to time. I don't have a hidden

agenda; 'see, this is what you do and that I will befriend you and try and make you a Christian.' I feel that God does that. It is the way I behave that might *attract* you to say, 'well, you belong to this community. Maybe I would like to come in and experience what the community is like.' I feel that it is God who will turn their heart and that the person has to take responsibility. I cannot take responsibility for that person in saying that now it is my job to convert them. I suppose I am rationalising. That is how I look at it. I am not there to convert you to my way of thinking and again it goes back to my total experience. LA4.406.

Another put the same emphasis on caring for the person where they are at.

It seems to me that it means for me is a daily learning to love in a valuable way anybody and everybody that you contact in your life. I am not talking about loving in a sentimental sense, respect, honour all those kinds of things. This seems to me to be the job that the Lord is about in the world; that is what he was about in his ministry. Sometimes the love was soft but it was still love. LA2.490.

"Talking about the meaning of the commission to you and you were talking about the grace of God so important to you, that kind of love."

Yes, I see that as being a form of outreach to people. We have learned, in various ways, to love like he does, accepting people warts and all, appreciating who people are no matter who they are. LA2.485.

The mark of witnessing, making the good news known, is central to the view of another lay leader. "I think introducing someone to Jesus Christ is something I can do but

that doesn't necessarily mean that they should become an Anglican so I divorce that from being an Anglican." LA3.475.

"That's our way of living out the great commission?"

Yes, the great commandment says, 'love one another as I have loved you.' Well, what did he do for us? He died for us. When we can do something sacrificial for someone else then we're loving the person and that's the great commandment.

"And that's the essence of the great commission for you?"

"That's the essence for me. It is not to get someone, not to make numbers for the Anglican church." LA3.521.

Sharing the "Good News" is central to their understanding.

When I look at the passage I suppose I see it partly as my mandate to share the "Good News", but not my mandate to change your attitude to change your thinking. God will do that through you and your personality. As long as I have shared the good news then I stop there. The good news for me is that I experience this love of God." LA4.473.

The respondents acknowledged the difficulties they had with Matthew's Great Commission. One reflected:

We have the charge, don't we, to go out amongst all nations and baptise them and that sort of thing. [For] Anglicans, perhaps with a British background, there is a shyness or a reticence to project yourself, to perhaps offend somebody, perhaps to be made to feel silly, if you are rejected, ... a reluctance to be rejected. I think that is why we don't do things in a very overt sense but we know we should. We should

take the chance. We see other groups who are not afraid to come to your door and talk to you. I think we have a sort of secret admiration of the fact that they have the guts to do that. I think maybe we would be more faithful servants, if in fact we did do that ourselves. I think it is in the personality, to some extent, of the individual. He is not going to say, "come and be saved". If someone says, 'what's religion mean?' he may not have the words or may not want to use the words. I think some of our priests have been very good about sort of defining the essence of one's faith, but we tend not to use those words for fear that they will become trite or someone will laugh at them. LA1.211.

Another respondent shared:

I wonder whether a lot of Anglican people who have grown up in the church or who have grown up in any form of British kind of reticence which I did feel that they would be intruding on people or, alternatively, we know our own feelings. When people knock at the door and try to give us pamphlets and they are doing evangelism for the [two religious groups] or somebody. We know our own feelings about that; they are intrusive we don't want to emulate that. I'm sort of really in a dilemma.

LA2.136.

Still another wondered:

I don't know how deeply a sort of Billy Graham type call goes. I'm sure it is useful. I'm sure the Lord uses it, but I am not sure.... I can't do that, at least, I never have. I think it is an area we feel very reticent and very uncomfortable because we are reticent. LA2.151.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF INVITING, WELCOMING
OR INTEGRATING A NEW MEMBER

“What has been your experience when you have invited a friend or a neighbour or an acquaintance or a colleague to come with you to church? Have you ever had that happen?

Well, I guess for me that is a bit of a difficult question because I think that is one of the aspects about the Anglican church. It would be a difficult place for me to invite someone in because I am not sure the things that I enjoy they would enjoy or whether they could see them from the same light. So, I haven't invited neighbours or friends to come. LA3.155.

He went on to say, “I don't know why anybody would want to go unless they were already an Anglican! Maybe that is not the right response, but that is what I feel inside.”

LA3.199.

I asked, “can you talk about any other experience you've had with inviting a friend to the church?”

I personally think that a lot of things that we do we think we do unconsciously or so subtly that nobody notices, but I have felt that on a couple of occasions that the people size you up. I'm thinking in an office environment, particularly, and we are very careful about not coming on too strong to people. We don't want to frighten them. We don't want them to think we are loonies, I guess, and fanatics. We have become so subtle that we don't think we are making any impression at all. LA1.97.

I think we find it difficult in anything but a very soft, gentle, subtle way to get people to come to the church. There are some people whose personalities are such that they say, 'we will pick you up next Sunday and we all go to church,' and I think that's marvellous. I think the majority of people don't feel quite comfortable doing that. They are probably afraid of rejection. They are afraid of coming on too hard, perhaps invading somebody's privacy or the privacy of their own actions. I think it is hard for them. LA1.572.

"What sort of feelings do you have when you hear that [Matthew 28.19] read to you as a gospel?"

There are two things that would come to me. One is that sometimes I feel that I am not going out converting, a bit of guilt there. Some guilt there that I am supposed to be out there as a Christian because I have said that I believe in the Trinity, I accept Christ as my Lord and Saviour. That is the first thing and it does induce a little bit of guilt in me. The second thing that comes to me is that I have to get out there and honestly work. What I mean by that is I've got to share what is deep within me with you or with whoever is there. Whatever you glean is whatever you glean. So that becomes not guilt but something that's hopeful, that's joyful because you get to know me for who I am and you glean whatever you glean out of that. LA4.421.

"You don't think that the people's difficulty might be due to what we talked about earlier, the reticence we have about inviting new people?"

Yes, that is partly reticence but I am inclined, maybe wrongly, to say part of it is fear, particularly fear of people who are very different in any way. Maybe underneath the fear of how will this change this comfortable situation.

“Change the nature of the community?”

“Yes, I think a lot of people are quite aware that we have been way too comfortable in the past.” LA2.234.

I’ve gone to church all my life and I don’t think I would really welcome the opportunity to go knock on doors of the general public and get them to come or to buy tracts or stuff like that. It is not our style I’m afraid and again, as you say, there is a guilt there because you know you should be doing that. I think it is very tough for people to do that. LA1.621.

These parish leaders were aware of ‘guilt’, ‘fear’, and ‘reticence’ in hearing the Great Commission read to them in their worship and Bible study. Could these deep-seated, subtle, vague feelings be behind their different interpretations of Matthew 28.19? They were more inclined to identify ‘evangelism’ with ‘witness’ and ‘outreach’ rather than with ‘conversion’ and ‘discipling’.

Three of the leaders interviewed talked of personal experiences they had inviting others to come to church with them. The fourth acknowledged that he had not invited anyone to join him at Sunday worship.

“Have you over the last 5 years or so intentionally invited a person outside of the parish to come to the church with a view that they would become a member of the church?”

Yes. I have done that but what I find is that I don't do it in the initial stages. I might be if I met someone or if I felt someone would express some interest in looking at the spiritual life or the faith perspective. Then I certainly would invite them to come. I'd say, 'Come and see, come and worship with us and see what it is like.'

"Have you done that?"

"I have done that, yes."

"Do you have any recollection as to how many times you have done that over the last five years?"

"In the last five years I would say at least 3 times."

"And what has been the response of the people when you have done that?"

"The response to me personally has been positive."

"In each of those three cases, have they come?"

Yes, they have come but what I have found is out of three one has become, what you would call, faithful, who has made a commitment and has kept up that sense of worship. Now, the other two have not been as faithful or as regular. In their own personal lives they might have changed. But I wouldn't say they worship regularly.

"Have they become Anglicans?"

"Yes, they all have become baptised Anglicans."

"Were they non-Christians before? Do you know?"

One was non-Christian. The other two were raised in a Christian upbringing, here, Canadians, and the other was a non-Canadian. I think what I found in the other two was a sense that they grew up in a very rigid environment where they were expected

to go to church three times a day. Somehow they were very put off. The interesting thing for me was finding out that they felt my style was quite laid back. I didn't initially push to say, 'Oh, you must come to church.' When I reflect and as we talk about it, we have become friends, so I talk about the fact, 'OK, 'so what was it that when I invited you, you came?' They both said, the two who aren't as regular in attendance, that I wasn't pushy, the sense of openness, accepting them where they were at the time when I invited them. That was the big attraction for them.

LA4.110

A past warden was asked, "have you had any experience with inviting a neighbour or a colleague at work? Can you share something of that experience?"

Yes, that is a very good question. Our neighbours next door moved in several years ago and we went over to see them and my wife prepared some goodies for them and went over to introduce ourselves. They, it turned out were Anglicans and hadn't had a chance to find a [church] home so we mentioned that we went to [the parish] and that we were very pleased with it. We didn't physically drive them over there but they did show up and they have been very, very faithful attendance ever since.

LA1.57.

Another talked of a not too pleasant experience when asked the same question:

It was quite a long time ago really, not recently. The thing that springs to mind is the time I brought this friend who was an inquirer, really, not a very active not active in any Christian community. It was very unfortunate for me, she walked right into the

middle of the priest losing his temper so consequently we didn't see her again.

LA2.86.

Reviewing each of the interviews, more and more seeing them as integral parts of the life of the parish, almost like different perspectives of a hologram, I realised that the attitudes towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members are shaped by the attitude of the parish in general -- the parish personality and its presentation of itself as an inviting, welcoming community in which new members would become bonded with others.

THE IMPACT OF VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF PARISH ORGANIZATION

A study of any organization as a living system brings out the inter-relationships among the various sub-systems. That appears to be no less the case here. The attitudes, theology, and behaviour of the members both nourishes and is nourished by the character and attitudes of the parish as a whole. This is indicated by the affinity of the personal views of the parish leaders and their perceptions of the parish itself.

We have had a lot of drop-in people who have come to town from somewhere else and they are shopping around looking for a church and they will come to our church and they will stay. I think this reflects well on the feeling and welcoming they get from that church. LA1.616

I think in my experience there has always been an element of the parish that has been good at recognising and welcoming newcomers and inviting them to be involved but

that group has changed from time to time. It has not always been the same group. People haven't always been invited to do the same sorts of things. I do feel that's been one of the strengths of the parish and I still feel that it is a strong parish. We have just gone through a phase and we are going into another phase which will be a very exciting time. I am looking forward to us getting into it. LA3.80.

The priest in the parish was not as sanguine in his view. I asked him, "What priority is given in the parish by you, as one of the leaders, to the matter of inviting, welcoming, and integrating new people? Could you say something about how the parish deals with that matter of inviting welcoming and integrating new members? What is the policy? Is there a program or procedure or are there people set up to do that? Are there people designated to greet people? Are there people; is there a program for helping people prepare themselves to extending invitations, any of those kinds of things?"

I give it top priority. For me, personally, I feel that if anybody who comes here and worships and feels welcome, they will stay. We have had a difficulty here in maintaining a program. I have always made a point of welcoming newcomers and if I spot them I will ask their name. When I am administering [communion], I will use their name while administering. Because we have three services -- at 8 I know the regulars and I will make a point of introducing the newcomers. At the 9 & 11 we have vestry members. Not everybody, but some vestry members who will make a point of going to the newcomers. We used to have an assimilation team who would take down the names of all the newcomers, send out a card, and then invite them to a

quarterly wine and cheese evening. We don't have anything of that kind now.

LA4.228.

AN ASSIMILATION TEAM

All four interviewed talked about an assimilation team that had been functioning in their parish. It was the primary formal project and program that was intended to welcome and integrate new members.

“When you were on vestry do you recall a particular program or a particular project or process that the vestry agreed to enter into in order to increase membership, to improve how you invited, welcomed and integrated new members?”

“Well, there was an assimilation committee and it was led actually by a very, very efficient and effective couple.”

“Were they called that, by the way?”

“Yes, they were called “the assimilation team”. They set up a list of people who greeted people at the door and there was some discussion about how to bring people farther in, how to encourage people to stay. Everybody was encouraged to go, and we still do go and speak to and shake hands with new people and try to have a little conversation with them, this sort of thing. Certainly there was a plan to visit on the part of lay people; to visit some homes of newcomers. I don't know how far that went. That got so embroiled in sort of covering people's ‘butts’ that if its a woman,

then we have to have two women. If there's a man in the house there has to be a man visiting, ... on and on and on. LA2.247.

Another gave a similar response:

In the last five years there has been some intentional work. We had what was called an 'assimilation committee' and the purpose of the assimilation team was to look at ways of assimilating new members into the parish. We also had, in terms of the various ministries on Sunday, a "greeters ministry" and we asked newcomers and guests to identify themselves. They were personally invited to join us at our coffee hour. The greeters would intentionally seek those people out to make sure that they were personally welcomed to the parish and I think that was a good program.

LA3.120.

UNORGANISED EFFORTS TO WELCOME NEWCOMERS

One of the parish leaders talked about the informal or unstructured "greeting" done in the parish.

I think one point I would like to make is that there are people in the congregation who don't necessarily have an official designation of being a greeter or a newcomer's representative but who will spot new people. Sometimes [this happens] as a result of newcomers being introduced by [the priest] at the end of the service. [He would say], 'do we have any newcomers?' If so, they stand up and introduce themselves. Even prior to that there would be people in the congregation who

would seek out new people and would say grab somebody, like myself, and say, 'let's go to talk to so and so. They are just new here.'

"And that is quite informal?"

Yes, not structured at all. It is something the people encourage but it is just done very informally. There are some people who feel quite happy doing that and there are some people who are too shy. I think it has sort of been my experience as an Anglican that there are a lot of people who tend to be shy, who don't do the evangelising sort of thing just as a function, perhaps, of their personality or the fact that they keep their privacy. But there are a goodly number and I could name some people, like [a parishioner], and people like that who will always go to see newcomers. [Another parishioner] is very good. A number who want to do that. One of the difficulties with newcomers is very often they scoot right out after the service is over and don't stop for coffee, 'the great sacrament' sort of thing and you can't do much with them as a result of that. It is tough. LA1.84.

Other difficulties were mentioned:

"Now, with the assimilation team, sometimes it would be left for a month, two months before a contact was made." LA4.262.

LEADERSHIP

It is assumed that in any parish attitudes about important matters would be influenced by the leadership within that parish. That leadership, in an Anglican context,

includes the rector or incumbent priest, the wardens and members of vestry. There is other leadership, of course, both formal and informal, such as the 'gate keepers.' Individuals and groups who have the desire and capacity to see their desires met in the life of the parish also exercise leadership, but here I focus on the formal, canonical leadership, of the rector, wardens and vestry. It was important not only to find out what these people held as personal beliefs, attitudes and opinions, but how leadership influenced the attitudes of the parish in general with respect to inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

Each of the lay leaders commended the incumbent priest on his style and attitude, best summarised by the comment of one:

He is excellent. He has a real gift in the sense that he can remember people's names so he will have met a person once, very briefly, and the next time they are back in church he greets them by name and knows something about them. People really feel special. I think that is a real gift and we have had a lot of new people come into the parish that have stayed because he has greeted them and remembered their name.

LA3.385.

There is some tension between the attitudes of the priest and the lay leaders. The priest expressed it this way:

One of the things I talk about constantly at vestry and the [meeting with the] wardens is how are we bringing the newcomers in. What I have tried to do is that if I know you live in [such a district in the city] and I know there are two or three people living there, I give them your number, but what I find is that they don't call. I think we talk

about it and we want to be an open community but the phone call doesn't happen.

LA4.266.

After reviewing all the interviews, I think it is fair to summarise the question of leadership in this parish with the response of one of the past wardens interviewed:

I don't think there was a crisis. I think that people were aware that we have been losing some members and they would embrace anything that would perhaps act as a cohesive agent for people, and to give people an opportunity to say why they are unhappy and how can we help. LA1.480.

THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM

Woven into the mix that is parish life is the larger church. Each of the leaders interviewed was aware of the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism at Lambeth in 1988. The interesting question was, what difference did this declaration make in the life of the parish?

When I think about the Decade of Evangelism one of the things that excites me, what I hear in that, is a sense of getting out there and sharing the good news. The sharing the good news excites me but I have a bit of fear, I think, when it comes to the other part of the Decade of Evangelism that we are supposed to get out there bring people into the fold. The fear comes for me, I think, from the fact that, we may be saying, that maybe the people out there aren't as good as we are as Christians and it goes back to my early childhood again." LA4.501.

With his personal experience as a child it is not surprising he went on to say:

“With the Decade of Evangelism one of the priorities that came for me was the reaching out to others. That did become a priority but not necessarily with the idea of converting them to my way of thinking. I think there is a difference for me. I feel very strongly that if you are a Christian you must believe in the Trinity and you need to be part of a worshipping community. I don’t think you can get away from that. With that in mind, knowing that is what I strongly believe in, what the Decade of Evangelism has done for me is the priority that it has put for me in that sense of reaching out to others. That has been a top priority so I take evangelism as reaching out to others not necessarily converting them. LA4.528.

Another parish leader was asked, “have you talked much about it? Have you thought much about it? Have you done anything about it in your parish in the last six years or so?”

The reply illustrates how little the declaration expressed itself in parish life:

I can’t give you exactly a time but [the priest] keeps talking about it. Actually last Sunday the prayer before the sermon said, ‘may we get on with the teaching, may we hear the teaching that is being given and get on with it.’ [The priest] said, from the pulpit, ‘if you get on with it, you are going to go out and bring one other person to church next week.’ Getting right down to the nitty gritty!

Have you, as a warden or member of vestry or an active member of the parish, been a part of any discussion at a formal or even informal level about the Decade of Evangelism?”

“No I haven’t. Now that is not to say some formal discussion has not taken place, but I would be surprised if it had.” LA2.342.

Another gave further reflection on the declaration.

It hasn't made a significant difference as to how I act out my Christian life and I don't think it has made a big difference in the way our church has acted out its life. I think part of it goes back to a couple of years ago [when] the Bishop set aside a Sunday where everyone was to supposed to ask somebody to come to church like a neighbour a friend. I thought about that and I couldn't do it because I said, 'ask them to what?' I couldn't see, and again maybe I downplay it too much, but in many cases I couldn't see why would anybody who is not currently going to church want to come out and sit through one of our services, sit through a 45 minute sermon, an hour and a half or an hour and three-quarter service? Why would I want to invite somebody to that? I had a real problem. My problem has been in the Anglican church is, ... to invite somebody to what? LA3.535.

THE DIOCESE

The Decade of Evangelism was, in effect, a top-down emphasis and strategy within the church. The bishops from Canada carried the message of this emphasis into each of their dioceses and from there to the parishes. This raised for me questions about the support for this world-wide strategy from both the national and diocesan levels of the church.

The question was put to one of the leaders this way:

“Are you aware of, not necessarily a program, but a resource in the diocese that would be helpful to you for doing the kind of evangelism that would be important to you?”

Has any been promoted to you as a resource of the diocese to help you do that in the context of the Decade of Evangelism?"

"No, No. At the parish level we really haven't had any program at all. We have our general outreach but really nothing that relates to the Decade of Evangelism. LA4.538.

He went on to say:

"No, and I haven't pursued it either. I am not aware of any vehicle there at all that I can tap into or a resource I can use." LA4.568.

The other parish leaders were also not aware of any program or resource from the Diocese to assist them with implementing the Decade of Evangelism.

"Has the diocese provided your parish or vestry with any resources that would help you in the areas of *Congregational Development* or church growth, for inviting, welcoming or integrating new members?"

"No, I don't think specifically. As I said, the weekend we spent with [a facilitator] sort of has that aspect to it, but it isn't really in response to a perceived need." LA1.540.

"What about anything from the diocese? Do you recall, as a warden, anything from the diocese to help or to encourage parishes to be more inviting or welcoming? Do you recall any program or any project or any thrust from the diocese at all to help you with that as a parish?"

No I don't. Years and years ago [a local guest preacher] put on some things on evangelism, how to do evangelism and a certain amount of discussion arose because of that. People who went to it and discussed a lot of what he had said. I am not remembering the details as it was some years ago. LA2.278.

“What’s your sense of the Proclamation of the Decade of Evangelism on your parish and in the diocese? What is your sense of what it has meant if anything?”

Well, I certainly get the sense that it is something that the Bishop has felt strongly about. I think he has been quite consistent in his message. I believe it has been communicated out through the diocesan tentacles, but that’s all they can do. I would probably sense that they would have to be the ones to see what has been the result of it. Being Anglicans, you know, from parish to parish the response is going to vary dramatically and quite often it will be a function of whoever happens to be the clergy in that parish at that time. LA3.594.

A reading of the minutes of the vestry of the parish for the past six years indicates that the parish did have some involvement with preparation for the special synod in April 1991, which was addressed by the Reverend Robert Wise. The minutes record the preparation this parish, along with others had to perform for that synod, and that the time of preparation from the fall of 1990 to the spring of 1991 called for parishes to spend time on matters of evangelism. The parish in this study developed this statement of their mission;

To be a Christ-centred community for individuals to respond to God in personal faith and glorify God in the wider community by building God’s Kingdom.⁴

The new incumbent priest came in 1993. The terms of the wardens interviewed would have begun about the same time. Thus, the synod for evangelism which happened in 1991 occurred before their time in office. However, we note they are most able to remember the “Faith Alive” program of many years previous.

We had a very meaningful event some years ago in the parish it was soon after we moved into the church going on 21 years ago. It was called *Faith Alive* and it brought a great many people to commitment to taking Christianity seriously in their lives. LA2.370.

“Was there a significant increase in the membership of the parish?”

“Oh, yes, yes! We were bursting at the seams at two services.” LA2.396.

Another recalled:

We had one, what I would call a major event about fifteen years ago called *Faith Alive Weekend* and I know certainly that was a significant event for us in terms of our walk. I think it was a significant event for the parish. Out of that there was a very strong, young core group of people in their early 30s that became really excited about the church and about their faith. My personal belief is that that’s the kind of core you have to have. LA3.109.

The third warden acknowledged that event as memorable, but questioned its effectiveness in bringing others into membership in the parish.

I don’t know that we really did anything in a formal sense to increase the congregation other than things that were very dramatic like *Faith Alive Weekend* and that would have involved mainly people who were already on board. It wouldn’t have brought people in from the community as such, but I think the attraction of the new church and the lively spirit that seemed to be here all helped. I really think people sort of came in off the street, if I can put it that way. LA1.45.

The months of preparation, from the fall of 1990 to the spring of 1991, were not as memorable and had no apparent impact on the parish's approach to evangelism that was lasting.

THE NATIONAL CHURCH

Following questions about the role of the Diocese in implementing the Decade of Evangelism in the parish, the priest and wardens were asked about any support or resource that might have come to the parish from the national office of the church.

“What about at the national level they have, for example, the *Congregational Development Workshop*?”

I have been involved with [that workshop and its resource person] right from the time I was in [another city, another diocese], and here a little bit. I really am not very involved with them, but I am very aware of his group. We did have one workshop here and [the national resource person] came and [a local resource person] was here. What I found was that I was very much for it, but the vestry didn't buy it. They felt it wasn't feeding them with methods of how to take Christ out there to the person so that person accepts Christ. LA4.572.

When asked about this workshop a lay leader replied, “No, I am not aware of that at all.” LA2.270.

This was echoed by another, “I don't. I am entirely ignorant of it.” LA1.513.

THE LAST QUESTION

At the end of each of the four interviews I asked if there was something that I did not ask about that they thought might be pertinent. I felt that no matter how well thought out the interview questions were, and how much help consultants gave developing them, I had to give these parish leaders opportunity to tell me what they thought.

The priest said:

One of the questions you might address is the role of the priest versus how you carry it into the vestry. We touched on it right at the beginning. What I do here when I know you are new... I will get to phone you within two weeks and find out, 'you do carpentry? painting? What is in the back of my mind is how can I get you involved. I do that personally here but it doesn't get followed up by the vestry or the other groups.

"What can you say about that? There seems to be a breakdown there."

The break down is I want to be very open and have you involved and the resistance is we have been here 20 years. We've done it this way and you are coming in. We don't know you. We don't know your churchmanship. There is an element of judgement there.

I here repeat a quote mentioned earlier in the "Parish Goals and Direction" section of this chapter. "So what you are talking about is a difference of vision almost. How we should respond to new people?"

Yes, my vision is different and its not fully accepted. Somehow I haven't managed here to get a group together who are willing to work on that. 'Let's explore this whole thing and do we really want new members or not? Are we just content with who we have here and [do] we want to be a very cosy community here?' We talk about the fact we want new people, new blood, but even at the Parish Revitalisation meeting it came through strongly that, yes, you are new and we were new at one time. We did it this way and we can show you how. What I hear is, 'we are willing to teach you but you have to be open to listen.' I don't hear anything saying we are also willing to be open to listen to what you have to say. I don't know how to break that. I don't know what vehicle to use, how to say to the person, 'I'm hearing double messages here! You say we want new blood, we welcome you but this is the way we got on board and you should really get on board this way.' I haven't been able to break that at all." LA4.628.

A warden made this response:

Yes, one thing I would like to state is that I think people come to the church through a variety of ways and one way where I've known that several people have arrived is through just helping in the church. I have known three men, anyway, who have been encouraged maybe to do a bit of handiwork, to help out, to do whatever, ...a bit of carpentry; and it has brought them into the church. They have become very, very strong workers and leaders in the parish. It is a very gentle approach to them, I think. Maybe it appeals to men that they can sort of do the 'macho' thing without losing anything and they respond to the fact that they can do something to be of help, and

then they get integrated into the life of the parish and have gone on to do good things. LA1.557.

I asked another lay leader, "Has there been anything that you can think of that I have not asked you about that needs to be said that I just overlooked?" He made two responses:

From my own perspective I think we do reasonably well at greeting people, saying 'hi', and finding out the basics about their life, how many children, where did they live, how long have they been here, all those sort of things. 'It is nice to see you.' I don't think we take the next step always to discover what are your gifts? What are your needs, if people are willing to share that. Why did you come, if people are willing to share that. You can pick up from what they say and then bring them into some sort of group where they can discover where they are in their walk with the Lord. LA2.594.

This person then went on to talk about what they called a "foyer program", referring to people meeting at the entrance to the church and arranging to get together for a meal and visit.

That was very effective. We, I got to get to know the [one of the other parish leaders interviewed] through that. The program was basically, ... you have 4 or 6 couples, whichever you choose, or six or eight people. You meet for dinner once a month at each person's house and you can organize it any way. It can be potluck. It is not advised to put on a big dinner. You sit and visit afterwards and you get to know each other in a social way. You get to know everybody's husbands and wives, if they

have any. We got to know each other very well that way and there is a lot of sharing.

There is a lot of good fellowship and fun.” LA2.639.

The final interview ended with a reflection on an analogy between the parish and a nuclear family.

What I wanted to say was, to summarise it in my own perspective, I think that in terms of welcoming and integrating new members you can't welcome and integrate someone into your family unless you feel quite secure in your own standing within the family because otherwise a newcomer can be a threat. I think this is how society works. In order to feel totally secure and loved within that family I think, part of it is, you need to have your strong bonds and friendships in there. I think you need a very strong faith which in my experience has been a result of some type of renewal experience. LA3.637.

CONCLUSION

The data have been presented according to how they were encountered and experienced and not according to a logical progression of themes. I began acknowledging just a few of the important relational dynamics of any interview, which led to a greater respect for the data presented to me. Then I entered the interviews themselves beginning with questions of personal history in the church, the effects of long term membership and recognising this parish was in a period of transition from one incumbency to another. I explored that attitudes of these leaders to inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

I concluded the interviews with questions about the role of parish structures, the diocese and national church in the shaping of their attitudes.

In this process I was again struck by the complexity of parish life, the many issues, personal and corporate, that shape peoples' attitudes and behaviour. I was struck as well by the deep, significant and valuable friendships that had developed over many years among those members who had become parish leaders and who had a deep affection for their parish. All of this I will examine in more detail in chapter Eight. I will also "triangulate" the data from these interviews with written documents from the parish.

CHAPTER EIGHT ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this, the concluding chapter, I present the discoveries I made in analysing the data. I revisit the major topics of the interviews: the leaders' personal experiences of inviting, welcoming and integrating new members; their attitudes towards Matthew 28.16-20 and the Decade of Evangelism; and their attitudes towards evangelism as a Christian responsibility. I conclude with a few proposals as to how we might benefit from this and similar studies.

GENERAL COMMENTS ABOUT ANALYSIS FROM THE DATA

One of the real excitements of this type of research and – one of the biggest frustrations – is that it you must let the data take you where they must take you! The data control the direction of the study. It is exciting because you don't know what is around the next corner, but it is frustrating precisely for the same reason, with the researcher in control only to a degree. Out of respect for this precept the previous chapter presented as much of the interview data as possible, an attempt to simply let the data speak for themselves, leaving the reader to find what the data want to say to them.

Another exciting and frustrating aspect of this project is finding people saying things you were not expecting to hear, and not saying things you did expect them to say. Along this path the researcher must constantly be checking and acknowledging her / his biases and

preconceived notions when they do appear. The researcher must simply be faithful to what the data reveal.

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us.¹

These are, obviously, some of the reasons why qualitative research holds that the findings in the study of one site may not be validated by replication in another.

In fact, the value of the case study is its uniqueness; consequently, reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here.²

The parish in this study is unique in many respects. Its uniqueness comes out of its history, demographic environment, size, budget and the personalities and contributions of the unique individuals who have made up its leadership including especially, the succession of different incumbent priests. The variables I discovered were not only extensive, but complex, inter-related and organic. By organic I mean I could feel and see that this parish community was a living organism, a living system with many sub-systems. As it was growing and changing it would take more than a few descriptive words, no matter how well thought out, to fully explain the life of this Christian community. Another sign that this was a living organism was that it was not at the same place at the end of the interviews it was at the beginning as the parish leaders and interested members were moving through the *Parish Revitalisation Process*. The interviews began at a time of perplexity in the parish, and ended after the initial stages of identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses of the parish, with both the hope and commitment to resolve this crisis.

Replicability in the traditional sense can be determined only within a framework – and that framework is itself a construction, not an inevitable and unchanging part of “reality”.³

My study delved into a small slice of life at a particular moment of time when particular, unique sub-systems were active and predominant. Next week a similar study would likely find other meanings and other understandings of the perceptions of this parish’s leaders. The case study, in this research project resembles a CAT Scan (Computerised Axial Tomography) or an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) where the subject is examined along various plains and a specific axis. The diagnostician can change the angle of the scanning technology to get images along other axes, but again the result is a view of the interior life of the patient along one plain, from one perspective. What, then, can anyone else do with this information? I will come back to this question later in this chapter.

ASSUMPTION

Letting the data take the lead can be hard on the researcher’s assumptions! I had expected, for example, to be able to confirm my assumption that this parish, like many others, was, in its attitude towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members, operating under what Reginald Bibby calls, “the demographic necessity.”⁴ At no time during any of the interviews was reference made to the parish needing new members to maintain its budget. There was no reference to a dwindling membership base or concern about a deteriorating income source that must be served by new subscribers. An

examination of the minutes of vestry, October 1991 and again in January 1995, for example, report that the treasurer was concerned about the deficit facing the parish in its annual operating budget. At one level the concern was there and was one of the factors in releasing the assistant priest in the parish who had been serving on a part-time basis. This was done in 1994. As well, in 1995 the Annual General Meeting, it was agreed to undertake a major renovation of the building, including the worship space, parish hall and office.

PARISH RECORDS IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL STATISTICS

The period 1990 to 1993, the most recent years with complete statistics, indicates a steady decline in the three measures of membership at the national level of the church: Membership decreased about 5%, Confirmed members by about 7.5%, and Identifiable Givers by about 4.5%.

The parish in this study had more radical losses, with membership declining about 19 %, the number of Confirmed Members by about 26%, but Identifiable Givers by only about 4%. In 1994 and '95, the parish has shown a burst of new membership, but not a corresponding increase in the number of identifiable givers in the parish. Respondents did express concern about all of when they were talking about those who had left the parish.

The national office of the Anglican church reports that in the period from 1990 to 1993, income reported from all the parishes in the country declined about 2% whereas expenses at the parish level increased by just over 4%. This indicates the strain at the local

level to meet diocesan and national expectations for increased contributions from parishes. Local expenses and local inflationary factors are forcing parishes to keep more of their income at home.

For the period 1990 - 1994, the parish in this study reported a 24% decline in "envelope income," but a 26% decline in expenses. Some of this decrease in expenses was due to revising the contract of the part-time assistant and then releasing him from his contract with the parish in 1994. During this time other adjustments were made to other part-time staff that resulted in some savings. "Envelope income", which means the same as "Identifiable Givers", is the most reliable indicator of parish trends, as this income is determined by the pledges of members, and is the major source of parish income and hence the most reliable income source on which to base budgets.

Although the figures indicate a considerable drop in income in the parish, they also indicate a parallel decrease in expenses. The last four years, 1992 - 1996 has been a period of tight budgets for the parish, but, obviously, they have not reached that critical point where they have to find new members simply to keep their budgetary commitments. I think this explains why financial concerns did not press the four leaders to look to increasing membership and, thereby, improving their strategies for inviting and welcoming new comers. This pressure just was not there.

The attitudes of those interviewed about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members were more in line with the teachings of the church, bringing its story of Good News to all, especially to those in need, and inviting those hearing this Good News to join in the fellowship of those who are moved to live it out in their daily lives. I will say more about

this when I examine their responses to questions about the meaning of evangelism and the great commission in Matthew's Gospel.

I realised, at the end of the interviews, that I did not expect the respondents to be so hospitable, frank and co-operative with this struggling, stumbling researcher. When a microphone plug popped out of the tape recorder, they were patient, assuring and most able to return to the flow of the conversation. I am most grateful to the four of them for all of this and more.

Now for an examination of the themes that emerged from the study.

PERSONAL ANGLICAN HISTORY

In this case study there appears to be a difference in attitude between the two leaders who joined the Anglican Church from the outside and those who were, as one put it, "cradle Anglicans." This is represented in their general attitudes towards encouraging outsiders to come and join the church. We note, for example, that the two who joined the Anglican Church in their teenage years talked most about having invited people from outside the church to "come with them" to a Sunday worship. Only one of the "cradle Anglicans" had extended an invitation to a new neighbour, but had done so when he learned that he was an Anglican new to the city. Recall the following comment from one who joined the church in his / her early teens in response to my question:

“Can you identify how that early experience and your coming into the faith, the Christian faith and the Anglican Church, has affected your attitude towards inviting and welcoming and integrating members into your parish. Has there been any effect?”

I think it has been the basis of my own attitude towards being open to anybody who comes to worship and not judging churchmanship style or how they worship or how they articulate their faith. I feel my own background has helped me tremendously, in that sense, in being very, very open to accepting the people who come in. I always make a point of trying to make them feel welcome. That has had a tremendous impact on me. I come with that open attitude. LA4.100.

I am reminded of the conversation that germinated this study in my mind. The person said to me, “How can we possibly increase our membership by that much? There aren’t that many Anglicans in town!” This person was also a “cradle” Anglican, and her experience of the Church was from this perspective. She had always been an insider. There was the assumption, not cruelly meant, that this must surely hold for all Anglicans! Those who had experienced life outside the Anglican church obviously came with a different personal history that included the personal, rich, and sometimes painful memory of their own experience of being invited, welcomed and integrated as new members. It was a part of their own experience to have to consciously go through the process of entering into the church. It is not surprising, therefore, that this should contribute to the formation of their own theology of evangelism.

FRIENDSHIPS IN THE PARISH

When we first encounter the value of friendships within a parish, we begin to see distinctions between the attitudes and commitments of the priest and the lay members. What marked the bonds of the lay leaders was simply that they had been together in this parish for a long time and had, over that time, become friends. A perception of one of these members captures, I believe, the comfort, patience and acceptance that comes only with being in a parish for many years. "Yes, and I think that warmth is still there. I think after you have been there for a long, long time you may get so used to things, that you are not as much aware of them anymore. The report we get from other people is that the attitude is still a very friendly one." LA1.189. The speaker, of course, has the perspective of one who is in the midst of those friendships.

The three lay respondents all had a long history in this parish, over twenty years each. In that period of time, through the tenure of four parish priests, they had developed significant friendships among themselves as leaders, and with others in the parish. This provided an attraction to the parish for them, as these friendships were the treasures and springs of nourishment that mothered their commitment, their involvement, and in fact, their leadership. In this particular cluster of significant relationships they found support, comfort, affirmation, stability and pleasure. All of this is worth working for and protecting. We learn, too, of the significance of longevity in these relationships and, correspondingly, in their relationships with the parish. The strong bonds and memories of special, affirming events created an attitude that allowed them to see the current crisis in a larger perspective

that included other crises from the past. They were more patient, more sanguine about the parish affairs of the moment. As they had a fellowship of friends in the parish, they by and large did not feel pressed to invite any more people into that circle.

THE INCUMBENCY OF THE PRIEST

The present priest has been in the parish for only three years. He does not see himself as having the bonds or the depth of relationships the others have. In fact, at one point he said, "I have felt very much an outsider for a long time here". LA4.663. I hasten to add that this feeling is real in the face of the support, admiration, respect and true affection of him acknowledged and happily expressed by the lay leaders who were interviewed. It appears to be one of those situations in which one feels 'outside', while the others, not acknowledging or perhaps even aware of those feelings, view that person from a different perspective. Respect and admiration do not necessarily mean "belonging". One can feel affirmed but still not part of the group or the community, such as the parish fellowship.

At this point the perception is just a little blurred! One begins to get hints, at least, of the great variety of dynamics at work in parish life. There are, as was acknowledged earlier, the personal histories of those in leadership roles: their histories within the Anglican Church, this parish, their own families and other networks of relationships. There are also the individual personality types, the transferences and counter transferences.

Various authors including Mansell Pattison (*Pastor and Parish: A Systems Approach*. 1977), and Anthony G. Pappas (*Pastoral Stress: Sources of Tension*, 1995), talk

about the significant roles transference and counter-transference play in the life of the pastor.

John C. Harris expresses it this way;

Churches do not hire a pastor, not at first. They hire a knotted triangle of messianic, erotic, parental wishes and hopes dropped crazy-quilt fashion on the shoulders of one finite, limited individual.⁵

In an interesting study of clergy stress, Mary Anne Coate follows the lives of five 'imaginary people' and examines a variety of experiences of the stress factors confronting these people as they carry out their pastoral ministries. The author says of transference when introducing a study of its dynamics:

This mysterious process can happen in any context, but the religious dimension is vulnerable to becoming an active agent of it to the extent that the vocabulary of religion, and so perhaps its essence, encourages sharp polarisation such as good/bad, violence/peace, light/darkness, holiness/sin. Good people must have only good things inside them, but what then happens to the *bad* things?⁶

How does one hold all of this on one small slide for the microscope? This was not intended to be a psychoanalytic study, and although it was fun to wonder what was going on here at particular moments in the interview, these urges were suppressed. For my purposes, we need only acknowledge that there are no other sub-systems in this matrix: the unconscious life, that of the respondent, that of the interviewer. This was another reason why I thought it was so important to let the data speak for themselves.

VISION VERSUS THE STATUS QUO

It was evident that there was some frustration on the part of the priest because his vision of an inviting and welcoming church was not universally acted out by the membership of the parish. "My vision is different and its not fully accepted. Somehow I haven't managed here to get a group together who are willing to work on that." LA4.643. Given that these lay leaders speak well of the current parish priest, one wonders how much a sense of belonging is identified with sharing similar views, visions, and attitudes and methods for achieving them?

Consider what Harris has to say about transference with respect to a pastor who saw that his vision was not being accepted by the rest of the leadership in the parish:

Obviously, ministers are not some form of spiritualized electronic tape upon which the congregation programs its own consensus and symbol system. In reality, all new clergypersons are threatening (and exciting) intrusions into the life of a church precisely because they bring their own operative values and vision.⁷

It is hoped that the *Parish Revitalisation Process* will give all members and lay and ordained leaders an opportunity to articulate their vision and values as the beginning of a process of working on ministry and mission together – in short, what it will provide a successful challenge to homeostasis.

"I think after you have been there for a long, long time you may get so used to things; that you are not as much aware of them anymore." LA1.189

“A long, long time” and “get used to things” hints at homeostasis. Along with adapting to life under the leadership of a new priest, another of the challenges to homeostasis in this parish is the ‘turnover’ in the membership. “We have had 150 new families come in to the parish in the last 3 years. Now, they have not all stayed. 100 have stayed. 50 have moved on.” LA4.324. In a parish of 350 families the new membership in the last three years represents almost one third! The stability or the homeostasis of any organisation will be impacted by such a radical change in membership over such a relatively short period of time.

GRIEF AT THE LOSS OF MEMBERS

A most painful shock within any living organisation is the loss of members. As was seen in the previous chapter, when a leader talks about the feelings expressed over the loss of some members, grief is one of the current corporate properties of this parish. The increase in new members in the past three years has been off-set by members who have left in that same period of time. Some of those who left for other churches have been parish leaders. “We don’t have any group now. The thrust of the group that used to be here have left and are now going to [another church].” LA4.556. The tension, anxiety and grief at their leaving is recognised by one of the respondents: “Those people have left. It was quite a power struggle and very difficult and it took a lot of energy.” LA2.465.

I had not anticipated the role of grief in a time of transition in my original design of this study. My attention was drawn to the interview data about feeling the loss of other members, thereby generating another category for analysis and presentation.

I mentioned earlier how the perception of the situation does get somewhat blurred. This is not simply due to an inadequate amount of data or to the blinders of bias that can block the researcher's perception. It is as much due to the unresolved anxiety, even anger, that accompanies a separation among the members of the organisation, among and between those who have left and those who have stayed. "I think our parish and, I think newcomers sense it at times, that we don't deal with anger well." LA2.556.

One of the leaders made what I believe to be a thoughtful, sensitive, and insightful reflection about this grief:

I would say there is an awful lot of discussion about it quite frankly. The terms of "pain" and "grieving" are used a great deal in vestry. People are extremely anxious about that. They hate to see people who they feel dear to them leave for whatever reason. Yes, we have had a lot of soul-searching type of interludes. Just recently we had one [the *Parish Revitalisation Process*]. We have had them in the past, an envisioning type of thing, the parish weekend type of thing, where this has been a big part of people's concerns. A lot of it is very hard to fight because there is a lot of pain in the parish. When you try to tie it down; well, who's pain and what pain? Where did it originate? It's sort of ephemeral. It is not just now; it is way back. What do you do with 'way back'? I don't know. You are trying to pin down specific reasons for things to have happened and it is difficult to do. Some people just don't

want to name names, perhaps, or they tend to carry on with feelings that they have where they don't have any concrete reasons for it. I find this very distressing, quite frankly, because we can't fight it. You don't know what they are talking about and I think these terms are used a little too often. I think what was pain may have been resolved and yet people still talk as though it were still alive. It is hard to resolve these things. People try to resolve them on a one-to-one basis. They try to get people to come back to the church. Certainly there is a lot of encouragement of that sort of thing and it just becomes so difficult. When you feel eventually that the church is "putting out", the congregation and vestry are putting an effort to encourage people to come back and yet, maybe they are the only ones who are putting in any effort into it. In other words, the person who has left maybe is not likely to want to come back. Maybe they want to be unhappy! That is a very uncharitable way of putting it, I think, but sometimes you wonder if it isn't true. They want to be at odds somehow. They want to be upset and they cherish that "upsetness". LA1.364.

I remember, as I sat in this person's living room, feeling that something very important and with real insight had been said here. I thought about that "pain" talked about by this respondent. I wondered where that "pain" had come from. I thought about all the references in the literature about pastoral counselling to the transferences and counter transferences that are most active, powerful and dangerous, but unconscious. The unresolved, un-named pain. It is ephemeral! It is precisely because the pain is unconscious that it is so difficult to articulate. No wonder, then, this respondent could not clearly locate its origin.

I remind the reader that although grief was an important, current emotional feature of the parish during this study, it was not the only one. There was appreciation for the friendships and pride in being seen as a warm, welcoming, Christian community.

The satisfaction with and appreciation of the lay leaders for their life in this parish can also be seen in the memory of past events. Looking back through the interview data, much of which appears in the previous chapter, we find that the priest is more critical of the parish's attitude towards inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. One of the factors that explains this is that the lay leaders' wider perspective includes their long involvement in the parish along with relationships with individual members who were very good at inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. "I do feel that's been one of the strengths of the parish." (LA3.90) Their long memberships, each for over twenty years, has shaped their vision, their perception. Though things may not be so good right at this moment, there were better times for the parish in this aspect of its life. Those memories soften their judgements as to how things are now.

EVANGELISM AND MATTHEW'S GREAT COMMISSION

The major interest in this study, as has been stated, was in the attitudes of lay and clerical leaders in an Anglican parish about evangelism, and about inviting, welcoming and integrating new members. What does evangelism mean to them? What was their personal experience with evangelism? How do they interpret the commission of Jesus in Matthew's gospel:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28.19)?

I was also interested in ascertaining what role the church at the diocesan and national levels played in the implementation and accomplishment of the Decade of Evangelism. We discovered, as indicated above, that the personal experience of these leaders when becoming Anglicans coloured their current attitudes, perceptions and interpretations.

I was somewhat surprised to see how consistently they interpreted Matthew 28.19 in a softer way than I would have thought, given the words of the text. Consider a spectrum from an imperial, disparaging position in which the goal is to change another person's mind and allegiance, at one end to the position at the other end, of serving the needs of others. It is clear that all four would interpret this biblical verse along the lines of the serving end.

I was really struck by the ease with which each leader interviewed spoke of and interpreted Matthew 28:16-20. I was also struck by the consistent similarities in their interpretations. My study of the Great Commission in Matthew suggests that this text, by itself, represents the "converting" end of the spectrum more than the "serving end" better represented by other texts both in Matthew's Gospel and in the three other Gospels of the New Testament. I had always viewed this text as a firm, clear dictate to talk to people with a view of conversion, that there was a dialectic that lead to a formulaic pronouncement: "I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour". In retrospect, I better see the contrast between an argument in the classical, philosophical sense and a process in which others come to discover for themselves the blessings found in the life of one

making the witness on behalf of the Gospel of Christ. This leads to a re-consideration of the ministry of teaching with respect to both Matthew's commission in particular and evangelism in general.

More precisely, I found that they would want to carry out the initial step in this commission by accepting people "where they are" – not being judgmental, but affirming and supporting. Each of the four leaders consistently stressed the 'care and nurture' component of evangelism as being primary with the 'proclamation' component coming later in the relationship when the opportunity arose.

Their interpretations reminded me more of other commissions of Jesus in the Gospels:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12

"As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment." Mat 10:7-8

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Mat 22:36-40. (Also Mark 12: 28-31.)

The underlying theme of their interpretation was Jesus' pronouncement of the meaning of his ministry at its beginning:

... the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Luke 4:17-19.

"What role does it play in your life? What do you think about it, that particular commission? We were talking about the meaning of the commission to you. You were talking about the grace of God so important to you, that kind of love."

Yes, I see that as being a form of outreach to people. What the Lord has me doing and probably a lot of other Christians in various ways is to learn to love like he does accepting people warts and all, appreciating who people are no matter who they are.
LA2.485.

Another said of the Great Commission, "I think it is very much in our minds and I think if in specific cases we can be of help to somebody, we are attuned to doing that."

LA1.232.

Another put it this way:

the great commandment says, 'love one another as I have loved you.' What did he do for us? He died for us so we can do something sacrificial for someone else.

We're loving the person and that's the great commandment.

"And that's the essence of the great commission for you"?

"That's the essence for me. It is not to get someone, ... not to make numbers for the Anglican church." LA3.521.

The parish priest was asked, "what role would that particular passage, [Matthew 28.19] if any, play in your design of an evangelical program in your parish?"

I think what I would like to do with that particular passage is not to deny it, and have it there, to say its there. I would look at it from the perspective, 'am I trying to convince you to my way of thinking or am I prepared to [share] my faith and hope and belief that God is Almighty God, Jesus is the son of God who came and died on the cross and rose again. He conquered death and the conquering of death will change you and your attitude.' That is how I would use that message and not take it as my job to go out and convert you or another person there. LA4.460.

Along with not wanting to stress their role in bringing about the conversion of the person they are talking to, the leaders acknowledge the call to proclamation, to tell the story and ramifications of Christ's death and resurrection. Without acknowledging or, maybe, even being aware of it, they have expressed the importance of the second major element, 'proclamation,' after what is normally called 'outreach' in resolution of the '88 Lambeth meeting:

This Conference:

I calls for a shift to a dynamic missionary emphasis going beyond care and nurture to proclamation and service.⁸

I found, in the interviews, what I would call stages of evangelism beginning with meeting and getting to know another person. Next, there would be the desire and capacity to respond to an expressed need of the other person, which is frequently called “outreach”. The other person may need something emotional and personal – support, care, understanding, advice, affirmation, or the consolation of friendship which can do much to improve one’s self esteem. They may need food, clothing, help finding a job, or help with learning how to care for other members of the family, such as small children, teens, or elderly relatives. This might be followed, if the other person invites it, by talk about what God has meant in the life of the person offering the “care and nurture”. The conversation may prompt the one making the witness and offering the “service” to invite the other to church. This can be seen as the pattern each of the respondents understood as shaping their understanding of evangelism.

Imperialistic evangelism was rejected by these same respondents:

Sometimes I wonder whether a lot of Anglican people who have grown up in the church or who have grown up in any form of British kind of reticence, which I did, feel that they would be intruding on people. Alternatively we know our own feelings when people knock at the door and try to give us pamphlets and they are doing evangelism for [two other churches named]. We know our own feelings about that. They are intrusive. We don’t want to emulate that. LA2.136.

Another referred to the same two churches and used the same word, “intrusive”, to explain why Anglicans do not engage in that kind of evangelism. This respondent, though, acknowledges and admires their courage in going door to door. One finds a hint of guilt because Anglicans do not “take the chance”:

We have the charge, don't we, to go out amongst all nations and baptise them and that sort of thing. Basically, as Anglicans, perhaps with a British background there is a shyness or a reticence to project yourself to perhaps offend somebody, perhaps to be made to feel silly, if you are rejected, a reluctance to be rejected. I think that is why we don't do things in a very overt sense, but we know we should take the chance. We see other groups like [the same two churches], people who are not afraid to come to your door and talk to you. I think we have a sort of secret admiration of the fact that they have the guts to do that. I think maybe we would be more faithful servants if, in fact, we did do that ourselves. I think it is in the personality to some extent of the individual; he is not going to say, ‘come and be saved’. If someone says what's religion mean to him he may not have the words or may not want to use the words. I think some of our priests have been very good about sort of defining the essence of one's faith, but we tend not to use those words for fear that they will become trite or someone will laugh at them.” LA1.211.

‘Serving’ is represented by this excerpt from one of the interviews when I asked, following questions about this person's understanding of evangelism:

“We were talking about the effect of the outreach?”

I think, in some ways, that's been the way that in our parish people find it easier to respond to the Decade of Evangelism rather than doing it on a personal basis. Again this may be a more Anglican way. Doing it through the back door provides some money, some resources or helps somebody in need with that sort of evangelism.

LA3.610.

I believe this last quote captures the essence of the meaning of evangelism for these leaders. They are motivated to care for those in need, to be involved in outreach with the Good News that someone does care and wants to help. These leaders are more comfortable with this notion of evangelism than any other.

EVANGELISM AS OUTREACH OR SERVICE TO OTHERS

Loren Mead in his consideration of the new paradigm in which the church finds itself presses us to consider the 'serving' model vis à vis the 'converting' model in the light of past historical paradigms of the life of the church.

A second polarity has to do with the church's understanding of what its mission is. This polarity is reflected in the two ways the church has described its work - conversion of the world or serving the world. Both terms are drawn directly from Jesus' ministry. He called his followers to go to the ends of the earth to convert, but he also sent his disciples to be servants even as he had been one who served them.

At no time has the church ordered its life exclusively to one or the other pole, although the predominant public model of both Apostolic and Christendom

Paradigms was conversion. I note that as the public model, the one that drove the engines of the institution, although I suspect the predominant private model has always been servanthood. Literally millions of ordinary folk have acted out their faith in caring for their neighbours and for those in pain around them, often without even thinking of it as mission.⁹

The first task in teaching about these matters is to have articulated and identified the guilt that some feel when they hear this part of the Gospel read to them at worship.

I've gone to church all my life and I don't think I would really welcome the opportunity to go knock on doors of the general public and get them to come or to buy tracts or stuff like that. It is not our style. I'm afraid and, again as you say, there is a guilt there because you know you should be doing that. I think it is very tough for people to do that. LA1.621.

"I really feel a bit guilty about it, you know, we keep talking about evangelism and I don't think I am at all good at what people think of as evangelism." LA2.107.

Some of the guilt appears to be the tied into their interpretation of the Matthean commission in 28.19. This, in turn, may be the result of the teaching and the learning about this particular text in Anglican worship.

EVANGELISM IN THE LECTIONARY AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 28.19 is not a text that has any predominance in the lectionaries of the Anglican Church of Canada. The lectionary is the arrangement of readings from scripture

appointed for Holy Days, Sundays and weekdays to be read in the worship of the Eucharist and in morning and evening prayer.

This verse, Matthew 28.19, does not appear either frequently or at major Sunday festivals. In the *Book of Common Prayer* it does not appear in the readings for evening or morning prayer (xvi - xiv). In the Epiphany season it may be used on weekdays as the Gospel reading on an occasion celebrating and praying for the work of the church overseas. There is the implication that “out there” is the need for conversion. That was, of course, a primary driving public force for the extension of the mission of the church in the previous two centuries. The implication is that this passage is for the missionary work of the church overseas, not just missionary work anywhere, including at home.

Note also that since this verse “may be used” the choice is left up to the person, usually the priest, who is arranging the worship. She or he may choose otherwise. And even if the choice is made, it is for a weekday celebration of the Eucharist, and hence there is little chance that many members of any parish will hear it read or taught since Anglicans are not notorious for going to Church on weekdays, except, maybe, Good Friday. The leaders of the church in this study were all products of a church that used this lectionary. It is no wonder then that they had not heard much about the Matthean commission, 28.16-20, except as it applied to the work of the missionaries overseas whose role was to convert those who differed greatly from members of the northern, Caucasian, Christian Church.

The Lectionary in the *Book of Alternative Services* appoints this passage to be read at more occasions of public or corporate worship, such as the Gospel at the Easter Vigil (329). Maybe the designers of this lectionary are more attuned to evangelism being called for at

home! In the three year cycle of readings it appears as the Gospel reading on Trinity Sunday in year A, (347) and in the readings for the daily offices on Ascension Day in year 1 (467). Here we simply want to note that other themes often take precedence for the preacher on Trinity Sunday. When we were younger we thought it was our responsibility to explain the math, logic, history and philosophy of “three in one and one in three”, all in a sermon of fifteen to eighteen minutes! Again, although the Easter Vigil is one of the richest and most profound liturgies of the Church, because it is not on a Sunday, Anglicans are not too inclined to attend. As with Trinity Sunday, other themes – baptism, deliverance, the exodus, other great events in the history of salvation – press themselves upon the preacher to be talked about in a homily or sermon.

What about preaching on Matthew 28:16-20 on Ascension Day? As that Feast Day is governed by the date of Easter, which in turn is decided by the date of the spring equinox, a floating date on the calendar, the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension always falls on a weekday, *ipso facto*, few Anglicans are in Church to hear such a sermon!

There is a paucity of opportunities in either lectionary to teach from this text. It is not surprising one of the respondents was able to say, in response to a question about the emphasis in this verse, that it was “...to help evangelise people, to help them realise the importance of having a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. That’s strong evangelism and that’s not necessarily what I certainly hear at our church on Sundays.” LA3.496.

The structure of the worship in a typical Anglican parish does not allow much opportunity for the development of personal ideas in conversation with others. I believe this

is a contributor to the reluctance, reticence and guilt talked about by the respondents. For given that the Anglican Church of Canada is currently home for a number of members who do not have a British ethnic heritage, the reluctance must, at least in part, come from somewhere else. I would suggest that it is mainly to be found in the culture of the church itself. The Biblical texts of its worship suggest this.

At a broader level one respondent talked about how the configuration of the expression of the faith of an Anglican community itself was an impediment to inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

That's where there are things like evangelical weekends or where the emphasis is then on somebody who is a good talker, an entertaining speaker, this type of thing. Then you can invite someone in because that's not, quote, 'what we do on Sunday'. We have in past, in our church, invited special speakers and sometimes people from other denominations, sometimes people from other faiths to come in, and quite often there will be a good turnout. That's something to invite people coming to learn more because I think, to me, sometimes the Anglican church is sacramental. There is a tremendous component of kind of a knowledge base. There seems to be a general interest in learning about things, understanding why things work, wanting someone to come and give a good explanation of why is it that we are doing this or why does this happen. Maybe that is, not making a generalisation, but that is a character trait that is found in a high proportion of people that are Anglicans. For some reason if they don't have that knowledge thing, maybe they will either leave the church and go to another denomination that appeals to something else. I think, for me, looking at

the church the aspects that have been good about the Anglican and sacramental churches is the work that we have done in terms of outreach. We have done a lot of work with Mustard Seed ministries downtown with excellent sandwich making, and these are things that you enjoy telling your friends and neighbours or people at work about. You can invite them to come and participate in this, trying to be sort of the hands of God in the world. I think for me that is the opportunity in the Anglican church that we can maybe emphasise more because a lot of people can identify with helping the needy, the hurt, the lost, the hungry, the blind. As Christians we can often lead the way in that or try to initiate things and keep things going because we are doing it not to get personal satisfaction out of it, but doing it because that's what Jesus calls us to do. LA3.235.

I found this statement to be most interesting for two reasons. First, it pointed to how the initiation process within the Anglican church really works. The Sunday worship, especially the Eucharist, is rich with symbols, actions and words that have to be understood to be appreciated and valued by the worshipper. This is the "knowledge" the respondent was talking about. The entry into this experience, this mode of expressing and sharing one's faith, is something different from a guest speaker, or the like, at a different time.

I am reminded of stories of the earliest days of the church when new members went through a period of instruction, the Catechumenate, before they were even invited into "Sunday worship". I believe the Anglican church would benefit from a reassessment of this strategy especially as we extend our mission to the increasingly secular world that does not understand or appreciate the symbols of faith and their richness, or their theology.

The second reason why I was impressed by this statement is that it, again, expresses in a moving way how several Anglicans feel they can move into evangelism. It is an expression of that “serving” model talked about earlier.

When asked if there had been much discussion about Matthew’s Great Commission in the parish another leader replied:

I would have a little trouble with determining just when this has happened but I do know that it has been preached to us in the past. Whether it has been the last two years or not I would hate to say. Yes, I think it is part of our awareness of what we should be doing. It may make us a little less timid because we know that we do have the responsibility and we feel that responsibility. LA1.262.

Note the choice of “it has been preached to us”, which suggests, “here is something you should do!” This part of the conversation was in the context of placing this Matthean commission with other Biblical – specifically, Gospel – injunctions about evangelism, and the question referred to preaching and discussion. “It may make us a little less timid” referred to the possible discussion of the text with a view of learning more about it, and how one could more easily, with less “reluctance” or “guilt” incorporate it into one’s personal witness.

A priest friend of mine recently conducted a course on spiritual growth. People who attended told me that in it they developed more freedom and relaxation in talking about their faith, beliefs, and understanding of how God has acted in their lives. This course, which ran one night a week in the fall and winter months for two hours, took three years to bring this group of twenty people to this point. We should not be surprised when both lay and clerical

leaders are reluctant to present the story of Christ crucified to others! This priest and I often talked about the course: its progress, plan, and outcome. In one of our last conversations we both acknowledged that many of us, again lay and ordained members, do not have the vocabulary for this kind of conversation with another. We have the theological language, the language of formulae and abstraction, but not the kind of vocabulary that makes it easy for us to translate to another person, in non-threatening terms for them or for us, how the Christ event has played itself out in our lives. All conversations have their own gifts and devices. Conversations with a child, a lover, an intimate friend, a parent, a superior, a mentor, a subordinate, a neighbour, etc., all have their own social conventions which surround and support that conversation without audible words, but are important to make the words spoken understood and accepted. The Anglican church normally does not provide an opportunity to learn and grow in one's capacity to share the faith in a really personal, meaningful and effective way with others. We do not, normally, have "testimonials" either in our corporate worship or in our Bible studies. Bibles studies outside of worship are offered, but nothing was said in the interviews to indicate that any had been recently held in the parish that would assist members in developing the skills of evangelism. We do not spend much time, as is evidenced by the responses of those interviewed in this study, to "unwrap" Matthew 28.16-20, folding it around our own experience and representing it in a fresh, personal, and vital way.

The learning here must involve confronting and debriefing the "guilt" and "reluctance" acknowledged by all of those interviewed in this study. By this I mean that

opportunities should be given to people to articulate those feelings, share them and work through them with others to a new confidence in themselves as witnesses to their faith.

THE DECADE OF EVANGELISM

In the course of designing this study the need and desire for training or education of parish leaders was anticipated. It was fair, therefore, that the Lambeth resolutions respecting the Decade of Evangelism should call upon the church at the national and diocesan levels to provide resources for this education. Each of the leaders in this parish were asked about their experience of any program from either the diocese or the national office of the church that would have been useful to them, to educate them further in matters of evangelism.

The Lambeth Conference passed this resolution which calls upon the leaders in the church to provide such training.

Resolution 45: Mission and ministry of the whole Church

This Conference:

- 1 acknowledging that God through the Holy Spirit is bringing about a revolution in terms of the total ministry of all the baptised, thus enriching the Church and making Christ known to men and women as the hope of the world;
- 2 urges each bishop with his diocese to take the necessary steps to provide opportunities, training and support to ensure that this shared style of ministry becomes a reality.

(See further paragraphs 70-75 of the Report on 'Mission and Ministry').¹⁰

I asked, "Has any [resource] been promoted to you as a resource of the diocese to help you do that in the context of the Decade of Evangelism?"

At the parish level we really haven't had any program at all. We have our general outreach but really nothing that relates to the Decade of Evangelism. I haven't pursued it either. I am not aware of any vehicle there at all that I can tap into or a resource I can use. LA4.568.

Another leader confirmed this: "I don't think specifically. As I said, the weekend we spend with [the facilitator] sort of has that aspect to it, but it is in response to a perceived need." LA1.540.

I referred to a national program arranged to assist parishes with matters of evangelism. The Reverend Paul McLean provided fine leadership for a week-end workshop on "Congregational Development" which was intended to help parish leaders begin to work towards ways of increasing the membership of their parishes. I attended one of these workshops, in 1990, for two reasons. First, it was related to the area of my interest in this study. Second, it was a way for other leaders in my own parish to join with me in identifying directions we, as a parish, could move in with a view to increasing our membership. The priest in the parish of this study had also attended a "Congregational Workshop." As he and I talked about it, he said that he had arranged for Paul McLean to lead a workshop this parish could be involved with, but it was not successful. Minutes of the vestry at that time indicate that the workshop was held in that parish and that other parishes were invited to participate. People in this parish were not inclined to attend. The priest explained the lack of support in the parish for the workshop in this way: "My vestry

didn't buy it. They felt it wasn't feeding them with methods of how to take Christ out there to the person so that person accepts Christ." LA4.528.

It is not surprising, then, that the lay leaders did not credit the national church with any resource to assist them with evangelism. When asked about this *Congregational Development Workshop*, one replied, "I don't. I am entirely ignorant of it." LA1.513.

Another concurred, "No, I am not aware of that at all." LA2.270.

This exchange points to a systemic problem, not isolated, I think, to the Anglican Church. Decisions made at one level are not easily transferred to or incorporated by others. Enthusiasm for the declaration of the Decade of Evangelism was based on the experience of bishops hearing exciting stories from other bishops around the world. Their perspective of the church was broadened and encouraged by this experience. At home, in local parishes, the experience of the church was in the surrounding neighbourhood, town or city where other forces were at play.

The minutes of the annual general meetings and the vestry register of the parish studied record an attempt to carry out the declaration in this diocese. The 1991 synod, built around the guest speaker Robert Wise, had each parish involved in some preparation his presentation on evangelism. Any enthusiasm for this was lost as the parish in this study got caught up in local issues including, in 1993, the need to find a new incumbent priest.

Since the diocesan synod of 1991 the parish and the diocese of which it is a part have moved on to other challenges. The Diocese, in 1994, adopted a new and broader plan that included the reorganisation of Diocesan committees and programs. The parish was caught up in its adjustments to a new rector and to crises which saw members leaving. Even those

attempts at “service evangelism” were short-lived and isolated. They did not engage the whole parish in a way that would have sustained them.

It also appears that the national church, except for its program of congregational development, did not provide resources for the development of local evangelism. This neglect was compounded, I believe, by the lack of resources for members of parishes to explore, develop and articulate their own approach to evangelism. Material that did appear, for example, in the national newspaper of the church was a modernised version of “Conversion evangelism”. This has not been all that useful to the leaders interviewed in this study, as “conversion evangelism” makes assumptions about what church members are prepared to do, that are clearly unwarranted.

METAPHORS

“WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS”, “MEANINGS WITHIN MEANINGS”

As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance was like the gleaming of beryl; and the four had the same form, their construction being something like a wheel within a wheel.

When they moved, they moved in any of the four directions without veering as they moved. Their rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around. When the living creatures moved, the wheels moved beside them; and when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit

would go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When they moved, the others moved; when they stopped, the others stopped; and when they rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them; for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. Ezek 1:15-21 (NRSV)

While reflecting on various aspects of the data from the interviews and reviewing documents in the parish pertinent to this study, I was reminded of an introduction to a series of meditations given at a clergy retreat by Bishop Barry Valentine in the mid 1970s. What he began with was almost an apology: that as he drew from his personal faith and theological understanding, he was aware of the various forces that shaped that faith, his personal and family life, his ministry as priest and bishop, his theological study in various locations, etc. He said we could expect to find, with him, “meanings within meanings”. There would be layers, but there would be a holon, “a sub-system that has properties distinct from the individuals that it comprises, as well as properties distinct from the larger systems that contain it.”¹¹ During the interviews, I was very much aware of each respondent’s individual, separate systems, or ‘holons’. At the same time, I was also very much aware that each person was a leader in a larger system – a sub-system, part of the larger holon, of the parish.

Like Ezekiel’s wheels, there were wheels within wheels, wheels of a gyroscopic motion yielding to various forces and counter-forces. But as there were wheels within wheels, it allowed the system to move freely in any of the four cardinal directions. Ezekiel’s vision was not limited to one wheel, having, by its shape, only the ability to move in one

direction or its opposite, but had a second wheel set transversely allowing the creatures to move without limitation in any direction. The parish moved in its own direction according to its own corporate theology and spirituality. Similarly, the individual leaders moved in the direction of their own spirituality and theology. Both were bound together by relationships that grew out of those very theologies and spiritualities.

As there were forces and directions that were both distinct and yet united, so there were, as well, “meanings within meanings”. The personal histories of the leaders influenced their current understandings of evangelism, and understanding these personal, historical forces helps us understand the nature of the relationship each person had with the other and gave us a taste, at least, of the expression of the mind of the parish. It was difficult, once this was perceived, to move to some unified expression. Each attempt was hampered or stalled by a memory of something said in an interview that drew me away from the pursuit of understanding the larger system, the larger ‘holon’, and enticed me to delve more deeply into that individual statement, into a musing about the person who made it, its personal context. I imagine this to be both the charm and delight of this type of qualitative research and one of its largest challenges!

My study brings one in contact not only with the complexities of the interactions and dynamics of interpersonal relationships within the leadership group, but also with the larger life of the parish. This larger life not only includes the present members and the movement of those new sub-systems, but also its history and place in the larger community.

A major function of parish story, therefore, is the formulation of a larger setting for the self, one that situates the individual as part of a society and a world. In

establishing a setting, narrative acknowledges that what “I” am only gains sense in the matrix that “we” are. “I” do not as a donor create the corporate entity and the world that holds it; rather, “I” figure as actor in the larger narrative that ??? group and world provide. Insofar as parish story is told with attention to its setting, then, we state that we are not adrift as atoms in a chaotic soup. By narrative we are comrades in common story, first with those who play out the story in our congregation, but ultimately with all people who in communal discourse inhabit the world.¹²

The “larger narrative” for this parish included its outreach to groups and citizens in the larger community.

“What does outreach mean to your parish?”

It has two levels of meaning. In one group of people it means that we need to get out there and get those people who don’t come to church on Sunday, who cannot say that they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour on such and such a date. This is why [we] go and work on them. I understand from some members of the parish you go and make a friend with someone and the motive is then you work on them so they can accept Christ. On the other side, I have another group of people in the parish where outreach is giving money to *Habitat for Humanity* refugees. You work with refugees. You bring them into the country and set them up so what you are doing is reaching out to the need. LA4.545

Here we find that crossover of meaning between “evangelism” and “outreach”, one stressing the goal of conversion, the other the goal of service. In the interviews I learned

that most of those who were proponents of the first objective have left the parish. That emphasis, evangelism for conversion, is not strongly held by the four leaders interviewed.

That evangelism and outreach can often be seen as synonymous has its positive side. Service to and for others can be a more comfortable way for members of this parish to begin their evangelistic purposes. This approach might lead, ultimately, to integration of new members from those who are served.

Roy Oswald and Speed Leas, in chapters Five, Six, and Seven in their *The Inviting Church: a study of new member assimilation* (1987), offer very helpful ways for parishes like this one to build on their current understanding of evangelism and themselves as a parish so that their “serving” mode can be more effective. A different but still most helpful tool is provided by Michael C. Armour and Don Browning in *Systems-Sensitive Leadership*, particularly section three of that book.¹³

One of the leaders interviewed spoke of a project originating in this parish that was a response to a real need in the surrounding community.

I can give you a specific example. I was running an unemployment support group a few years ago for people who lost their jobs. I phoned around to all the Anglican churches in town to see if they had similar support groups or if they had people who were interested. Did they want to join with us or did they want to do something as a megachurch type of group? It was rather interesting that the other churches didn't know we were doing this at all and certainly we didn't know what they were doing.

LA1.521.

This is an interesting example where people in one parish identified a need and serious concern in the community – unemployment – and decided to try to respond to it with the development of a support group. This approach was also talked about by one of the other respondents.

I was a proponent of saying if there is a need for, you know, a parenting workshop why shouldn't we put that on and I could invite somebody to that. It could be done from a Christian perspective. How about dealing with the stress of parenting teenagers? What do we do or how do we handle trying to raise teenagers in the 90s? Looking at that from a Christian perspective. We could organise that. That's something I could invite somebody to. What about dealing with financial stresses? How do we cope in the 90s with fixed salaries, with inflation and general falling net incomes? As the kids get older the financial needs [increase]. How do you deal with trying to budget within that kind of environment and still be able to do the things that you feel you want to do? Financial counselling, maybe from a Christian perspective. I've always felt strongly those are the kinds of programs that our parish and Anglican churches should be offering to the community at large. If those were going on I could invite people to those and if they saw that people from our church were interested in doing those kinds of things and putting on those programs, 'hey! maybe we should find out what else is going on here. Why do these people want to do this? LA3.553.

There is, in these accounts of parish outreach, mention of "Mustard Seed", "Habitat for Humanity", and "Exit". Each are agencies external and apart from the parish. Here one

finds two marks of detachment. The first is that the people and the money from the parish go outside the parish's communal life to fulfil the desire to witness to the Gospel of Christ. The activities of the agencies and service groups are not extensions of the administration of the parish in any structured way. If they were, it would more easily allow the members to see that this is not just an expression of their good will but integral to the rest of that parish's life. The second indication of detachment is in the uneasy reconciliation of evangelism and outreach. They are sometimes seen as synonymous, sometimes not. In outreach there is the initial stage of evangelism, caring for another, affirming the other, and nurturing the other toward a healthier, stronger life. What is difficult is the next stage: articulating the faith and theological understanding that motivated this desire to care for that other person. This leads me back to what I was saying earlier about how valuable it would be to have a course in which one can develop the language that allows one to truly witness, to articulate to that other person the source of this motivation for the care, concern, support and assistance one is impelled to provide out of their personal faith.

The views of the leaders interviewed are, I think, quite common among the members of the Anglican church, but confirming this would require further study, and a much larger survey.

There is the uneasy alliance between outreach, seen as a more natural attempt at evangelism within the church, and the type of evangelism that involves being able to share with others what it is from your church experience, your faith, that motivates you.

THE GOLF SWING

A second metaphor that has assisted me with this study is that of the golf swing. I love the game. Improving skill as a golfer has been one of the goals since the earliest days of my learning covenant for the Doctor of Ministry program. I play as often as I can. I practice at the driving range when I see that I will not have a game that week. I watch the professionals on television - the so-called "regular" tour, the senior tour and the ladies tour.

The desire in golf is to develop a swing that both achieves a lower score and is consistent. Utopia is a homeostasis, everything working in harmony, consistently, the grip of the club, the position of the feet, the position of the body, the movement of the club away from the ball, the position of the club at the top of the swing, the shift of the weight of the body as the down-swing begins, the contact with the ball and the follow-through of the club to the conclusion of the swing. It all has to work together. Each element is distinct and can be practised separately, but it is only when they all work together in harmony, with its own rhythm, that success at the game is possible.

Since I first declared my desire to improve my game, two significant elements have changed. First, I bought a new set of clubs. Second, I came to see that, as I aged and my body changed, I needed to find a new rhythm for my swing. I consider these to be analogies for the kind of individuation that presses one on to survival, to success, to accomplishment. Both new elements radically disrupted the homeostasis that evolved around the old clubs and the old rhythm. This led to frustration, anxiety about whether I would succeed or not, and even consideration of dropping the sport out of fear of the new challenges. Moving to a

new level has, as is often the case, that painful time of transition, away from the relative comfort of a not too productive or satisfying former life, or game, toward an unknown that oddly enough brings one up against the fear of success.

With this metaphor in mind I move to consider homeostasis in the life of this parish especially as it helps us better understand what its leaders mean by evangelism.

This term [homeostasis] is borrowed from physiology, where an organism shows an inbred tendency to correct any deviation from a baseline steady state in the concentration of such body chemicals as hormones or electrolytes. A family is viewed by these [family systems theorists] as a system that has an integrity all its own that operates in a consistent and only slowly changing sometimes inefficient manner.

... Human systems are believed to have developed mechanisms that oppose changes that might destroy the integrity of the system.¹⁴

Opposing change carries with it a variety of fears: fear that we might have to change, fear about an unknown future that is uncomfortable to anticipate. Various fears were named by those interviewed in this study. They are, I believe, key elements in a proper understanding of the attitudes of the leaders to their roles in inviting, welcoming and integrating new members to their parish.

This parish is in a moment of transition with the discomfort that accompanies any change. Transition requires energy; energy is spent on either maintaining homeostasis or pressing through to a new level of existence.

There have been so many changes with the different priests going and coming and people leaving and new people coming on board I have just been stuck with maintenance [of parish life]. I feel that I haven't had an opportunity to sit really down and talk. The other thing is we talk about it at vestry and then we leave it, so I feel I am the only one who is pushing and pushing . LA4.298.

This leader is at the hub of the transition recognising the gifts and blessings of this particular parish, its security and strength, but wanting to push for a more open community.

I think there is a fear of change. When the newcomers come in they might bring in some new ideas, some different ideas from our own thinking. We might have to really listen to them and say, 'we've talked about the fact, okay, we have been a church and done all these things and it has been great, but then you might come in and you might have a different churchmanship and have a different style of thinking. If you come and I welcome you, I will really have to listen to you and my sense is that as a body of the church here at the [the parish] there is fear in that. If I really listen to you I might have to change a little bit. I don't have anything concrete to go on but that is what I sense very strongly in some ways, that the fear of change and the church is changing in that things are changing. LA4.278.

"Part of it is fear, particularly fear of people who are very different in any way.

Maybe also, underneath, the fear of how will this change this comfortable situation."

LA2.236.

There was, as well, not wanting to be "so afraid of frightening people off." LA1.107.

There was also the fear of being embarrassed or ashamed:

I felt that the family was slightly dysfunctional. If you sense that, you especially don't feel like inviting people to your home. I look upon the church as my home. I perceive that in my perspective that there was some dysfunction within the family and because it hasn't been sorted out yet I am not quite ready to bring my family out on public display. From that standpoint I'm quite happy. I love the family and I want to work with the family, but at the same time there are parts of the family that would kind of embarrass me by some degree so for me that brings in a reluctance to invite people. LA3.176.

Anyone who has grown up in, to use the current jargon, a "dysfunctional family", comes to see, in the maturity of their understanding, that a lot of time and energy was demanded of each member of the family just to "keep the ship afloat" and "keep the family together". Sadly, much of this energy, spent on striving for homeostasis, went to maintaining those elements that, tragically, were leading to the destruction of the family! These families become closed systems, and as such, self-destruct.

The maintenance of the current attitude and approach to evangelism expresses the desire for homeostasis.

We become aware in this study that the various outreach projects involving the parish as a whole give the parish an outward looking perspective, looking beyond itself. This outreach is mainly through financial assistance, or individuals who contribute time and energy to a local charity. It is not surprising, therefore, that Oswald and Leas in their research

found that most churches which were successfully finding and integrating new members had some kind of outreach into the community: they allowed other community groups to use their facilities (which brought people who would otherwise be strangers to them into their building) and/or their members were active in other groups, including political parties, volunteer organisations, social change groups, social groups, and self-help groups (all of which provided opportunity for members to make contact with “outsiders” and communicate with them about what is good about their church experience).¹⁵

My study illustrated this point with reference to a woman’s bible study group through which others were integrated into the membership of the parish.

It is through personal relationships that most of the new membership is found. Oswald and Leas point to an article published by Elmer Town, “Evangelism: The How and Why.”

He gives figures similar to those seen elsewhere;

How People are Brought into the Church

By Advertisement	2%
By the Pastor	6%
By Organised Evangelistic Outreach	6%
By Friends and Relatives	86% ¹⁶

Similar statistics are reported by Donald McGavran and George G. Hunter III in their contribution to the “Creative Leadership Series” edited by Lyle Schaller and entitled, *Church Growth: Strategies That Work*.¹⁷

The necessary combination of outreach and personal contact which is important to growing churches is well described by Alan C. Klaas in his *In Search of the Unchurched*. He makes a distinction between “presence” outreach and, what he calls “Great Commission outreach”. “Presence” outreach happens when, “the congregation provides some form of social service to the community.”¹⁸ In the interviews we note there was a willingness on the part of these leaders to offer this service. The next step was not acknowledged: developing personal relationships in which personal spiritual stories are told, and proclamation is made. In other words, “the members do not develop personal relationships with the people being helped.”¹⁹ As trust develops so does one’s confidence to share what might be considered by them a most intimate understanding, namely their faith.

Klaas says, on the other hand, that Great Commission outreach means touching the spiritual lives of people thus preparing fertile ground for the Holy Spirit to establish and nurture faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. Great Commission outreach can start with the same activities as presence outreach. The difference lies in the fact that the ministry touches the spiritual lives of the people being helped. Most Great Commission outreach activities are first-person contacts.²⁰

RECAPITULATION

The study and its interviews were done at a time of transition and some turmoil in the parish. The priest was aware of forces that wanted to keep things the way they were. This was confirmed, indirectly, by the many references of the lay members, all who had been there a number of years, to the great events of the past, and the strong friendships that had

developed. These were what was important to them. We saw how the priest felt like an outsider. That is not surprising in the light of the expressions of friendship that had developed over twenty years or more among the other leaders I interviewed. To the lay members this parish was 'home'. The priest, on the other hand, related to this parish as one of a number he would serve in his ordained ministry.

It is encouraging that just as the study was getting underway the new leadership of the parish were seeking a shared vision and direction. They were, in the *Parish Revitalisation Process*, beginning by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. This will provide the opportunity for the sharing of views, interpretations and values that will be necessary for them to work together for that new life that awaits them as a parish community. The study discovered the need for consultation, particularly consultation between the priest and lay leadership, that would clarify and focus their efforts on a healthy, creative and corporate move into the future.

CONCLUSION

I want to stress, again, that this study is a slice of life, at a particular moment of history. It is limited to four leaders in one parish. There was no general and statistical survey of a larger sample of the membership.

There was, intentionally, no attempt to solicit the views, thoughts and experiences of new members to this parish. Much of what people are looking for has been studied by other authors, including Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*; Donald Posterski and Irwin Barker,

What Makes a Good Church; and Roy Oswald and Speed Leas, *The Inviting Church: a Study of New Member Assimilation.*

My purpose was to examine the attitudes of the leaders of the parish in matters of evangelism, mission and ministry. If members are not open to one another, there cannot be encouragement and support for those attempting to welcome and integrate newcomers. The newcomers will come and go, simply visitors, looking for a parish where they can feel at home.

RECOMMENDATION

I see more clearly now that there are at least three key phases in the development of a successful parish program of inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

The first phase is the development of a shared understanding of what evangelism means among the leadership, including not only the rector and wardens, but also the members of vestry and key committees and groups in the parish. Passages from scripture like Matthew 28.16-20 have to be considered in light of similar commissions in the New Testament. We cannot presume, as we have seen, the words of one verse or short passage will mean the same thing to all hearers. In this last decade we have come to see a most opportune field for mission work right out our front doors, in our own communities and cities. This is a real paradigm shift from “out there” to “right here”.

In the past the work of the evangelist was done *away* from northern Anglican parishes. Evangelism was done in countries and societies that had little or no contact with the Christian church. We saw ourselves as a Christian country that did not require local

evangelism. We have grown up with that understanding. Evangelism, in this spirit, meant converting, changing the minds and lifestyles of those who were clearly not Christian. Now that evangelism is to be done “right here” we have to develop a vocabulary and a new understanding of the process of that evangelism. “We now assume that the front door of the church is a door into mission territory, not just a door to the outside. Everybody who goes through that door is personally crossing a missionary frontier and is involved in mission.”²¹

The second phase gives leaders in a parish an opportunity to share interpretations, attitudes and theological understandings. Conversations and meetings specifically to discuss one’s personal faith and how it might be shared provide an opportunity for each leader to develop her or his skills at articulating their faith, examining their reluctance or resistance to the “proclamation” of evangelism. Through a progressive course such leaders can grow more comfortable in being able to share with others what it is about their faith that compels them to reach out sacrificially to others. The links between what attracts them to regular worship Sunday morning and their desire to serve others can be identified, shared, and tested in conversation with others in their faith community. This process not only builds up personal confidence and clarity in speaking about personal spiritual matters, but continues the representation of the mission statement around which all members are united.

The third phase is to identify those outreach projects that can be opportunities for extending the invitation to others. This would involve working with the leaders of those groups, familiarising them with the vision of an inviting parish, assisting and supporting them in developing their own, personal ways of witnessing. In order for Great Commission outreach to be accomplished, though, it is not just a case of better identifying and becoming

more familiar with those outside agencies, but consciously developing links between them and the congregation at worship on Sunday mornings.

The parish in this study has expended a lot of energy, as they recognised, dealing with internal issues, conflicts and organisational shifts which have come with the arrival of a new priest. As a result, energy and attention could not, at this point, be focused on their evangelistic mission. There were internal conflicts to deal with, new patterns of leadership to develop, hurts to be healed, and other parish issues to attend to. Like any organism, the parish directs its energy first at self preservation.

Earlier in this chapter I asked how this study might be used in other parishes by other researchers. First, I think the questions themselves can lead another researcher into an examination of the same issues, but with different, local results. This is to be expected as each parish has its own story, its own unique narrative. Second, the researcher will have to do a similar study of the written documents, the minutes of the meetings of vestry, corporation (rector and wardens) and the annual general meetings or special meetings of the parish membership. Third, I believe some of the same concerns about systemic issues deserve a similar study and evaluation. If there are agreements in a repeated study, that would be satisfying. The results would further confirm the need for a revised strategy in parishes. If there are not, it would be worthwhile comparing both studies to probe more deeply into what happens at a local, parish level with respect to inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

I felt strongly at the beginning of this project that the introduction of various church growth programs assumed that the members would be most willing to be engaged in them,

and that there was a shared understanding of what it means to be a Christian, especially what it means to evangelise as individual Christians or as parishes in a community. I felt it important that we know more about the attitudes of parish leaders and other parish members before designing a program or direction we wish members of the church to follow.

I close by repeating that nowhere in the interviews in this parish was there expressed a desire to find new members to maintain the membership so that budgets could be met and programs and projects within the church financed. There was no mention of what Reginald Bibby calls the “demographic necessity.” However, “demographic necessity” may be an important source of motivation in other parishes and congregations. That was not found to be the case here, with these four leaders. Instead, I found a genuine love for their parish, gratitude for its blessings to them, most especially the blessing of friendship and meaning in their lives. I also found a desire to serve their church so that it really was most open to inviting, welcoming and integrating new members.

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Vestry Policy 9) Does your vestry, or one of its committees, have a policy and / or procedure for welcoming new members?

10) Do you, as a vestry of the parish, get any program material or resources that assist you with congregational development and increasing church membership?

11) How does your vestry respond to challenges from the church at either the Diocesan or national level to increase your parish membership?

12) What has been your experience on vestry of vestry's attempts at developing procedures for inviting, welcoming and integrating new members?

13) Do you recall any programs or directives of vestry in the last two (or relevant number of) years that have aimed at inviting, welcoming and integrating new members? Have they worked? If so, why? If not, why not?

Parish custom

14) What does your parish do about integrating new members into the fellowship of the parish? Do you have special groups or procedures for welcoming new members and integrating them into the life of your parish?

- 15) Do you, as a vestry of the parish, get any program material or resources that assist you with congregational development and increasing church membership?

- 16) What does your parish do about integrating new members into the fellowship of the parish? Do you have special groups or procedures for welcoming new members and integrating them into the life of your parish?

- 17) What is happening in this parish that encourages you to invite others that you think or feel might benefit from membership in this parish?

- 18) How has the leadership of the rector and others in the parish affected your attitude and conduct with respect to inviting others to join your parish?

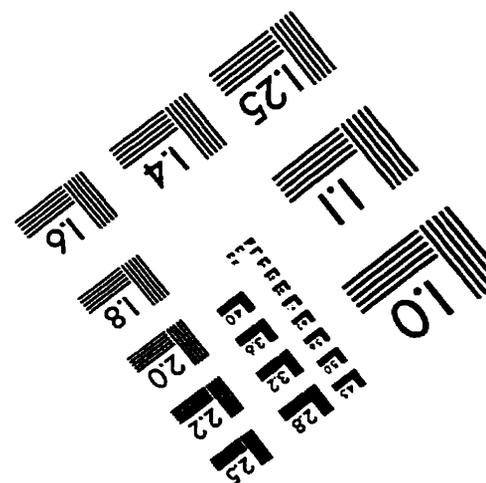
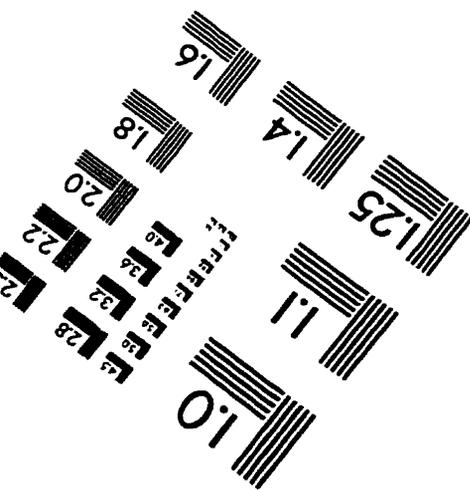
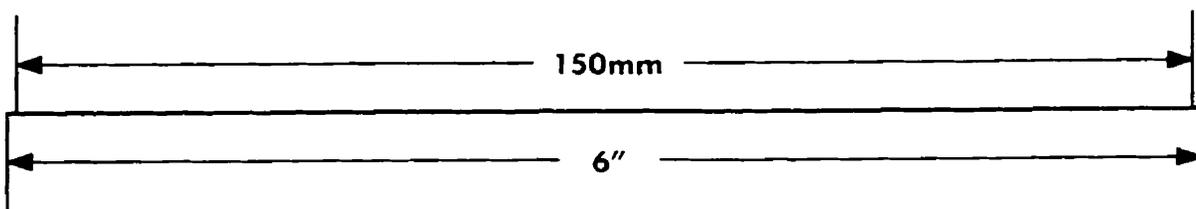
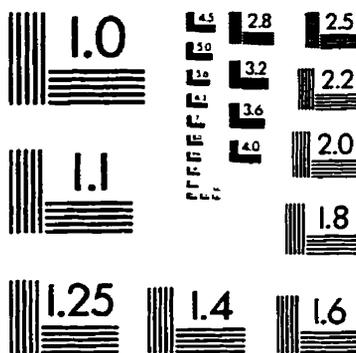
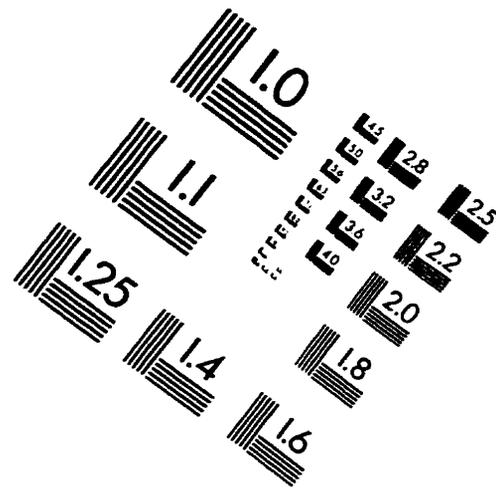
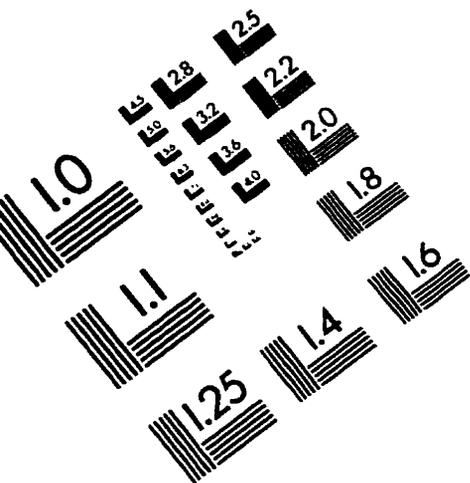
- 19) What is happening in this parish that encourages you to invite others that you think or feel might benefit from membership in this parish?

- 20) How has the leadership of the rector and others in the parish affected your attitude and conduct with respect to inviting others to join your parish?

- 21) How do you think you and your parish should approach the matters of inviting, welcoming and integrating new members?

29) Has this emphasis in Anglican Church
influenced you in any way? If so, how?

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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