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A New Zealand Contextual Church Model that Fosters Community and Discipleship

Darryl Tempero
dmin-fpcoord@fuller.edu

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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

A NEW ZEALAND CONTEXTUAL CHURCH MODEL THAT FOSTERS COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

Written by

DARRYL TEMPERO

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned reader:

Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: March 20, 2017
A NEW ZEALAND CONTEXTUAL CHURCH MODEL THAT FOSTERS COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DARRYL TEMPERO
FEBRUARY 2017
ABSTRACT

A New Zealand Contextual Church Model that Fosters Community and Discipleship
Darryl Tempero
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2017

The goal of this project was to discover a church model that helps de-churched New Zealanders grow as followers of Jesus and in relationships with each other. The strategy followed was to include the de-churched in the identification of activities that they believed would help their formation. The context of this study was the Kiwi Church faith community, a new church congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand. The study led to the definition of church for this community as “Doing life with Jesus, and each other.”

Six participants were interviewed at the beginning of the project to gain an understanding of their current level of spirituality, and identify possible activities to experiment with. The activities, along with other spiritual exercises identified by the author, were experimented with over a period of eighteen months, and then the participants interviewed again.

The learning from this process is in three main areas: activities, leadership and environment. It was found that the predominant leadership model of the PCANZ was not suitable to lead this type of faith community, therefore a new model, “player-coach” proposed. The church environment required has a number of characteristics: equalitarian, freedom to doubt and question, no expectation to serve, and a high level of hospitality and listening. The most significant aspect being the high value placed on an invitation to authentic relationships. It was found that the church environment was impacted negatively when activity was prioritized over relationship. The Church of England’s four-directional model describing a healthy church was examined, and two additional relationships proposed, one with the land and environment, and one with oneself.

Church expression can be simple, and it often becomes more complicated than necessary. The key ingredient missing in the ecclesiastical landscape of New Zealand is imagination. Church can, and should be expressed in many different ways responding to the context each community is located.

Content Reader: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 312
This project is dedicated to Michele, Joel, James and Fraser who have been patient with me, have cheered me on, and put up with my crazy ideas. I will always be grateful.
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PART ONE

CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

This project is a personal journey to explore different models of church so that the de-churched people of Aotearoa, New Zealand may find a faith community in which to grow. In the early-1980s, as a young teenager, I belonged to a Presbyterian church in a small village in North Otago, on the South Island of New Zealand. It was at the tail end of the charismatic movement that swept through New Zealand, impacting many mainline, Protestant churches with members having new experiences of the Holy Spirit. The youth group was a solid community of around twenty-five teenagers who prayed together, studied the Bible, travelled on road trips, went to camps, and excitedly talked about our destinies in life. As we left high school, people drifted away from our small town to other places for university, travel, and work. Of all those who belonged to the youth group there are likely only three or four people who remain connected to organised religion, one of them being me. Over the years I have often reflected on that experience, and pondered as to the reasons why so many drifted away. I questioned if the spiritual experiences were real, or whether the activity perceived as the Holy Spirit was imagined. Maybe it was simply an expression of group behavior and belief that, when tested in the “real” adult world, did not stack up as valid or relevant to everyday life for some.

Now, thirty years on, it seems that the experience of my youth group was not unique. My generation, Generation X (people born between 1965 and 1981), has largely left any form of organised religion, although the decline began with the Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964). New Zealanders (Kiwis) are however, no less
spiritual than before, but the institutional Church, with some exceptions, is not seen as a valid option in which to express that spirituality.

During a decade while working in the corporate banking world I belonged to lively Presbyterian Churches. However, I carried an underlying discontent about the way we did church, how we behaved together, the place we had in society, and the apparent ineffectiveness of the Church to “spread the Gospel.” If it really was “good news,” people in the general public did not seem interested, and only a few had the courage to do the “witnessing” and evangelism that we thought was required. I was not one of those courageous people. I tended to question the effectiveness of the street corner preacher, but carried a sense of inadequacy in my ability to share faith. My insecurity and fear of rejection relegated me to the backbenches of evangelistic efforts. Looking back I had a gnawing discontent about how the Church was run and our ineffectiveness to reach people who did not know Christ. Alongside that I knew the potential of the Gospel to transform lives. Indeed, I felt my own life had been transformed and my heart captured by Jesus, and if this were the case for me, surely others would be interested.

In time a sense of call emerged that led me towards seeking ordination as a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. My studies took my wife and me to Sydney, Australia, to be part of what is now one of the largest churches in the world, and then to Christchurch, New Zealand to complete my undergraduate study. Part of this study exposed me to literature on emerging churches, which I found extremely exciting with regard to the questions I had. Soon after this discovery I was working as a full-time assistant pastor, leading the creative team, overseeing one of the worship services, and managing various community projects. We experimented with different
expressions of worship and learning, but I remember the time many years ago where I felt that it was not “working,” and people did not like it. Even young people, whom I thought were dissatisfied with usual ways of “doing” church, were complaining about these new forms of worship. After discussions with my senior minister, who was not convinced this new emerging church literature could be trusted, I chose to put my efforts into a more familiar contemporary service, with preaching and sung worship. When I reflected with my colleagues on the fact that my generation had left Church, the general answer was that they would come back once they had children, contributing to my sense of “just get on with it and work hard.” As it has turned out, this supposition turned out not to be true. Gen-X people did not return to Church with their children.

That experience was quite formative for me. I worked very hard, outwardly convinced that the “normal” way of church was the best way, while all the time a quiet sense of discontent remained. After a number of years, we enjoyed significant growth (in the New Zealand context) and I oversaw the beginning and growth of a number of community projects. We celebrated the numbers of worship doubling, income increasing every year, a new building project and an increase of staff numbers by 600 percent. At the same time I looked at our low baptism numbers each year suggesting that almost all of our growth was Christians from other churches. ¹ I remember the day we strategically

¹ A feeling since confirmed by the research of Kevin Ward, who researched the life of a number of churches in Christchurch, New Zealand. He found 87 percent of attendees in the successful church that he studied had attended another church as adults, with 9 percent attending as children or youth. Only 3.9 percent came from a genuinely non-church background. The growth of that church had mostly came from people that belonged to other churches, or a small number returning since being involved as a young person. The church I was employed at had 4 percent coming from a non-church background. Kevin Ward, Losing Our Religion? Changing Patterns of Believing and Belonging in Secular Western Societies (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 92.
decided to resource our youth and children’s ministry, believing that parents would come with their families. As it turned out, that was true.

I wondered how the churches that had lost these people were feeling. I recalled the questions I had had ten years earlier and realized they had never gone away. An opportunity emerged to engage with current literature about emerging church models, which eventually led to leaving my then position to start exploring what a new model of church could look like that would engage with people who were not currently in church. That has led to the purpose of this doctoral project: to develop a church plant model that fosters community and discipleship activities that are attractive to de-churched New Zealanders. “De-churched” describes people who are not currently connected to any formal church community, but who had been at some point in their lives. To focus the topic further, this project will explore two key issues discipleship and community, both of which emerged as my studies progressed. Questions were raised in my mind regarding the ability to grow as disciples into Christ-like people, and the hunger for people to do life together in authentic community. The Acts 2 church, which was the vision of my previous church, was attractive in theory, yet illusive in practice.

Two recent personal experiences relating to the ability of Christians to grow as Christ-like disciples and to form authentic community have been significant. The first was soon after we left our previous church and I attended a class with Dallas Willard. He made a statement that arrested me on the inside, sending me on a fresh trajectory in my relationship with God and in my experience in church leadership. He said, “Jesus only
ever invited us to ‘come to me, abide with me, learn from me and follow me.’”2 It was a simple invitation, which did not include any prescription on how to perform as a Christian, or behave as a church. Not long afterwards, while researching the Fresh Expressing movement in the United Kingdom, I read this by Graham Cray: “Church is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other.”3 These two thoughts provide a framework to explore new forms of being church. People are invited to gather around Jesus, encounter him, and as part of that encounter hear his invitation to come, abide, learn, and follow. The question that fuelled development of this project is: “If we started with a ‘clean slate’ to explore a new expression of being church, what could that look like in our Kiwi context?”

Part One describes the community and ministry context. It outlines the decline of the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand and asks questions about church model characteristics that possibly contributed to that decline. Six people are introduced, all of who at some stage in their lives were very actively involved in the leadership of a local church, but are no longer. I describe their faith journeys, their desires for authentic living and community, and invite them to be a part of creating activities that aid their formation as individuals and as a community. A review of New Zealand culture helps identify unique features important to consider that may influence any activities, and help focus the

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context—the suburb of Halswell, in Christchurch is researched as a target demographic for the church plant.

Part Two reflects theologically on the invitations of Jesus, and reviews a number of key ecclesiological texts. These identify further church model concerns that have possibly contributed to church decline, and also aspects of church life that have fostered church health. The historical Celtic monastic tradition is explored to identify potential ecclesiological features that may foster healthy church expressions in New Zealand. Scriptures relating to the theme of encountering Jesus, and encountering each other, along with the invitations of Jesus are studied to examine what that could look like today.

Part Three describes the practice of this project. The strategy was simply this: to include de-churched people in the identification of any activity that could potentially aid formation as disciples and formation together as authentic community. The rationale is that by including de-churched people in the identification and development of activities there will be more ownership, ensuring greater success. A team was formed including de-churched people, who together have reflected theologically on context, the theme of encountering Jesus, and what it means to foster that encounter in ongoing encounters with each other.

The activities identified were practiced together over a period of one year, with constant review and reflection, changing when needed along the way. Afterwards, I interviewed the participants to evaluate how the experiences aided their discipleship and sense of belonging. Some initial hunches were confirmed, some discarded, and some surprises were discovered.
CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

A Churchless Faith

John grew up believing there was a God. As a five-year-old, every Sunday he would go with his family to the cemetery to see the grave of his sister who had died at one month. His parents said she went to heaven and although they did not attend church he fundamentally knew God existed. For a time his grandmother would take him along on Sundays for Sunday school, a regular activity that ended in his pre teens during confirmation classes as they approached making a formal commitment to the church. Later, as a sixteen-year-old he was invited to play in a band on what turned out to be on a Christian mission. While travelling with the band with a friend he “prayed the sinners prayer,”¹ and got involved in a local Pentecostal church. After school he joined the Army and after a small sojourn into the party life, “sorted his life out” and spent the next sixteen years doing his best to live like a Christian, including many church meetings, evangelism and witnessing. Eventually he was part of a church plant for about five years and left after a disagreement with the leader who was a “bit of a workaholic.” The pressure to

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¹ John (pseudonym), personal interview, April 19, 2015.
spend more and more time in church activities at the expense of time with his young family led John to leave, move towns and get a job in the denomination overseeing youth programmes.

He experienced a significantly formational time when he was part of an initiative taking universality students to the Philippines on cultural immersion programmes with Servants for Asia’s Poor, living in squatter communities. John says:

I ended up going five times, and that became one of the single greatest impacts on me. I guess how I started to see the world, particularly my faith and my faith in the world. For example, you’d be in the squatter community, and you’d be in a little tin church thing and you’d pull out a guitar and they’d sing Hillsong, but they couldn’t speak English. Even now talking about it, it pissed me off. It really did. That’s what I considered to be the enculturation of church, or proliferation of church culture and this is what it means to worship.2

John expected the local Filipino Christians to have an authentic faith expression of their own that would be in their own language and reflect their local culture. It started him questioning, thinking and reading a lot about what it means to be Christian, and what it means to be together in community and to be church.

After working at the denomination headquarters John and his wife started a home church with some other ex staff members that went for around eighteen months, where they got together around a meal every fortnight and talked together.

For me it was probably one of the coolest expressions of community and caring for each other we had had for probably, maybe ever. . . . We sort of look back and thought it was all work, work, work for God but for me I think I actually became a very good and effective worker in the church, doing what I thought was God’s work, probably without God. It was easy enough to walk away from, not God, but that whole church expression. It seemed contrived. Like, as a leader we were told we had to sit at the front and had to raise our hands in worship because that’s giving an example to everyone else how you worship. That sort of thing seemed to me contrived, inauthentic and false, and that’s something I don’t think I’ve ever

2 Ibid.
been. I’ve got warts and that, but I’m reasonably authentic. . . . After that I guess the phrase I used, or the adjectives are, disheartened, disillusioned, disgruntled, and departed when it comes to church. 

Interestingly John’s faith never diminished. It made for many conversations with people trying to explain why he was not attending church, but belief in God never wavered; he simply found that he “had an orientation or mindfulness towards God without all the populous common cultural forms of what that has meant, and ironically I felt I could be more myself.”

John has several questions regarding how Christians grow. For example, he asks why someone to lead the process of maturation is needed, starting with a prescribed expectation of what maturity in Christ looks like. He says, “There’s an authority, they dispense their wisdom and other people talk about it, and align themselves to it at a greater or lesser extent, and therefore modify their behavior and go on maturing. And I . . . just think its bullshit. As opposed to being together authentically, having the space to share authentically.” He did not want to be somebody’s “project” and his reflection on the Philippines experience was that the Western Church subjugated their faith, and an expectation of what it meant to be a Christian imposed on to them. A key quote from John was, “I didn’t walk away from God, just the church expression.”

John’s wife, Jane’s childhood involved attending Sunday school occasionally, dropped off by her parents who did not attend church. Then, as a fifteen-year-old, being brokenhearted after a relationship ended and thinking the only person who could help her

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3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
was God, she went and “sat outside the church because I thought that’s where God was.”

She met John (her future husband) who took her to church. Wanting to know more she met weekly for a period of time with her cousin (the only Christian in her wider family) who led her through some discipleship classes.

In time Jane became involved in many different church activities, running a playgroup, leading worship and preached once. Her leaving church happened gradually over a long period as she gave priority to her desire to support her husband. The couple moved towns and she found that having a young family made it more difficult to get involved in a local church. She felt, “If you’re not involved you’re very easily on the outer so it doesn’t kind of feel like you’re family unless you’ve got some involvement in running the place. Otherwise you’re someone who just comes and goes.”

She felt some loss at not being involved in the music and worship, and thought her relationship with God suffered as a result. In the end, around ten years ago, she drifted off and was no longer part of a church. Through this time her faith has not wavered. She said, “Like, I believe what I believe. That hasn’t changed.”

There is no real activity that fosters that; it was simply a knowing that God was there and acknowledging that in things around her.

As Richard grew up, his family moved around a lot, which meant he was part of many different, predominantly Pentecostal, church communities. Typically he got to a stage where going to church was a chore, until his mid teens when he got extensively involved in a Para-church organisation, particularly with music. This music involvement

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6 Jane (pseudonym), personal interview, April 19, 2015.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.
continued as an adult in a central city, Pentecostal church, which also included a time on the leadership team. Looking back he reflected, “My story I would say is a story of being so busy in church to not actually being connected to church.”9 Richard’s wife Annie grew up in a mainline church through Sunday school, and moved to a different mainline church youth group with friends as a teenager. She also got involved in the para-church organisation being involved as a dancer at local events. After they married, they moved cities and settled into a local Pentecostal church.

Their story of leaving the city church they had been part of for approximately fifteen years, serving weekly for long hours, came from a quietly growing sense of not fitting in. They went through a number of significant challenges as a family, and close friends in the church also had a major trauma to deal with, and they felt there was a disconnect between the expectation at church, and time pressure increasing to fulfill family responsibilities. Richard said, “So if I was late to music practice on a Sunday morning or skipped a practice during the week or something like that there was all hell to pay.”10 He felt his friends had been treated poorly as they went through their challenge, as his friend also faced pressure to serve in the church. He did not feel close to God and felt his main connection to God was serving in the church: “I gradually developed a cynical view that there has to be more than just church because I feel really lonely and all we do is get grumped at if we do something wrong after we put all of our heart and soul and extra time into just doing stuff.”11 Annie said, “We began to see the machine that is

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9 Richard (pseudonym), personal interview, November 8, 2015.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
the church,” and as they both admitted, it was a cynical view. She felt the senior pastor would hear about the latest programme and that would lead to the church embracing that, with Annie commenting, “It was all meant to make it bigger, better, brighter wonderful, you know . . . and it didn’t seem to ever change anything.” One Sunday, after struggling to get the children to the service (they did not want to go), she felt a real sense of isolation and disconnection, causing her to wonder what she was doing there.

In the interview, Richard wondered whether, if he had been more connected to God and less to the church, he would be less cynical or would the church have been more life giving. When asked whether leaving church had any impact on their faith, Richard’s answer was surprising: “The truth of that is, I would say when we left, that’s when I probably started being interested in finding out about God. Sounds crazy after all that time in church, but that’s when I would start the clock in actually putting time and effort into lets suss this out a bit.” Annie picked up from there saying, “Whereas I don’t think leaving church had any impact on my faith. I don’t have any expectations of what church had to do for me, or provided for me, I knew it was between me and God and that didn’t change.” One other experience that impacted Richard was that he attended some talks from a local Bible college lecturer who was part of his church movement. There he was introduced to the need for care when interpreting Scripture to ensure the context was taken into account, and the concept of the big story of God, which helped him realise his

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12 Annie (pseudonym), personal interview, November 8, 2015.
13 Ibid.
14 Richard, personal interview.
15 Annie, personal interview.
understanding of the biblical world had been somewhat narrow. This was quite a wake-up call as he was attracted to a discipline that from his perspective had “more intellectual integrity.” He felt this brought a sense of freedom in his faith, and while he did not say so, I suspect it contributed to his journey of eventually leaving the church he had been part of for so long.

Andrew was brought up in the Catholic Church as his father was Catholic and they attended Sunday worship regularly. His mother was a Presbyterian, although he was not aware of her connecting with any local church and there was no expression of faith at home. Church attendance was quite boring to him with lots of ritual, and lacked any sense of connection or relevance with everyday life. His wife Rebecca grew up in a Christian family, who attended church every week. Both her parents had faith, particularly her dad, who she describes as passionate and zealous in his faith expression; so home life included prayer, faith conversations and giving. She had a high level of trust towards her father, which, she observed easily translated to trust in God. For both, their teenage years were significant for their faith. Andrew met a priest who helped introduce him to a personal charismatic expression of faith, and Rebecca was part of an active youth group, also experiencing Holy Spirit encounters. Their faith has significantly guided both of their lives, with Andrew intentionally pursuing a close relationship with God, devout in spiritual disciplines, and joining various intentional Christian communities through his life. Rebecca’s journey led her to study agriculture with a view to serving in global mission, leading her to spend time in Ethiopia working as part of a

16 Richard, personal interview.
mission organisation. From these and many other experiences they were left with questions about their faith, church and God. Andrew said,

My relationship with church has always been a difficult relationship; I still struggle with church. . . . I don’t have any problem with God – I feel completely at peace with God, I just find the culture of church quite difficult. Its almost I don’t fit there and I don’t fit in the world. . . I guess I see it [Christianity] as fullness of relationship. And I just haven’t experienced that. I guess part of it is that we live in a society that is so broken and so disconnected. We are disconnected from ourselves, we are disconnected from our community, and environment, more than we have ever been in the past. . . I do believe that Jesus didn’t come to solve all of the problems of the world, he came to create an alternative sub culture as a reference for the world so in my view that’s what we should be doing . . . [for example] right relationship with the environment which I think the church is so lagging behind in that area, and I do think its part of the journey towards holiness and the Gospel is entwined in that. I think its how we do housing, how we do food, it should be a total experience, and I think we just get all caught up in rules and regulations, these sort of things.”

When asked about the rules and regulations, both felt in their experience there were certain expectations to live out that were not connected to the Gospel, with examples being what clothes to wear and hair length. Rebecca observed, “You have to be at the Sunday service to connect with your Christian community. Even if the Sunday service is like a play and its not actually connecting with your life in any real way, you still have to be there.”

When asked further about that, both felt the Sunday worship service was like a play, one they were invited to attend and watch others go through certain activities and behaviours, and there was a disconnect between that and everyday life. Andrew felt, “So much of our culture is entwined in church culture and you have to try to de-twine it to get to the essence of what it [church] is about. I think I feel we have not done because it’s

17 Andrew (pseudonym), personal interview, August 30, 2016.

18 Rebecca (pseudonym), personal interview, August 30, 2016.
just got to be an experience.” He questioned what it was we were trying to achieve on a Sunday, and asked what experience should people have in that type of gathering. It is not just the Sunday service the couple has questions about. Both are very interested in the environment and living in a sustainable way. Rebecca says, “I just don’t know why Christians aren’t talking about bigger issues of how the Western world lives. To me there is so much inequality and people are not aware they are not thinking about the rest of the world when they do that, and that it affects the environment.” Andrew adds,

I personally find the church unchallenging. Its just like, its just feels like it’s in a nice phase, a nice place and its not really confronting the real issues and so, and that’s nice if you kind of want to have a nice club but for people that really want to grapple with making the world a better world, its just not challenging and – it’s not a complaint, its just like a little bit of frustration like where do you go [for that]? I’m finding New Age people are really grappling with some of these issues so I find a lot more resonating with them than I do in the Christian community.

These stories and experiences are consistent with Alan Jamieson’s research of church leavers in New Zealand twenty years ago. The stories of people who had left churches, often from positions of leadership and significant involvement, showed that people did not leave because of leadership struggles, rejection of faith, personal difficulties or because church was simply crowded out by other life activities. The stories he recounted included people struggling to be themselves, not having the opportunity to grapple with their questions and pressure to accept pat answers, having the

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19 Andrew, personal interview.
20 Rebecca, personal interview.
21 Andrew, personal interview.
23 Ibid., 3.
sense of not being heard, lacking a sense of belonging if they were not part of running an activity, and the lack of connection between church and work and general life experience. People felt isolated as their sense of belonging decreased.24

**The Decline of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand**

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) has declined significantly since numbers peaked in the early-1960s. In 1960 overall church attendance in New Zealand was approximately 20 percent of the population, and by 2000 it had fallen to about 10 percent.25 In 1960, 119,041 adults, 76,030 children, and 20,507 young people attended worship, Sunday school or Bible class in the PCANZ. 26 By 2005, weekly attendance had dropped to 34,000 a decline reflected in all aspects of church life such as membership, Sunday school and youth numbers.27 Added to this, the age profile in most mainline churches is older as younger groups are now “missing in significant numbers.”28 The Church Property Trustees of the PCANZ have more recent figures as shown in the following graph. It shows worship numbers declining, and average parish sizes declining as the number of parishes remained relatively static, placing pressure on less people to maintain the institution.

24 Ibid., 4, 29.


In 1980, there were 11,407 youth recorded as being a part of the Presbyterian Church. Thirty-four years later, while the same age cohort is not specifically recorded, there were 5,366 people listed as members between the ages of 26 and 45. While it is a rather crude way of comparing statistics, anecdotally even a generous treatment of the numbers would suggest that around 10 to 15 percent of the youth in the early-1980s were still listed as attending worship in the PCANZ in 2014.

Kevin Ward has done the most recent comprehensive research into the decline of the mainline church in New Zealand, finding:

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That the most significant factor accounting for decline was the impact on church life of the cultural and social changes that have occurred since the 1960’s, rather than as a result of loss of religious believing itself by individuals. When it comes to the resilience of particular churches, it argues that those which have retained a strong commitment to the historic orthodox beliefs of the Christian faith and also adapted their life and message to relate to this rapidly changing context have been more likely to thrive.³¹

People had not stopped believing; the world had simply changed and the Church had not adapted with it in terms of expression. A move away from historical orthodox theology has also contributed to this decline. Ward discovered there were two recurring themes in the data that contributed to decline: the move from public to private faith, and from commitment to consumption.³² He believes the most significant impact on church life is not that people are becoming irreligious, but are moving to a more individualised expression of faith, with the focus for people becoming on what will meet their own personal interests and needs. He observes, in another book discussing his research, that it may have been easier for more independent churches such as Baptists and Pentecostals to adapt to new forms than churches that were “much more nationally controlled, such as the Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and the Salvation Army.”³³ There was something in the way denominations worked that inhibited individual congregations from adapting with their context, and those that did not adapt tended to decline.

³¹ Ward, *The Church in Post-sixties New Zealand*, 2. He describes Orthodox Christian belief as consisting of the uniqueness of Christ “both as a being and in mediating salvation, the authority of Scripture, belief in a personal God who acts, and the need for conversion in the sense of life change.”
³³ Ibid., 38, 39.
Churches were losing touch with people. Ward quotes Wade Clark Roof:

A decade ago these questions were raised by boomers who felt at odds with a religious culture of the churches: today the same concerns are most likely raised by those younger, the Generation Xers. In either instance, it is less a protest of religion in the deeper sense than a response to institutional styles that are unfamiliar or seemingly at odds with life experiences as these people know them.\(^{34}\)

He argues that the forms of church life that exist today have been shaped in Christendom for 1,800 years, a period in which Western culture and society was fashioned by a Christian understanding. Christendom is no longer shaping the values and morals of society, and meanwhile the Church

Has continued to maintain forms, values, language, and rituals that were shaped by that framework. These are intensely meaningful and helpful to those brought up within the church (or Christendom culture), and it is their concerns that largely shape what churches do. However they are meaningless (when they can actually be understood) and irrelevant to the vast majority of those brought up in post-sixties Western culture. Hence the diminishing involvement in churches, as have been seen, amongst baby boomers and, even more so, amongst the generations that have followed them.\(^{35}\)

A case in point is Sunday worship. First, simply being on a Sunday when society no longer has the same attitude towards that day with many working or pursuing leisure activities. Another issue is the worship service—corporate singing and listening to a “20 or 30 minute monologue, with no opportunity to interact. Where else in our society do we attempt to create a sense of belonging to community in that way?”\(^{36}\)

He felt that in recent times, even the churches he studied who had flourished since the 1960s were losing touch with changing New Zealand culture as leaders aged and

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 103.
moved towards importing models and programmes of overseas churches. Younger New Zealanders were less able to identify with these models citing an aversion to having their lives too regimented or dictated to by leadership. A discomfort of American qualities of “ostentation and slickness . . . significant numbers of New Zealanders have again felt alienated from their churches and drifted off to pursue faith outside of the church.”

A further issue is the Christendom distinction between clergy and laity. While there have been various expressions since the Reformation, everyone still knows who “calls the shots” and “who gets the money.” The clergy (or senior pastor) remain central to the life of the church, and Gen-Xers have an inherent deep sense of anti-institutionalism. (Ward suggests that it is deeper than for the Baby Boomers before them.) They have rejected different forms of institutions created by the Baby Boomers.

A postmodern culture of “do your own thing” and “follow your own dreams” clashes with any hint of institutionalism and control. As a consequence of church growth and management approaches, there has been a sense of the Church demanding more time and energy from busy people to run programmes or volunteer for projects and:

It seems that so often today a pre-occupation is with the church as an institution instead of living out the Gospel. We become focused on keeping the institution going, on making it bigger and better, on what is happening at church inside the institution. It becomes idolatrous, and in the end idol takes from life rather than gives life. Research on the church leavers indicates that this has been the experience of many, and those looking in from the outside say “I don’t want to have any part of that.”

37 Ibid., 83.
38 Ibid., 197.
39 Ibid., 104.
40 Ibid., 106.
These issues speak directly to the heart of this project. It seems vital to ensure any attempt to form community is not dominated by leadership or central control. The community must have a culture of serving people on their faith and discipleship journey, (rather than ask them to serve the activity of the church) helping them live their lives as Christ intended. The increased focus on *Missio Dei*, the mission of God, in recent decades has more opportunity for buy-in from Gen-X Christians that I have met. They do not want to give their time to running church programmes, but are attracted to the thought of participating in God’s mission. Their church experience has made it difficult to distinguish between the two; therefore help is required for them to discover God’s invitation to join him in mission. Wade Roof claims that Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers have not protested against faith in a deep sense, but simply institutional religious styles. He suggests that three key parameters a church should consider are open discussion, shared experiences, and attention to spiritual development.\(^{41}\) To connect with this generation, these parameters are a good place to begin.

**The New Zealand Context**

New Zealanders’ values and attitudes towards religion are changing.\(^{42}\) Recent studies show that the most important values include: tolerance and respect (83.1 percent rated as very important), followed by responsibility (56.1 percent), independence (53.5 percent), and hard work (50.2 percent). Religious faith came in the lowest at 15.9 percent. The importance of doing something for the good of society and looking after the

\(^{41}\) Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 189.

environment were both the highest ranking in terms of personal priorities as 95 percent of people rated this as “very much,” or a “little like” me.

People who said they were religious was reported as 42 percent and 18 percent said religion was important in their life. Interestingly 42 percent were religious and yet only 15.9 percent felt it important to encourage children to learn about it, showing a very independent attitude towards religion. Fifty-eight percent of people believed in God, with 22 percent saying they did not believe, with a number not sure. Twenty-four percent said God is very important in their lives; 71 percent of people believed in a life force/spirit; and 37 percent of people said they prayed several times each week or more.

The focus of this project is Halswell, a residential suburb of Christchurch, the largest city on the South Island (population 341,000). This area was chosen to help understand the ministry context, as it is a good representation of the relevant people group, and the location of some of our church activities. Halswell has a population of around 17,000 and is one of the fastest growing regions in the city with a significant level of new housing. In 2011 and 2012 the city experienced significant earthquakes with widespread commercial and residential damage, leading to acceleration of housing development in this area. It is expected that the population of the area will more than double by 2030 to around 45,000 people.

The census area unit of Halswell Domain was chosen to further study demographics as it is where some of the church activities are located. With a population

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of 1,580, Halswell Domain is a quickly growing (an increase of 24.3 percent since 2006), predominantly European community with a higher number of children and lower number of older people than the city average. There are more than average two-parent families in the census area with a relatively low number of one-parent families, low unemployment, and a higher level of education. Economically it has a much higher level of income and level of home ownership, and other economic factors such as access to private motor vehicles and the Internet, than the rest of the city. In summary Halswell Domain is predominantly made up of White, two-parent, middle-to-higher class families.

This residential growth is putting more strain on social infrastructure, with the City Council reporting the key issues facing the region: “Halswell residents risk being isolated, with a lack of social connectedness.”\(^{45}\) There also is no high school in the area, which “This has resulted in the youth lacking cohesion and a sense of identity. . . . Without local youth services and facilities, other than sport, youth will become bored, and fail to feel they belong to their community.”\(^{46}\)

Families in the Halswell community are like everywhere else. They hope for a safe, caring community for their children, and an environment for them to flourish to be all that they can be. They hunger for connection with others and healthy relationships. There is evidence of financial hardship: even though people may own higher value houses, the income needed to service their mortgage means they can hardly afford to live in them.\(^{47}\)

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\(^{45}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{47}\) Strengthening Communities Adviser, Christchurch City Council, November 16, 2015.
Summary

Many factors need to be considered when identifying activities for de-churched people that will foster growth as individuals and in community. The negative experiences of de-churched friends suggest that it will be unhelpful if there is pressure to spend time on church activities to the detriment of family wellbeing. It is important to foster a sense of belonging for those not involved in “running” the church. They want a faith expression that is real, that fosters authentic relationships, does not leave members with the feeling of being subjugated by other’s expectations, and that does not damage positive aspects of indigenous culture. They hunger for a place to be authentic, within themselves and with each other. They want a place to belong, and to serve each other in ways that enhance their lives. They desire a contemplative space in which to participate in worship (and not be a spectator), that is not contrived but flows naturally out of authentic relationships and for that space to be a place where there is freedom to question and doubt.

New Zealand cultural characteristics that are important to embrace in any activity include tolerance and respect of others, and the activity being relevant to the individual, allowing for personal application, and not be bound by prescriptive expectations from those in authority. The need for connection with others is recognised, while an egalitarian and inclusive environment that is adaptable and informal is attractive to many New Zealanders. To restate this in a negative way, people have left church when it is clergy-centred, intolerant, insistent on certain behaviour resulting in a clear demarcation of who is “in” the community and who is “out,” and formal or rigid expressions and structures.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the quest to develop a church-plant model that fosters community and discipleship activities that are attractive to de-churched New Zealanders, a number of books were reviewed. Each resource was reviewed. Key contributions to this project, or limitations of the resource were identified.

*Models of the Church by Avery Dulles*

Catholic theologian Avery Dulles compares and contrasts various models expressed in different church traditions as members live out their faith. While he acknowledges models fall short of reality, and that church is one of the mysteries of God, he believes identifying these models provides a helpful framework by which to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each. The five models he suggests are: Institution, the Church is known in terms of its visible structures; Mystical Communion, the Church consists of people of faith who are united by their common participation in God’s Spirit through Christ; Sacrament, a sign and transmitter of God’s grace in the world, the favorable presence of God; Herald, the Church primarily exists for proclamation; and Servant, serving all humanity as Christ modelled.
He advocates for an ecclesiology where the qualities of each model are blended together with any one taking a priority role depending on the context one is in. The exception to this is the Institutional model, which he does not think should be prominent at all, but secondary to the others to aid organisation, because the “institutional model, by itself, tends to become rigid, doctrinaire and conformist . . . the structures of the church must be seen as subordinate to its communal life and mission.”¹ He believes the communal model has priority over the Institutional model as “large institutions are accepted as at best a necessary evil. They are felt to be oppressive and depersonalizing. People find the meaning of their lives not in terms of such institutions but in terms of the informal, the personal and the communal.”²

From his analysis of the various church models, Dulles also looks at the leadership models that serve them.³ For the Institutional church, authority is patterned after the secular state (in our context, the CEO). Authority for the community model is the pastor; sacramental, the priest; herald, the preacher; and servant, the servant leader. He advocates integration for a holistic approach to leadership pointing out that not one person is able to fulfill all five:

The fullness of the priestly office, which very few individuals adequately encompass, would include the building of Christian community, presiding at worship, the proclamation of the word of God and activity for the transformation of secular society in the light of the Gospel. These functions do not exclude one another, but they stand in some mutual tension, so that a given priest will not be equally involved in all four.⁴

² Ibid., 55.
³ Ibid., Chapter 10.
⁴ Ibid., 165.
Ministers in the PCANZ spend much time and energy in managing institutional expectations as well as the other four Dulles identifies, strengthening his point that one person cannot cover all the roles.

This work provides an effective framework for the conversation of what the priority of the Kiwi Church will be. Mark Johnston, in a published lecture at the PCANZ ministry training centre, observed that Presbyterian churches historically gravitate around the models of the Church as “Herald” or the “Servant.” He writes, “In both instances it is difficult for the church’s image of itself not to be reduced to that of a functional instrument. What the church considers it needs to do on behalf of God (or perversely itself) become the starting point of both its identity and ministry.”

To take Dulles’ lead in allowing context to determine which model takes priority, the cultural complaint of fractured lives and isolation, plus the desire of the de-churched people canvassed to re-establish their vertical connection with God, the natural choice seems to be the church as “Mystical Communion.” The strengths that Dulles identifies of churches from this model are the identity that comes from being part of the Body of Christ, the priority on personal relationship collectively and individually with God, which helps revivify spirituality, and meeting the human need for community. These are attractive to de-churched friends. He warns that a focus on this model “fails to give

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6 Dulles, Models of the Church, 54, 55.
Christians a clear sense of identity or mission”⁷ therefore it will be important to be intentional about blending other models in any church models identified.

Church for Every Context by Michael Moynagh

Michael Moynagh provides a historical, theological, and practical survey of new forms of church emerging all over the world, including church planting, emerging churches, Fresh Expressions (UK), new monasticism, and other communities in mission that do not naturally fit in any of those categories. He calls these new types of church “new contextual churches.” Moynagh suggests they are missional (in the sense that, through the Spirit, they are birthed by Christians mainly among people who do not normally attend church), contextual (they seek to fit the culture of the people they serve), formational (they aim to form disciples) and ecclesial (they intend to become church for the people they reach in the contexts).⁸

There is a significant volume of material in this work as he argues that these new churches are well grounded in Scripture, particularly through the experiences and writings of Paul. Also, they have a rich history in various communities such as the Antioch and Celtic communities, and communities formed by Benedictine, Beguine, Ferrar, and Wesley. He analyses sociological changes such as the decline of the Western Church and the significant societal changes particular to ethics and attitudes toward authority and sources of knowledge. It is interesting to note that the World Council of Churches in 1968 called for:

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⁷ Ibid., 56.

New “functional groups” in different “spheres of work and living.” These “new congregations” should be seen as “the Church carrying out the original intention of the ‘parish church’” alongside it. They should be authentic communities “in which Christians and non Christians alike can face questions which play a determining role in the lives. These new congregations would seek to discern God’s activity within their contexts and would enable Christians to participate in mission “not as an occasional activity but as their very raison d’être.”

With a few examples of new contextual churches aside, overall the Western Church has not taken this plea very seriously in the last fifty years, certainly not in the New Zealand context. Moynagh’s conclusion is that “With the fragmentation of life, the church has failed to accompany people into the numerous settings where they now live.”

Having given good historical evidence and societal need for new forms of church, Moynagh turns his attention to a theological rationale of these types of churches. He explores ecclesiological purpose, essence, and questions of mission priority over worship and the rationale for a church of many shapes. The remainder of the book is for the practitioner, providing a guide for bringing contextual churches to birth, and helping them grow towards maturity.

Moynagh critiques the Church of England Mission-Shaped Church denominational document, a text also included in this literature review, with a focus on the activity framework of UP (relationships through participating in the life of the Trinity), IN (relationships through fellowship within the gathering), OUT (relationships in love for, and service to the world) and OF (relationships, as part of the whole body, through connections with the wider church). While the report was describing

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9 Ibid., 80.
10 Ibid., 95.
11 Ibid., 107.
relationships, he argues it “didn’t quite get there” in terms of a four-relationship understanding of church, and is worth quoting at length. He writes:

The four relationships approach differs from views that emphasise certain practices as essential to church. Usually the tradition has sought to describe the practices that must be present if any Christian gathering is to be truly church, such as the ministries of the word and sacrament and the existence of bishops, priests and deacons. The historic four marks of the church – One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic – are typically defined in terms of practices. . . . Yet just as defining marriage in terms of a legal document and having sex would fail to capture the fullness of the relationship involved, so conceiving the essence of church as certain practices omits too much of what it means to be church. Rather than practices, concentrating on the four sets of ecclesial relationships that practices embody provides a richer account of the churches fundamental nature.\(^\text{13}\)

It does not mean the activities are not important: “So attention must be paid to practices that promote the health of the relationships that constitute the church. If relationships are the essence of the church, practices are for the good of the church.”\(^\text{14}\) This is extremely helpful for this church plant to guide daily life together as it provides the opportunity to ask if activities foster healthy relationships in the four areas described. This provides opportunity for a vast array of activities that could fit into these categories as part of being an authentic expression of church.

New Zealand is a multicultural country and a common aspiration among churches is to have multicultural churches. Moynagh gives a case for the legitimacy of specific culture churches. The “early church described how the early churches combined home-based homogeneous gatherings, called church, with larger, probably town-wide

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 108.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 109.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
assemblies (also called church), which drew these gatherings together."\textsuperscript{15} He describes the potential of a “focused and connected church” where communities (church in their own right) connect regularly for other activities and homogeneity and heterogeneity can be held together. He points out that people will be friends when they share something in common, or a need brings them together (for example, immigrants), and people can identify with more than one group at once. Moynagh’s idea here allows for the church to be, both church in their own right, and connecting together in ways that enhance each communities’ wellbeing. This is a simple, yet important acknowledgement in the life of this church, protecting it from the temptation to join everyone together and risk losing the uniqueness of each community that the members love. Ashe summarizes, “In short, focused-and-connected church reflects two human instincts. People naturally gravitate to affinity groups, but they also want to belong to a bigger whole.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{The McDonaldization of the Church by John Drane}

John Drane explores George Ritzer’s social analysis of rationalised systems that dominate our culture now, referring to it as “McDonaldization.”\textsuperscript{17} Ritzer identifies four key characteristics of the McDonaldization process: efficiency, calculability – size and quality with an implication of the bigger the better, predictability, and control. He then explores how they have become the way of life of a significant portion of the world. Drane uses this to examine Western Church culture and activities.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 172.

\textsuperscript{17} John Drane, \textit{The McDonaldization of the Church: Spirituality, Creativity and the Future of the Church} (Atlanta: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 32.
A consequence of this evolvement of Western culture is that “daily life is no longer carried out in a relational context;”\(^{18}\) lives are fractured and broken, and evolving culture has “created personal dysfunction on the grand scale.”\(^{19}\) He asks if people have lost interest in church because of pre-packaged spirituality that does not connect with their “desire for personal growth and meaningful spirituality, neither of which can be quantified nor reduced to neat formulations.”\(^{20}\) He focuses on a group of people he names “spiritual seekers,” those motivated by a desire for self-fulfillment noting that “our ability – or inability – to reach them will probably hold the key to whatever future there might be for the Church in the West.”\(^{21}\) These people are not interested in a “one size fits all” spirituality, which accurately reflects the de-churched people interviewed in this project.

Drane’s work significantly contributes to this project by providing principles to consider when imagining activities that will foster formation and healthy relationships. He points out that commitment to calculability does not give time to “explore God or to make meaningful connection with other Christians, let alone reach out to others who are searching for the meaning of life.”\(^{22}\) He writes, “Counting people should not be made a substitute for taking the risk to focus on discipleship, renewal and maturity. A more discerning question will not be, “how many of us are there?” but “how much like Christ

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 14.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 26.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 37.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 48.
have we become?”23 This reinforces the desire to have formation as priority. The Church lives in the tension between not wanting to bow to efficiency, and also not wanting to waste peoples’ time and value to quality over quantity. The desire is to waste time together in a meaningful way. People may like to know what happens next, but what if the Church believed in “ways that are open to authentic (and potentially unique) experience of the Spirit.”24 In other words, the Church wants an environment where everyone’s experiences and encounters with Jesus can be different: “Christian faith is supposed to be about the other, and by definition therefore ought not to be predictable.”25 Imagine if small groups were trusted and encouraged to develop as fully functioning churches within themselves and not controlled and managed.26

This project originally included the proposal to “measure” a person’s spiritual growth to establish how effective current church models are in growing disciples. Most tools available, however, carried a predictable expectation of what growth means and how to measure it (for example, “how often do you read Scripture?” or “how much more likely are you to share your faith now?”) After engagement with Drane’s material the questions are now more open and individually posed. For example “Do you sense any growth in you?” This leaves identification and growth measurement up to the individual.

The discussion around the creation and nurturing of the “space” that people gather together in is extremely helpful. Drane writes, “Space will be the key factor in any

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23 Ibid., 47.
24 Ibid., 49.
25 Ibid., 51.
26 Ibid., 53.
rethinking of effective mission in today’s world, and we need to learn to be far more intentional than we have sometimes been about the kind of space in which we gather.”

When the church gathers, how are they positioned, from where is the person leading the conversation (for example from above the people or among). This affirms the approach taken in this project. Rather than coming up with activities and asking people to participate, maybe creating space for people to be in, and trying to have no expectations of what might, or might not happen would be more effective. This highlights the possibility that church has become too complicated. He writes, “After all, Jesus’ charisma derived not from trivialities of that sort, but from the simplicity and clarity of his message. He just told the truth, was not embarrassed to speak about God in simple language that even a child could understand, and welcomed to his side anyone with even the vaguest interest in what he was on about.”

The leader as a midwife is extremely attractive. A midwife teacher, or midwife evangelist, is not prescriptive but protects the environment and focuses on the health and wellbeing of the baby, to “help individuals to deliver his or her own spirituality into the world.” This metaphor provides a compelling model to follow in the journey of this project, and of the Church.

*A Churchless Faith by Alan Jamieson*

In his doctoral research of people who left Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches (EPC) Alan Jamieson was surprised to find that people who had

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27 Ibid. 105.

28 Ibid., 188.

29 Ibid., 205.
left the Church were not moving away from Christian faith as most leaders assumed, but continued to have a vibrant, growing, and in a majority of cases, more mature and integrated faith. They did not fit the usual assumptions of why people leave church such as leadership struggles, rejection of faith, conflict and hurt, or simply too busy or distracted by other life pursuits. In his interviews with over one hundred people he found a majority wanted to live their lives with Jesus at the centre, and to try and follow him. They reached a point where the churches they were, all a significant part of, for many years, no longer supported their faith journey and in some cases inhibited it.

He found the people he interviewed fell predominantly into four groups: “Disillusioned followers” are leavers who are angry and hurt, and account for 18 percent of the total group. “Reflective exiles” (30 percent) can be distinguished through their questioning of the basic beliefs of the faith received from their church, and hesitantly holding unresolved questions. “Transitional explorers” (18 percent) are in a phase of rebuilding faith for themselves, comfortably discarding some aspects of their faith and discovering new understandings. “Integrated way-finders” (27 percent) have completed their faith reconstruction and demonstrate an integrated and strong faith, engaging in critical examination of Scripture. Jamieson found that some people progress through the various stages towards an integrated faith, and some remain where they are.

Having identified the four predominant groups, he explores James Fowler’s stages of faith.30 Fowler believes that faith is a journey of maturing, and there are common

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aspects of seven stages of the journey that can be identified.\textsuperscript{31} Jamieson lines these stages alongside his four groups of church leavers, and draws some interesting conclusions. He observes, “In EPC churches the teaching, worshipping patterns, styles of governance and esteemed role models are predominantly pitched at Fowler’s third stage of faith development,”\textsuperscript{32} which is the Loyalist, a tribal stage of faith where the individual goes along with others without a deep self-critique of belief. When members wanted to grow deeper in faith they found the life of the church actually “discourages people from exploring the faith stages that their own internal desire and external context are fostering.”\textsuperscript{33} The sense of the life of the church inhibiting faith maturation is a painful discovery for leaders of EPC churches.

Most leavers found themselves in post-church groups, and Jamieson observes that those groups fall into two sets: marginal (they tend to focus on what they left); and liminal (a focus on the future).\textsuperscript{34} While marginal groups tend to be unhelpful clubs simply rehashing old feelings, liminal groups can be prophetic in their nature and discover a new way of being, with important discoveries for the church in how to engage with postmodern culture. For example, they give priority to questions that lead them to be slow to give answers to those questions, they are structured differently with a high value on relationships, they are open to people who think differently, and have a broad eclectic

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., Chapter 8.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 158.
approach to liturgy and worship. These are key characteristics to foster for a church looking to engage with the postmodern Kiwi culture.

There are two significant contributions Jamieson makes to this project: describing the hurts and hopes of the de-churched New Zealander, and providing a familiar analogy to help engage with them. The material\textsuperscript{35} confirms my experience, that people who have left church want a safe place to encounter God and grow in relationship with him and others; to be free to express emotions, question and doubt; to have freedom to participate in the faith community; and to serve the wider community in ways that fit who they are and energise them without a sense of obligation. The opportunity for this type of dialogue is critical for most postmodern people; the inability of many currently established churches to create this type of environment has contributed to people leaving. One wonders if it has also been a barrier to some people coming.

Jamieson introduces a helpful metaphor for the journey he found people on which helps in understanding that journey. He likened the journey to dismantling a wooden frame house, examining what materials are useful to use again (the Reflective Exile phase), sourcing new materials and the rebuilding of a new house (Transitional Explorers), and moving into the new “faith” home (Integrated Wayfinders).\textsuperscript{36} While not mentioned, the Disillusioned Followers seem to feel stuck in the original house, dependent on it for shelter, but unable to face the dismantling process. This metaphor is helpful to the cause of developing a church-plant model for de-churched New Zealanders. Placing this alongside Fowler’s stages of faith gives further insight into the complexities

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., Chapter 10, Leaving Sensitive Churches.

\textsuperscript{36} Jamieson, \textit{A Churchless Faith}, 94.
and subtle differences between local de-churched people. Not all church leavers can be regarded the same. The question of where are each is in her dismantling and rebuilding of a “faith house” could be a useful image to connect with her story. This language is beneficial, and as Jamieson regularly points out, this is not a linear or straightforward journey. The terminology of disillusioned followers, reflective exiles and the like requires explanation to be helpful whereas the beauty of the building analogy allows for simplicity, and therefore use of simple words like “stuck,” “dismantling,” “building,” and “settled” in engagement with de-churched people.

One limitation of this resource in relation to this project is it is light on ecclesiology and much of the material is experiential of church leavers, and to a point, EPC leaders. Opinions have been formed, and people live out their faith with no evidence of critical theological reflection of the essence of church. Much has been learned about the practice of church, which reflects the sociological focus of this research, rather than a theological one. It is important when taking the contributions of this work to the church-plant project that they are lined up beside scriptural and historical understandings of the essence of church.

*Mission Shaped Church by the Church of England General Synod*

This work is a report prepared by a working group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council. It was prepared initially for the denomination, but has spread much wider. It comprises of two main themes: “That the church is the fruit of
God’s mission, and that as such it exists to serve and to participate in the ongoing mission of God.”

The report surveys the current cultural context of England, outlines the history of church planting in the Church of England, describes and analyses the Fresh Expressions of churches that have emerged in recent years, offers a theological ecclesiological framework (with a missiological focus), methodology for church planting, and practical recommendations for the future. This work makes two key contributions for this project. It provides a framework for the health of a church, and prescribes a three-way conversation between Scripture, the Church, and culture.

The Synod takes the four classic marks of the Church, enshrined in the Nicene Creed as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic,” identifying the true nature and calling of the Church. To try and make these marks more accessible and to help with the task of validating and fostering healthy growth of the faith community, they reframe the four marks as being “like four dimensions of a journey, none of which exists without reference to the others:” UP, IN, OUT, and OF. UP reflects the journey towards God, providing an expression of the church seeking to be Holy. They write, “Without the transformation that should gradually result [from the journey towards God in worship], we are only playing liturgical games or having charismatic caresses.”

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37 Church of England, Mission Shaped Church, xi.
38 Ibid., 96.
39 Ibid., 98.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 99.
IN is a dimension of relationships between members of the church participating in the relationships of the Trinity and discovering what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. It demonstrates the Church seeking to express unity in love. The Church is sent OUT as part of its apostolic call, and participation in the activity of a missionary God. Individuals are part OF the wider Catholic Church, interdependent both historically and globally. This framework brings clarity and a simple way of identifying activities that contribute to the health and wellbeing (or lack of) of a church community.

The report proposes a three-way conversation between the historic Gospel in Scripture, the Church, and the culture in which the Gospel is being shared.\(^{42}\) For it to be valid, and fruitful, all three parties must contribute. While this report is particularly interested in the non-churched, it is relevant to this project providing the framework to explore church models with the de-churched.

People learn what the Gospel looks like from Scripture, their own journey, and from people in their culture. People learn how to be, and do church from others they want to reach. Vincent Donovan is quoted with a beautiful phrase, “Do not try to call them back to where they are, and do not try to call them to where you are, beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have been before.”\(^{43}\)

Related to this is the concept of double listening (listening to contemporary culture and church tradition):\(^{44}\) “Double listening is a process that enables something to

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 91.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 104.
evolve as its context changes. It seeks to hold in tension both a creative engagement with context and a faithfulness to the good news in Jesus."45 This reinforces the goal of this project to form activities as a community with the de-church, a ground-up approach rather than imposing activities on them from the outside. The framework for ascertaining the health of a church (UP, OUT, IN, OF) has been very helpful for this project, providing a simple guide for a conversation about whether the community can be regarded as authentic church. However, as Moynagh has observed (as described earlier in this chapter), the framework does not go far enough in prioritising the relational aspect of the activities.

This is a very Anglican book, which is understandable given it was a study written for the denomination. The result however makes it challenging for the reader to sift through some of the structural specific issues that the denomination faces to find the underlying principles that can be contextualised. Some of the language was out of reach, and the topics seemed to follow an ad hoc nature rather than building in a coherent flow, again highlighting the fact that it is a denomination-specific report as opposed to a resource written for generic church leaders.

Chapter five, “Theology for a Missionary Church,” states that any fresh expression of church in the Church of England needs to be “undergirded by an adequate ecclesiology.”46 The chapter then focuses predominantly on missiology, and risks a new church focusing entirely on mission. For example it states of the Trinity, “First, God has to be understood relationally and communally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who mutually

45 Ibid., 105.
46 Ibid., 84.
indwell one another, exist in one another, and for one another, in interdependent giving and receiving.” 47 While this is true and vital, the text then moves onto God as a sending God, with no further development of the essence of church being part of a commune God. The four arrows described (UP, IN, OUT, OF) above go some way to ensuring a local church is a more holistic expression; however, one could be forgiven for sensing that in this case the church is only about sending. Both-and is required, and the thesis of this project is that the priority for a church plant must begin with the community, that has sending as part of its DNA.

The Forgotten Ways by Alan Hirsch

Alan Hirsch examines the early years of the Church and the underground church in China in the twentieth century. He identifies an inherent set of elements within the Church that saw it flourish in those contexts that he calls the “Apostolic Genius.” Apostolic Genius is “the built-in life force and guiding mechanism of God’s people,” 48 which he argues all people and churches have, and when accessed, allows them to participate in God’s mission effectively. He sets out to interpret this concept in the Western Church context.

He describes his own story of learning and formation in a missional church context, while the rest of this work describes six elements that make up the Apostolic Genius, which he labels mDNA (missional DNA): 49 the confession that Jesus is Lord

47 Ibid., 84, 85.


49 Ibid., 24.
over every aspect of life and placed at the centre of the community; disciple making, with
the key goal of members to become like Christ; a missional incarnational impulse of
being like seed, embedded into different cultures and contexts; fostering an apostolic
environment requiring the type of leadership required for the latent mDNA to emerge;
organic systems that spread like viruses rather than form institutional structures; and
seeking “communitas,” not community. Hirsch’s theory is that:

When all six elements are in place and mutually informing one another, infused
by its spiritual instincts and center, and empowered by the Spirit, something
fundamentally different is activated. It is at that point where, given the right
conditions, metabolic growth and impact are catalyzed. A movement operating
with Apostolic Genius is in my theory a distinctly higher and more authentic form
of ecclesia than that which might have existed before. . . . So what DNA does for
biological systems, mDNA does for ecclesial ones.50

There are many contributions for the current church-planting journey and this project,
particularly as he is writing out of an Australian context where the Church faces very
similar challenges and issues of decline as in New Zealand.51 The two most significant
contributions he makes for this project are the mDNA elements of the confession that
Jesus is Lord and disciple making.

Hirsch argues that an underground church must “travel light” with a simple
understanding of ecclesia, and a simple Christology.52 Stemming from the “Shema
Yisrael” (Hear O Israel, there is only one God, Dt 6:4) the confession that “Jesus is Lord
over all” in a context of polytheism was supremely provocative and calls for a removal of

50 Ibid., 76.
51 Ibid., 37.
52 Ibid., 85.
all other gods. In today’s context, Hirsch argues for the over-throw of gods like romantic love, consumerism, and self-help religion. In the early church, the underground Chinese church, and in the current context, subversive confession undermines all other loyalties and when put alongside the church definition espoused by this project, to encounter Jesus is to confess his Lordship over all things. To encounter Jesus needs to lead to the confession that “Jesus is Lord” for the Church to be Church. He writes:

At its very heart, Christianity therefore is a messianic movement, one that seeks to consistently embody the life, spirituality, and mission of its Founder. We have made it so many other things, but this is its utter simplicity. Discipleship, becoming like Jesus our Lord and Founder, lies at the epicentre of the church’s task. It means that Christology must define all that we do and say.

Hirsch argues that discipleship (disciple making) is the most critical element in the mix. To seek to be formed like Christ is critical to the potential growth and impact of the church. He observes that consumerism and consumer religion are major threats to the viability of faith, which is a significant claim, and very challenging in New Zealand’s context, seeking to reach out to predominantly middle-class people. The church must find ways to critique this “god” in its members’ lives, and discover ways to free others from its influence.

One main contextual limitation of this resource is the complexity of the information presented. There is no doubt that each element of the mDNA that Hirsch describes is vital however, he states the church must “travel light” with a simple
ecclesiology and Christology, yet this is not a simple road map to follow. One wonders if
the underground Chinese church or the early persecuted church thought about what they
were doing this much. In saying that, the church plant is not under persecution, and
therefore may need this type of analysis to help motivate it into action.

Creating Community by Simon Reed

Simon Reed sets out to address two questions: “How do we create, maintain and
deepen a genuine and lasting community,”57 and “How do we create mature adult
disciples of Jesus Christ?”58 He states that many people, including those who have
practiced Christian faith for many years, “did not feel a closeness or confidence in their
relationship with God.”59 He believes the answers are found in the first-millennium
church, specifically the Celtic movement in the northern United Kingdom and Ireland.

Reed explains that from his research and experience of being a member of the
international Community of Aidan and Hilda,60 the Celtic community was formed with
three essential activities: a Way of Life, a network of Soul Friends, and a rhythm of
prayer.61 He suggests by attempting to do the same, formation of authentic community
and Christ-like individuals will emerge. The Way of Life (like a monastic rule) is a set of
practices, which members agree to live by according to their level of commitment
“designed to help them to follow the path of Christ and take on his character in day-to-

58 Ibid., loc 200.
59 Ibid., loc 170.
60 Ibid., loc 253.
61 Ibid., loc 71.
Put another way, it is the “To Do” list for how to connect with God and how to connect God with the whole of life. The rhythm of prayer and worship “punctuate the day” and help people consciously connect with God, and the practice of Soul Friendship is every member of the community having another person who helps them live by the “Way of Life.” This person is more than a mentor, as they help the member “discern and respond appropriately to God’s will, grow in maturity, responsibility and wholeness, and to deepen our relationship with God.” The book explores all three aspects of community living in more depth, with practical examples of how a community can engage in these activities, and how they are formed individually and together.

This work significantly contributes to this project in a number of ways, sharing the same questions that led to the exploration of this new church plant. Most important is the description of how the Celtic community was formed, guiding the current plant in its formation. Reed observes that most churches, including “fresh expressions” of church, tend to attract people and the focus is often “pulling a crowd.” He continues,

Celtic churches worked the other way round. They started as communities and then gathered wider congregations, which attached themselves to the communities and took on their values and practices. All of these churches were basically monasteries but, to understand them and unlock their potential for today, we need to abandon most of our preconceived ideas of what a monastery is like.

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62 Ibid., loc 317.
63 Ibid., loc 369.
64 Ibid., loc 317.
65 Ibid., loc 685.
66 Ibid., loc 297.
67 Ibid., loc 302.
He describes a common Celtic village\textsuperscript{68} including an every-day collection of buildings, and a simple dry ditch encircling the village. The ditch reminds everyone that once inside the space rules of the Kingdom of Heaven apply and all seek to live by them. Then most importantly there are a:

Bewildering array of people. There are monks and nuns living under the disciplined and compassionate rule of life set up by Hilda. There are lay members of the community—men, women and children, single people and families—who follow the community rule less strictly. There are other Christians who live and work there, and probably also pagan visitors enjoying the hospitality of the community or seeking Hilda’s practical wisdom while seeing what living Christianity looks like.\textsuperscript{69}

The three key elements of formation—the Way of Life, rhythm of prayer and a soul friend—are simple and could be explored in the current context. The imagery of the “Way of Life” being the frame supporting the plant to grow\textsuperscript{70} fits well with the current horticultural approach and desire to do life together. Having a rhythm of prayer in the journey as an expression of connection with each other is a shift from an individual prayer life and it would be interesting to find ways to replicate.

The main limitation of this resource is that the theory comes from experience from a dispersed community, with only limited experience coming from a local church community. Reed acknowledges that they are only in the early days of the journey, which means that while there is significant potential in the principles he describes, it is unknown what impact these activities will have on current members and community until it is personally explored here.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., loc 309. \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., loc 317. \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., loc 540.}
CHAPTER 3
A THEOLOGY OF ENCOUNTER

Graham Cray says, “Church is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other.”¹ This chapter explores this and asks what it means to encounter the risen Jesus, and to encounter each other in a way that sustains healthy relationships with Christ and community. In doing so, it tests to see if it contains essential elements of what could be described as a biblically-sound understanding of church and can be applied in the New Zealand context. The predominant church model in New Zealand has not adapted well to the changing societal context and the institutional church model predominant in the PCANZ seems more complicated than necessary. This project argues that discipleship and church can and should be quite simple, leading to the question: “What does it mean to encounter the risen Jesus and encounter each other?”

The Essence of Church

The literary world of ecclesiology is vast. Craig Van Gelder contributes to this by attempting to integrate a number of diverse perspectives from a variety of disciplines,

including missiology, ecclesiology, leadership development, cultural analysis, management studies, and spiritual formation. He argues that to understand church deeply, none of these disciplines can be considered in isolation. Van Gelder further notes that often texts about ecclesiology tend to focus on a functional or organizational understanding of church and conversations usually revolve around what a church should be doing and how it should be structured. This is the case with many of the books reviewed in Chapter 2, which tended to be brief in the essence of church, and thorough in detailing the practise of church. Van Gelder writes, “As helpful as many of these emphases have been, they have often failed to grapple with deeper realities about the church.” This is the experience of many congregations in the PCANZ as they attempt to turn around decline, largely focusing on changing what they do and how they are structured. Church literature and imported self-help church programmes often contain material that focuses on a functional or organisational approach to church, highlighting the need for effective management and organisational skills, seducing leaders into placing too much confidence in their abilities or crippling them under an expectation to work in a particular way when they may not possess certain skills.

Many ecclesiological texts look at the marks of the Church (for example gathering, sacraments, confession, and church discipline) to ensure the church can be identified, however, the marks still do not describe the essence of church. Van Gelder argues for the development of a more “full-orbed missiological ecclesiology:”

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3 Ibid., loc 322.

4 Ibid., loc 368.
Three aspects of church life must be defined and related to one another: what the church is—its nature; what the church does—its ministry; and how the church is to structure its work—its organization. The interrelationship of the three aspects is clear. The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does. The nature of the church is based on God’s presence through the Spirit. The ministry of the church flows out of the church’s nature. The organization of the church is designed to support the ministry of the church. Keeping these three aspects in the right sequence is important when considering the development of a missiological ecclesiology.\(^5\)

This chapter will focus on the essence of Church, in Van Gelder’s words: “The church is.” The following chapters will identify marks of church and activities (what the church does) that will foster community and discipleship among de-churched New Zealanders.

One challenge, and no doubt the cause of many debates, is that Scripture does not clearly define church in a succinct way that appeases a logical, scientific, Western world need for clarity. Scripture references tend to be metaphorical, for example Jesus’ reference to his “little flock” in Luke 12:32: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”\(^6\) The analogy of sheep appears throughout Scripture indicating the type of relationship God has with God’s people\(^7\) (Ps 23, Jn 10:1-21) as shepherd, guide, and protector, but these passages do not describe the essence of the community. It is highly unlikely that Jesus meant that the Church was to be like sheep in principle; but it is a powerful image of how God relates to the Church.

Taking Scripture at face value does not help develop a simple understanding of church. Jesus’ use of the word “church” (Mt 16:18 and 18:17) signals that he considers the Church to be his, and he gives brief instructions for dealing with someone who has

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\(^5\) Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, loc 596.

\(^6\) All Scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

\(^7\) Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, loc 1333.
sinned. The Greek word “ekklesia” used by Jesus, and in many instances by Paul, means
different things in different contexts. Kevin Giles looks closely at the use of the word and
suggests any attempt to develop a clear ecclesiology based on the use of this word is
seriously flawed, due to the fact that it does not have a fixed meaning. For example, it
describes a group of Jewish people gathered (Acts 7:38), an unruly mob not actually
assembled (Acts 19:32), a group who regularly meet in a home (Rom 16:5), all of the
Christians in one city (1 Cor 1:2), and all of those in Christ (1 Cor 10:32). Christians
usually end up focusing on the definition that reinforces their individual perspective.8

There are many images and metaphors in Scripture that describe the Church. Van
gelder discusses Paul Minear’s work, who identified ninety-six images and analogies that
the early church identified with, depending on the context they were in.9 There is no
attempt in Scripture to combine any of these images, but they complement each other as
the church then, and throughout history, seeks self-understanding. A number of images
relate to the nature of church, with some, such as “Body of Christ” being both nature of
the church and its ministry. Few relate to the organisation of church, resulting in the
diversity of organisation that has ensued, as communities draw from other sources of
biblical material to identify structure and polity.10 Minear identifies four frequently used
core images that “reveal essential aspects of this new community of faith created by the
Spirit”11 underpinned by a common theme: the church is a social community. He writes,

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9 Van Gelder, The Essence of the Church, loc 1648.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., loc 1653.
Comprehending this is crucial if we are to gain a proper perspective for understanding the nature of the church. . . . The church is a social community, a community made up of people who are reconciled with God and one another. To be the church is to be in reconciled relationship. To be the church is to be in active fellowship. To be the church is to live in interdependence with others. The church as social community reflects the social reality of the Trinity. The four primary images that depict the church as a social community are the people of God, the body of Christ, the communion of saints, and the creation of the Spirit.  

The “people of God” connects the New Testament Church with the Old Testament story, fulfilling prophetic expectations of the people of Israel: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pt 2:9). The “Body of Christ” (for example 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16), a conception of human community as a body, comes from the Hellenistic social-political imagery of Paul’s day and Van Gelder suggests it is popular in North American Church (as well as in New Zealand) to “emphasize spiritual gifts and small groups.” In terms of the concept the “communion of saints,” or as Van Gelder suggests more helpfully, the “fellowship of saints,”

We now experience God and each other in reconciled relationships based on what we share in common in Christ. These reconciled relationships lead to a kind of fellowship among believers that only persons of faith can experience. The word fellowship is used with a number of other terms: fellowship of the Son (1 John 1:3, 6), fellowship of the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), and fellowship in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5). The focus in all these passages is the same. God in Christ has brought into existence a new type of human community—a fellowship. “God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9).  

When Jesus left this world he said another would come to be his followers’ Advocate-Helper, this is “the Spirit of God, sent to indwell the community of faith with

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12 Ibid., loc 1664.
13 Ibid., loc 1669.
14 Ibid., loc 1691.
15 Ibid., loc 1726.
the fullness of God’s presence and power.” While contemporary understanding has focused on individuals, Van Gelder argues that the New Testament’s primary focus was on the formation of a “new type of community, a new humanity that is indwelt by the Spirit.” Pentecost was the day the Church was born, and like every human birth, where it is unknown what the person will look like later in life, the early church was beginning and found its shape and expression in the context that it was in at the time. Being born of the Spirit is an essential element of the essence of church, giving freedom for the community to grow and form according to its context, all the while knowing that it will bear a family resemblance from the Triune God.

The word “church” is used in many different ways today: however, church is not just a building, event, policy body, or denomination although some focus tends to be on those aspects as church. Van Gelder argues the essence of church is much deeper:

The church exists in relation to all these meanings. But it is more than any one of them, and, in fact, more than all of them combined. When we encounter the church, we move into spiritual territory that occupies earthly terrain. We encounter the living God in the midst of our humanity. We encounter the Spirit of God dwelling in the midst of a people who are created and formed into a unique community.

Miroslav Volf joins Van Gelder in sharing the view that understanding of church must start with the triune God. Both say the essence of church is found in the essence of God, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Van Gelder’s emphasis throughout his

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16 Ibid., loc 1737.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., loc 219.
19 Ibid., loc 224.
20 Ibid., loc 183.
book is on the work of the Spirit in birthing, and sending the Church: therefore the Church is missionary in essence. Volf begins with the eschaton, God’s new creation describing a “mutual personal indwelling of the triune God”\textsuperscript{21} as described in Revelation 21:3 when God will dwell with God’s people, and people with their God: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.’” Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17:21: “That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me,) and John’s letter (1 Jn 1:3: “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”) are not only a aspirations, but also present realities.\textsuperscript{22}

Volf agrees with Ignatius who believes that wherever Jesus Christ or the Spirit is, there the universal church is found. However, he acknowledges that this is not completely sufficient as the Spirit is not restricted to church alone. Therefore he expands that to wherever is the Spirit of Christ, which as the eschatological gift anticipates God’s new creation (see Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 1:22; Col 1:11-20), there is the church.\textsuperscript{23}

Avery Dulles, as described in Chapter 2, identifies one model of church as “mystical communion,”\textsuperscript{24} with communion defined as being a community much like a family or household. This type of human community contains horizontal relationships,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Miroslav Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 128.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 129.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church}, 44.
\end{itemize}
and Dulles suggests if there is also a vertical aspect of the relationship with the Triune
God then church is engaged in mystical communion. He suggests this model was the only
one found in the early centuries of church life.\textsuperscript{25} Catholic ecclesiology makes a
significant contribution in exploring the essence of church for today’s context, with Veli-
Matti Karkkainen observing that:

Perhaps the most important development of Vatican II was the replacement of the old \textit{societas perfecta}, institutional-hierarchic ecclesiology, with the dynamic
“people of God” notion in which the church is seen first of all as a pilgrim people
on the way to the heavenly city. The view of the church as a perfect society had
enjoyed widespread support from the time of the Counter Reformation through
the first half of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{26}

Simply describing the essence of church as a communion between the Triune God
and believers is not enough to give a holistic understanding of church. Volf argues one
must not only know what the church is, but also how it is identified.\textsuperscript{27} Van Gelder’s
assertion is that identifying the essence of church must take priority in the conversation,
and would agree with Volf saying all three aspects (is, does and organises) are required
for a full understanding of church.\textsuperscript{28} The activities of the church will be explored in the
next chapter, however one simple identifying mark that Dulles suggests of this type of
community is the use of the word “we” when describing the community. If people
naturally say “we” when referring to the life of the community, then there is communion.

If there is relationship between this community and God, there is church. For the New

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{26} Veli-Matti Karkkainen, \textit{An Introduction to Ecclesiology} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity

\textsuperscript{27} Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, 130.

\textsuperscript{28} Van Gelder, \textit{The Essence of the Church}, loc 558.
Zealand context, this description of church could have value in its simplicity, plus depth as questions are asked about what it means to be in communion with a God of community. The essence of church is relationship and community, an example of the communion humanity will enjoy with God at the eschaton. This essence, relationship with God and each other, affirms Cray: “Church is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other.”

Attention now turns to looking at what it means to encounter the risen Christ.

The Invitations of Jesus

Dallas Willard said, “Jesus only ever invited us to come to me, abide with me, learn from me and follow me.” His argument was that Jesus did not coerce, dictate, or prescribe to his disciples what to do; everything stems from an invitation to relationship. This statement provides a good starting point to explore what it means to encounter Jesus, and the various Scriptures where these invitations are given require closer examination.

The invitation “come to me” appears twice in Scripture, one being in John 7:37, 38: “On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” The other occurrence includes the invitation to learn: Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my

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29 Church of England, Mission Shaped Church, v.

yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus gave the invitation in John’s Gospel to those thirsty for life, no doubt quite deliberately on the last day of the festival known as the Feast of Tabernacles (sometimes referred to the Feast of Shelters or Booths). In Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13-15 this festival is described where the nation remembered life in the desert, and people lived in shelters as they did in the Exodus. On the last day, which according to the historian Josephus was the most popular of the three main festivals, there was a water pouring rite reminding people of God saving them by pouring out water in the desert (Nm 20), plus the anticipation of God pouring out of his spirit in the last days.

D.A. Carson writes, “Pouring at the Feast of Tabernacles refers symbolically to the messianic ache in which a stream from a sacred rock would flow over the whole earth.” The people would celebrate in their remembrance of God’s salvation, plus anticipate the promised future of God’s Kingdom. The act allowed them to re-enter the story and remind them that they are part of the story of God. Carson is very helpful in explaining this when he states, “In general terms, then, Jesus’ pronouncement is clear: he is the fulfillment of all that the Feast of Tabernacles anticipated. If Isaiah could invite the thirsty to drink from the waters (Is 55:1), Jesus announces that he is the one who can provide the waters.” By standing and shouting his invitation for those who are thirsty for God’s salvation, and God’s promised future, he presents the familiar activity in a new

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32 Ibid., 322.

33 Ibid., 323.
way, like he did with the woman at the well (Jn 4:10) and “he insists he alone can provide the real drink, and the satisfying spirit.”\textsuperscript{34} Jesus is now the source of their salvation, the giver of life, and their future with God.

The invitation to “come, rest and learn” in Matthew is extended to the weary and burdened, and comes in the Gospel when opposition to Jesus is mounting.\textsuperscript{35} Given that Matthew’s audience were most likely Jews, a key word is yoke, giving a clue to the identity of the wearying burden. Yoke is the Greek word \textit{zygos}, which has two meanings: a wooden crosspiece placed on a pair of oxen to allow them to pull the plow, and also a word for law, or commands, that the Pharisees used in reference to the Torah.\textsuperscript{36} The Jews found religion a great burden and the Pharisees put heavy loads on people’s shoulders,\textsuperscript{37} and here Jesus is inviting people, particularly the weary and heavy burdened,\textsuperscript{38} to replace the yoke of the Law. Peter refers to this in Acts 15 at arguably one of the most important gatherings of the early church as they were grappling with the requirements of Gentile believers on whether they should be circumcised or not (“Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?” Acts 15:10) affirming that the Law had been a burden for the Jews. He argued they were all saved by the “undeserved grace of the Lord

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 328.
\textsuperscript{35} Tom Wright, \textit{Matthew for Everyone, Part 1} (London: SPCK, 2004), 136.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Michael Green, \textit{The Message of Matthew, BST Commentary} (Leicester, UK: IVP, 2000), 143.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
Jesus” (Acts 15:11), and as the Council discussed the issues, and referred to Scriptures, they decided not to place a burden of circumcision on the Gentiles.

It is significant the invitation was to “come,” and not to “go,” suggesting a relational invitation, not a transactional one, where the person needed to obey a command of some kind. The burdened being invited to a relationship would seem much more attractive than yet another task to do. The invitation, however, is not simply to rest and do nothing. It includes the invitation to learn from a Rabbi, an invitation not usually extended to everyone. The yoke of Jesus is “easy,” not without toil, but the underlying word means “kind,” with a minimum of chaffing.\(^{39}\)

Taking on the yoke of Jesus had an extended meaning for the hearer. Deep rest was offered, which could be found by taking his yoke upon you and “entering into partnership with him.”\(^{40}\) Douglas Hare refers to the work of T.W. Manson who proposed that the designation Jesus selected for his disciples from the Aramaic did not mean “pupils” but “apprentices.”\(^{41}\) A pupil learns in theory and listening; an apprentice learns not by thinking but by doing. The farmer would partner a younger ox with an older one, yoking them together, as the younger one would be eager to move, and not always in the right direction.\(^{42}\) The older one, who knew the pace required to work all day, and the direction the farmer needed them to go, would gently guide the young one in rhythm and pace until the younger learned what it meant to toil in the farmer’s field. This image takes


\(^{40}\) Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 143.

\(^{41}\) Hare, *Matthew*, 129.

on a whole new understanding of what it means to learn from Jesus, as an apprentice, yoked together with him in day-to-day activities. Much discipleship theology contains expectations of obeying commands, whereas Jesus’ invitation is quite the opposite. As Hare observes, “The metaphor attains new force. The yoke is not one that Jesus imposes but one he wears,” reinforcing the image of partnership. He continues: “Learn how to pull this load by working beside, me, watching how I do it. It will seem easier when you allow me to help you with it.” Not by studying, but “by living in his presence, listening for his voice, and learning from him as an apprentice does from a master, by watching and imitating.” Everyone was invited, particularly those weary and burdened by trying to live under an impossible law. No longer did one have to be a scholar, “someone who studied for years and was out of reach for most people. Now you could be a child.”

In the New Zealand context the analogy of an apprentice is much more accessible than the word disciple. An apprentice model of learning has been part of New Zealand society for decades, and it is well accepted that the young inexperienced person would be placed in a context alongside a mature, experienced, proven tradesperson and would learn on the job, complemented with classes of theory along the way. The action/reflection cycle of learning was the chosen form for the teaching of Jesus. Eugene Peterson captures this well in his translation of this passage:

> Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me

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43 Hare, *Matthew*, 129.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

To continue with this metaphor of being yoked with Jesus in partnership, the question then turns to “What is the field of toil that lies ahead?” This is found in the remaining invitations of Jesus - abide in me and follow me.

The invitation to abide in Jesus is found in John 15:4, 5: “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” This invitation comes from Jesus at what could be described as his most desperate hour—the final meal with his fiends. Judas had left to betray him, they were about to leave to what Jesus knew as his impending arrest, and within the monologue it seems that Jesus was preparing his friends for his death.47 He introduces, as he often does, a horticultural metaphor to help his friends grasp what he was inviting them to, to abide in him as a grape branch is connected to the vine. It would be clear to them that there is no fruit on a branch that is disconnected from the vine, as they would also have known the vine imagery had traditionally been understood as a metaphor for Israel.48 Here Jesus identified himself as the main source of life, and connection to God, and John uses the phrase “I am” a number of times throughout his Gospel connecting Jesus with the


identifying words of God at the burning bush with Moses (Ex 3), indicating the Father is intimately involved.49

It is important to understand what the word abide means in this context. Jesus had introduced a sense of mutual indwelling in John 14:20 (“On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you”) that the vine metaphor reinforces. The word “abide” means to remain, continue to be present, and in some cases allow one to be held. Matthew uses the word to describe being in a particular location with (Mt 10:11; 11:23) and the request of Jesus to his disciples to stay with him in the garden (Mt 26:38). Carson explores this, suggesting it could be conditional (if you remain in me I will remain in you), or there could be no verb (I just remain in you), “Or it could be mutual imperative: Let us both remain in each other.”50 It does not appear to be an action, but an identification of a state of being, or a heart attitude. It brings a sense of what it means to be in a family, or on a sports team. In both cases, identification is clear with the same surname, or team uniform, but it is up to the member to have a heart attitude of being in the family or on the team. Often in sports games the words, “his heart does not seem to be in it today” illustrates that abiding does not come in identity, but in heart attitude. Jesus is making a statement: “we are attached together, have the state of heart that we will remain together,” and his life will flow through his followers’ lives and there will be fruit.

The invitation given by Jesus to “follow me” can be found a number of times in Scripture, with one of the more dramatic occurrences in Matthew 9:9: “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him,

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 516.
‘Follow me.’ And Matthew got up and followed him.” This familiar passage leads to a shocking scene of Jesus eating at the home of Matthew with tax collectors and other disreputable sinners, drawing the ire of the Pharisees. Scripture clearly states that one should not fellowship, let alone eat with (which signals approval) sinners (for example Ps 1:1, 119:63, Prv 13:20) and the Pharisees made their disapproval clear. Tax collectors were among the most hated and despised people among the Jews, seen as traitors to their country for collecting taxes for the enemy, often exercising dishonest practises to earn more money,\textsuperscript{51} or doing violence towards those who did not pay.\textsuperscript{52} It is possible to imagine the attitude towards tax collectors being akin to the Dutch or French toward locals who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II.\textsuperscript{53}

It is quite likely Matthew would have heard about Jesus and his miracles, and there was something in this personal encounter that resulted in him “getting up” out of his booth that identified him with sin, dishonesty, shame, and isolation and going with Jesus. The same word is found referring to resurrection (for example Matthew 17 where Jesus refers to his own death and resurrection), suggesting Matthew saw his invitation from Jesus as a resurrection from his old life to his new life with Jesus.\textsuperscript{54}

The word “follow,” (\textit{Akoloutheo}) means to follow one who precedes, to join with, or most telling for the argument of this project, to accompany. The same sense is found in the story of Peter and the other fishermen responding to Jesus (Lk 5:1-11). They left their

\textsuperscript{51} Green, \textit{The Message of Matthew}, 123.

\textsuperscript{52} Craig S. Keener, \textit{Matthew} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 187.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Wright, \textit{Matthew for Everyone}, 103.
nets and followed (went with, accompanied) him. In both cases people left their old lives and began a new one, with Jesus. This is consistent with the imagery of the yoke, being side-by-side with Jesus. For many people, being a disciple is to follow behind Jesus and attempt to do in life what they expect Jesus would do, experiencing failure, which leads to condemnation. To accompany Jesus is a different image. It is relational, and an invitation to participate in the work together, not a command to an underling to follow orders. Later in the passage when Jesus justifies his actions to the Pharisees he says, “For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous but those who know they are sinners” (Mt 9:13, New Living Translation). The word “call” here is the Greek verb *kaleo*, which also means invite, as in the parable of the wedding feast⁵⁵ (Lk 14:8), further reinforcing the sense of invitation rather than command espoused by Willard.

“Follow me” has been interpreted as a command from Jesus, to go about a prescribed set of activities that the Church traditionally has understood to display what it means to be his disciple. “Come with me” is a much more helpful expression for understanding what it means to be a disciple. This then leads to the important question, of how to know what one must do with one’s life, a question heard from many Christians: “what is Jesus doing?” If Christians are to accompany Jesus in his work, then what is his work? It is not in the scope of this project to go deeply into the mission of Jesus, but suffice it to say, Jesus did not seem to have a prescribed set of activities in his ministry. There are two clear signals he gives in the Gospels of what guided his every-day activity. The first is in John 5:19 when he says he only does what he sees the Father doing. The obvious question then is “what is the Father doing?” This is the key for any disciple or

⁵⁵ Hare, *Matthew*, 101.
church community to learn in today’s context, acknowledging *misseo dei*, the mission of God, and that God is already at work. The mission of the Church is then to establish what God is doing and join, or accompany God in that activity. The second very clear description of the activity of Jesus is found in Luke 4:18, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me.” This is a very clear mandate and starting point for individuals and church communities when trying to identify what activities should take priority in their lives.

Those who are thirsty for life, weary and burdened by religion, seeking identity and purpose, find fulfillment in an encounter with the person of Jesus. The life of a disciple is encountering the risen Christ and responding to his invitation to rest in the new identity given by Christ and to be free from the old identity. It is to be a part of the family in heart and attitude, to learn from (and become like) Jesus as an apprentice learns from the master, and to accompany Jesus seeing the Father at work, participating in the mission of God, making all things new.

**Transfigured by Christ – Aidan of Lindisfarne**

History helps describe a simple expression of discipleship and community that encapsulates what has been described in this chapter. The Celts as a Christian movement were in Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England around the time between the sixth and tenth centuries. The Celts sought to model heaven on earth as they intentionally showed people a new way of living by Kingdom values: “Monastic settlements [were] anticipations of paradise”\(^\text{56}\) and a “kind of microcosm of the cosmos in its concept of

harmony and proper relationship with all things."57 Celtic Christianity was more of a movement than an institution58 not fitting in with any organised model of parishes and were distinct from the Eastern monasteries which were “organised to protest, and escape from, the materialism of the Roman world and the corruption of the church; the Celtic monasteries organized to penetrate the pagan world and to extend the church.”59 They were also more diverse than their Eastern counterparts with a variety of people and children part of the community under the leadership of a lay abbot or abbess, and were essentially a lay movement with the exception of a small number of priests.60 George Hunter writes, “The monastic communities produced a less individualistic and more community orientated approach to the Christian life.”61

A key figure in the Celtic movement was Aidan. In AD 635, Aidan and his brother monks moved from Iona where they had been living, and founded a new community at Lindisfarne, following a monastic way of life. He was a special man, described as quietly spoken with a bold humility.62 The community at Lindisfarne would have been a very humble collection of buildings:

There are houses and animal sheds, workplaces and shops, and somewhere in the middle stands a wooden building which doesn’t look much different from any of the others but is, in fact, the church. As you approach, you see not a high stone wall but a simple dry ditch encircling the village. This ditch serves a practical

57 Ibid., 45.


59 Ibid., 16.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., 18.

purpose in that it stops the animals from wandering away, but it has a symbolic purpose too. It reminds everyone that once they are inside the circle, the rules of the kingdom of heaven apply and everyone must seek to live by them.  

Aidan’s way of mission was to simply go out and talk to people instead of the normal evangelism method of the time of focusing on the King and seeking his conversion. As Aidan met and talked to people there were two things that startled the locals: he walked (people knew that aristocrats did not walk) and he went unarmed (in a very violent society). He wanted to be at the same level as the every day person, and also be consistent with his faith; he asked, “How can we talk about a God of peace and yet carry a knife?”  

He was highly regarded by the Northumbrian King Oswald and one famous story recounts the king honoring Aidan by giving him one of his best horses. Aidan gave the horse away to the first poor person he met, resulting in high offense to the king. Aidan’s reply was simply “Remember this. Surely you do not see that son of a mare is more important than that son of God.” The conversion of Northumbria was attributed to this quiet humble man, who simply lived his life as part of the community, following the community rule, which focused on members growing in Christlikeness.

**A Celtic Church in New Zealand?**

The image of a Celtic monastic community doing life together in twenty-first century New Zealand is compelling. Church is people in relationship with God and each other, modeling the community of the _eschaton_ where all things are in relationship as

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63 Reed, _Creating Community_, Loc 312.


65 Ibid.
God intended. It is a group of people who gather around Christ, “yoked” with him, participating in the mission of God empowered by the Spirit of God; said another way, “doing life with Jesus.” This community of people go about their day-to-day lives, knowing their identity in Christ and in each other, and are committed to growing in their Christlikeness by following rhythms and activities as a monastic community would do. A simple working definition of “church,” that has relationship and communion with each other and God at its core, that aids community formation in a New Zealand context, and is accessible to de-churched people, could be “Doing life with Jesus, and each other.” The community then accompanies Jesus in day-to-day life, resting in him, remaining in him, learning from him as an apprentice, and then going with him joining God in God’s mission.
PART THREE

PRACTISE
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY OUTCOMES

Church in a New Zealand context could be extremely simple: people who are “doing life with Jesus, and each other.” Church is a group of people going about their day-to-day lives in relationship with each other, attempting to grow to be like Christ and participate with Christ in the mission of God. It is a group of people in relationship with God and each other, modeling the community of the eschaton where all things are in perfect relationship with God. Having settled on what the Church is, this chapter explores Scripture, the Celtic community, and the experience of the de-churched to identify what this church could look like and what activities would help form individuals and community towards that image of church.

**God Intoxicated People**

The biblical narrative ends with a description of all things reconciled with God (2 Cor 5:18) and in perfect relationship (Rv 21). The Church currently lives in the time when the Kingdom of God is here, but not fully established; therefore, any description of an anticipation of paradise will always be idealistic. The Celts lived in this tension attempting to live in harmony with all things and live by the principles of the Kingdom of
God and they “beckon us to join a life of freedom and joyful collaboration with God, where the holy presence of God himself can be easily accessed and enjoyed in particular places and experiences.”\(^1\) Tracey Balzer writes, “The Celt was very much a God-intoxicated man whose life was embraced on all sides by the Divine Being.”\(^2\)

Willard affirms that it was never God’s intention for everyone to be ordinary\(^3\) and that a life in the Kingdom is accessible for all now through Jesus. A community of God-intoxicated people would exhibit all the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, [Gal 5]) and be people who act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Mi 3:8). It would see people who practice the “one another’s” of Scripture, particularly the invitations of Jesus and Paul.

For example love one another (Jn 13:34-35, Rom 13:8, 1 Pt 1:22, 1 Jn 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11-12, 2 Jn 1:5), encourage one another (1 Thes 4:18, 5:11, Heb 3:13, 10:25), greet one another (Rom 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, 1 Pt 5:14), accept one another (Rom 15:7, 14:1-4) and be hospitable to each other (1 Pt 4:9). C.S. Lewis describes the opportunity:

> Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. . . .\(^4\) To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an


\(^2\) Ibid., 32.


artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.5

The de-churched people interviewed for this project expressed a desire to do life with others in a community that inhibits all of those behaviors, plus highlighted specific values that they believe are vital for any community to flourish. The highest priority was the need for genuine community, with authenticity in interactions with each other and how they lived their lives. They placed a high value on a culture of invitation so that people participated freely in response, rather than out of a sense of obligation. All participants wanted to be intentional in growing, and felt that without any intentionality any gathering would soon feel meaningless. There is a desire to place high value on generosity: of encouragement to others, of finance, and time as people indicated a desire to give outside of themselves. Finally all agreed to prioritize sustainability of the planets’ resources as a tangible expression of faith.6

The Celtic community provides a physical example of what an anticipation of paradise could look like, as it encompasses many of the values identified by de-churched people. As described in the literary review, in the Celtic village a variety of people following the rule more or less carefully could be found, alongside pagan visitors enjoying hospitality and experiencing what Christian community was like.7 Ian Bradley writes, “Celts were rural and tribal, non hierarchical and de-centralised, made up of

5 Ibid., 40.
6 From the interviews referenced in Chapter 1.
7 Reed, Creating Community, loc 312.
loosely organised largely autonomous communities bonded by family ties" and the monastic community was in the centre of the village or town, not tacked on the periphery. Across the regions there was no central or hierarchical organisation but a network of communities that were trusted to each to do what was right in their place. The concept of tribal family ties could have helpful connections with New Zealand’s culture when compared to membership of organisations, as families are already connected, and simply need to discover what that means and how to behave together (as opposed to behaving in a certain way, or to profess certain things to be connected). This is an important reflection as the PCANZ (and most churches) attempts to identify members. For de-churched people, the concept of membership is an example of the institutional church trying to maintain control, and they feel there needs to be another way of expressing belonging.

Part of the answer could come from farming. Sheila Pritchard published an article in the early-1990s, which connects well with de-churched people. She writes:

A visitor to an Australian outback cattle ranch was intrigued by the seemingly endless miles of farming country with no sign of any fences. He asked a local rancher how he kept track of his cattle. The rancher replied, “Oh, that’s no problem. Out here we dig wells instead of building fences.” The implication is that there is no need to fence cattle in, when they are highly motivated to stay within range of water, their most important source of life.

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11 Sheila Pritchard, “Digging Wells or Building Fences?,” Reality (March 1994).
She connects this image with spiritual formation: rather than having a set of boundaries that keep a person in or out of church, people are either journeying towards, or away from the centre. This image removes any distinctions of people theologically and culturally, and simply encourages a journey towards Jesus. This image removes pressure to behave in a certain way, or profess certain beliefs to be a member of a community. In the illustration the cattle felt free to roam, always knowing where their centre of life was. This imagery allows people to ask about their posture, “Am I facing towards the well or away from it?”

**Training Blueprint: Curriculum of Christlikeness**

This image of church is attractive, but more is required to identify how an individual or community is formed. As related in Chapter 2, Reed says the Celtic community was formed with three essential activities: a Way of Life, a network of Soul Friends, and a rhythm of prayer.\(^{12}\) He suggests attempting to do the same would lead to the formation of Christ-like individuals and authentic community. In addition, are the four relationships identified by the Church of England and Moynagh of UP, IN, OUT and OF, to help ensure a holistic and healthy expression of church. In theory, if a community were intentional in practicing activities within this framework, and careful to only participate in activities that would nurture a closer relationship with God, each other, the community and the wider church, then growth would occur.

\(^{12}\) Reed, *Creating Community*, loc 71.
The Celts and other monastic traditions identified the need to be intentional in growing to be like Christ, and it was sometimes likened to the pursuit of physical fitness.

St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote:

> Spiritual exercises is meant every way of examining one’s conscious, meditating and contemplating, or praying vocally and mentally, and performing other spiritual actions . . . for strolling, walking and running are bodily exercises, so in every way preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul, is called a spiritual exercise.\(^\text{13}\)

New Zealand culture is very familiar with the concept of physical health, and running, cycling, or attending a gymnasium to condition the body is a popular pastime, so the concept of training to become like Jesus is an easy one to grasp. William Law provides good insight into the importance of being intentional to grow. He describes it as the “happiest and best thing in the world” to please God and argues that if one were to “stop and ask ourselves why you are not as pious as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, put purely because you never thoroughly intended it.”\(^\text{14}\)

John Knox, in a letter to his brethren as he departed for Geneva in 1556, said, “But above all things, dear Brethren, study to practice in life that which the Lord commands, and then be ye assured that ye shall never hear nor read the same without fruit.”\(^\text{15}\)

The de-churched acknowledged that intentionality was important but were not attracted to a prescribed list of activities of a church program and felt trying to conform to

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\(^{13}\) St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatious of Loyola* (New York: Cosimo Classics. 2007), 1st Annotation.


certain rules only led to frustration and failure. Willard acknowledges that this sense of frustration is a significant barrier in discipleship and suggests having a “curriculum for Christlikeness,” rather than pursuing the usual church discipleship program. He proposes two objectives: “We come to a point where we dearly love and constantly delight in our ‘heavenly Father’ made real to earth in Jesus and disrupting our automatic responses against the kingdom with various intentional practices that allow us to do what Jesus says.”\(^{16}\) A curriculum provides a broad selection of subjects and methods to engage with learning, and each person and group could select from activities and exercises that help formation, at the same time allowing for individual expressions of spirituality. In a school curriculum, some subjects are compulsory for each student, but many are optional depending on area of interest and life journey. The concept of some activities being identified as key for all apprentices of Jesus is helpful; others would be pertinent depending on the person. Thomas Merton in his description of the Desert Fathers states, “There is nothing to which they had to ‘conform’ except the secret, hidden, inscrutable will of God which might differ very notably from one cell to another!”\(^{17}\)

It is important to translate that intention into the twenty-first century and to build a culture that gives people freedom to explore various disciplines to discover which are helpful in their context. This does not mean some practices will be discarded because they are difficult; it simply means that the way they are practiced will be expressed differently for each person. That will release any pressure to conform and resist temptation to turn the discipline into a law. Merton writes, “Therefore, whatever you see


your soul to desire according to God, do that thing, and you shall keep your heart safe.”¹⁸

This could be a liberating concept for de-churched Christians wanting to follow God’s will for their life and help create an environment to aid accompanying Jesus, not following a set of rules. Due to cultures’ individualistic tendencies, care is required that exercises are not chosen because they are appealing. A good athlete will recognize the benefit of an exercise assigned by their coach to help form them to achieve their goal. In this case, the community or soul friend could be involved in choosing the exercises. It is important to note that the exercises are not an end in them and as Richard Foster states, “The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so He can transform us,”¹⁹ both individually and collectively.

**The Training Ground**

The environment in which individuals and community are formed is critical for growth. The analogy of a training ground provides a helpful context in which to train for Christlikeness, and de-churched people, New Zealand culture, and the literary review all provide elements important for training to ensure any exercise has meaning and purpose. As stated earlier in this chapter, authentic relationship must be at the core of any expression, including the need for people to feel like they belong regardless of belief. Participants must not be left with the feeling of being subjugated by other’s expectations, and have the freedom to participate when able. Any expression of faith must be authentic, and give permission for people to be real which includes the freedom to doubt, question,  

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¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

and have no pressure to accept pat answers. People expressed a desire for the contemplative space as a counter to the accelerating pace of their everyday lives and to participate in activities rather than be a spectator.

Any engagement with the story of God must include the opportunity to interact with the story as opposed to being taught the meaning of the text from a religious expert, including freedom to question and critique. This also helps deconstruct any assumptions held by de-churched people that one must agree with the one in leadership. Engagement with the story must include a strong commitment to historic orthodox beliefs of the Christian faith, and at the same time allowing adaptation to relate to the changing New Zealand context. Learning must include ways to connect God’s story with people’s story of everyday life or work, leisure, study, and a healthy family life. Any activity must include tolerance and respect of others, and express an egalitarian and inclusive environment that is adaptable and informal, including the willingness to end activities that no longer serve the purpose of building healthy relationships.

Resources from outside New Zealand must be used with care to alleviate any suspicion of an imported program or system to follow. Leaders must be both male and female, clergy and lay, and carry with them a humility that understands their role of serving the community. This humility must carry with it a sense of invitation, rather than expectation, to invite the de-churched into a life with Jesus and each other. Invitations need to connect with people’s own aspirations for life, as opposed to having any sense of maintaining the life of the church; therefore it is vital that activities nurture healthy relationships, and be modified or discontinued if they do not. It is vital that relationship is prioritized over activity, and activities monitored to ensure they are nurturing healthy
relationships (with God, each other, the community or the wider church) and not become an end. Care must be given to help people distinguish the invitation of God to be part of God’s mission of reconciling all things, as opposed to activities for activities’ sake. For the purposes of this project participants were invited to identify activities they felt would be helpful for their formation as individuals and as a community.

**Team Exercises and the “Play Book”**

De-churched people chose a number of activities and exercises to help form them. A distinction is made between the two, as a sports team would do drill exercises together (focusing on fitness, ball, skills and other activities) and actually playing the game. They chose exercises they felt drawn to from the monastic tradition: contemplative and centering prayer, dwelling in Scripture, building soul friendships (although some uncertainty was expressed in how formal this should be), and committing to a “way of life” that was developed together. In addition to this, further activities were identified to experiment with: Andrew and Rebecca felt close to God in the outdoors so suggested going on a tramp, and felt it was a good way to build relationships with each other. John and Jane wanted to have a meal with others each month and be intentional about their “vertical” relationship with God. Richard and Annie chose the monthly BBQ for hospitality and celebration.

It is important to clarify what the ancient disciplines chosen to experiment with mean. Contemplative prayer is very different to the prayer de-churched people have been used to. Ray Simpson critiques usual church practises and productive focus on prayer, which usually consists of petition, lists of concerns, and predominantly one-way
communication. He describes it as “controlling prayer . . . and human self-will dressed in religious clothing.”20 He goes on to say “contemplative prayer is natural, un-programmed; it is perpetual openness to God, so that in the openness his concerns can flow in and out of our minds as he wills.”21 Contemplative prayer helps dismantle the secular/sacred split in which Christians express their faith and breaks down division between the activity of every day life and prayer. He continues, “For the men and women who recited them, prayer was not a formal exercise: it was a state of mind.”22

The prayers of every-day activity are appealing, and can be developed as habits, which “punctuate the day and enable everyone consciously to connect with God and remember that every hour belongs to him.”23 Waal writes, “I have come to see that the Celtic way of prayer is prayer with the whole of myself, a totality of praying that embraces the fullness of my own personhood, and allows me not only to pray with words but also, more important, with the heart, the feelings, using image and symbol, touching the springs of my imagination.”24 The Celts had prayers for putting their clothes on, prayers for lighting the fire, and prayers of thanksgiving for their conception when making their bed.25 It is allowing “Christ to come into the natural patterns of people - getting up more intentionally, have breakfast mindfully, and before you lie down off load

20 Ray Simpson, Exploring Celtic Spirituality (Suffolk, UK: Kevin Mayhew), 2005, 74.

21 Ibid.


23 Reed, Creating Community, loc 323.


your ‘stuff’ to the Lord. It is important to fall into the rhythm that is already in the day, rather than trying to add something on top of it.”

Michael Mitton adds,

With the Celtic love for creation, many connect with the seasons and with all the various aspects of life in God’s created order. Celtic Christians found it as natural to pray during the milking of a cow as they did to pray in church. In fact, it is vital to feel at ease in praying while you are doing such mundane things as milking your cow, because, if you could not do that, your spiritual and earthly worlds were becoming far too separate.

Their prayer was inseparable from daily working life, and from the land: “Their sense of spirituality is akin to much in the African or Native American experience who have a ‘shared and common resonance.’” This is also true for the indigenous people of New Zealand, and Maori spirituality provides an important connection for this context. Humanity’s natural connection to the land has been lost with urbanization, and only recently re-emerged as a popular topic of conversation; this creates potential for an understanding of Kiwi spirituality.

The monks and nuns would have followed a standard form of daily office, prayer at dawn, noon and dusk (Ps 55:17), or the rhythm of prayer seven times a day (Ps 119:164). Ian Adams described the bell of the monastic community. He writes, “When the bell rings you stop doing what you are doing and go and do what is really important. In their [the monastics] case pray. In our case it is usually the really important thing gets squeezed . . . it’s not spectacular work, but gradually it changes us.”


28 Ibid., 96.
Ancient meditation activities were identified as exercises to be explored. Thomas Keating describes the activity of “Centering Prayer,” a modernized expression of Lectio Divina, offering “a way to grow in intimacy with God, moving beyond conversation to communion.” It is simply sitting in silence contemplating the Trinity, and each time the participant notices their thoughts wandering or distracted by a sound, they use a pre-chosen word to help them center their thoughts back into God. Alan Roxburgh describes a practise called “dwelling in the word,” which is essentially Ignatian meditation, the use of imagination when listening to Scripture. He writes of this practise, “It’s a way of letting God address us through Scripture, rather than using Scripture only as a tool for imparting new information or confirming existing beliefs. Dwelling in the Word invites the Holy Spirit to enliven a biblical text among us, so that we become aware of and responsive to what God is doing.”

The Celts believed that one could not grow on one’s own, and that everyone needed an “anamchara,” a soul friend. Waal writes, “It is the soul-friend who helps above all, who brings medicine for the soul, who supports and who challenges throughout one’s life.” A soul friend helps a person live the “Way of Life” of the community, a popular expression being that a soul friend “helped prepare you for death, and in doing so, prepared you for life.” One of the most famous expressions on soul friends comes


from St. Brigid (Abbess of Kildare Monastery, 457-525) who said, “A person without a soul friend is like a body without a head.”33 She believed it was so important that if you did not have one, then to find one before even having a meal.34 This role came from the Celts “baptizing” the role of the pagan druid who traditionally counseled the chief,35 expanding it in a way that it was largely performed by lay people to each other. It was an integral component of the community following the Way of Life. This person would provide a safe place for the seeker to “unburden their souls,”36 and provide a sanctuary where the worst part of oneself can be acknowledged so that genuine change can occur.37 Bradley writes, “Modern experts in the field of spiritual counselling and clinical psychology are coming to see the advantages of this Celtic model of pastoral care which faced up to the need we all have for regularly unburdening our souls without having to report to the formal ritual or the guilt-inducing aspects of the confessional.”38

One key aspect of this role was to listen to the confession of the seeker, and in some cases ascribe penance,39 a role which has since been taken over by clergy in the Catholic tradition, and largely ignored by Protestants.40 Most de-churched people acknowledge that bringing one’s weaknesses and failures “into the light” as James

33 Bradley, The Celtic Way, 73.

34 Raine, “Exploring the Celtic Heritage.”


36 Bradley, The Celtic Way, 73.

37 Balzer, Thin Places, 49.

38 Bradley, The Celtic Way, 73.


suggests (Jas 5:16) has benefits of freedom from guilt and shame. However, none of those interviewed had experienced any such formal relationship. The rise of the “personal coach” has been a recent phenomenon; one who helps in a range of areas of health and wellbeing: physical fitness, budgeting, time management, and even clutter management. This seems an opportunity to “baptize” a twenty-first century role in New Zealand culture, and introduce the soul friend who would help people in their discipleship. If penance was understood as training, just as a coach would assign exercises for the sportsperson, then this could have potential and would be consistent with early Christians who developed fitness programs to help overcome flabby souls. They were called “athletes of the spirit” and they would assign spiritual exercises to help them master cravings and to grow in areas of virtue.41

Until the introduction of soul friends, confession was done in front of the whole community and the community may have imposed a penance. A soul friend would listen to the confession, and prescribe some activity to help the person grow. For example, the soul friend could instruct a person who talked too much, or said inappropriate things, to carry a pebble in their mouth, which “trains” one to use one’s tongue wisely.42 Many other activities such as Scripture memorization, fasting, giving, and serving in secret would help the person grow in other areas. The term “spiritual exercises” rather than penance is a more helpful term for today’s context so that it is seen as a practical activity that helps a person grow and change behavior, and reduces the risk of it being seen as a punishment. One further benefit of the concept of soul friends for the community is that it


42 Raine, “Exploring the Celtic Heritage.”
disperses the authority of the community away from one particular person or hierarchical group to a network of support people. This is an attractive characteristic for New Zealand culture, also alleviating the pressure of the “pastor” to be all things to all people.

Andrew and Rebecca were the ones who suggested developing a “Way of Life.” Andrew had experienced various expressions of Christian community in his life and wondered if being intentional about living this way in dispersed community would work. A Way of Life is the monastic community rule gathered around a set of shared values committed to by each member in the community. Reed writes, “The difference between community and a group of friends is that in a community we verbalise our mutual belonging and bonding.” When Aidan and his brother monks founded the new community at Lindisfarne, they most likely observed the Rule of Columba guiding their everyday life. This monastic rule is often referred to as the “Way of Life.” Reed continues, “Aidan would then have taught it to others, and, as he was the recognised spiritual leader within the kingdom, it would soon have become known as the Rule of Aidan, with modifications to incorporate his own insights and way of teaching and living.” He trained and mentored others, notably Hilda who became the Abbess of one of the largest Christian communities in the north at Whitby.

A Way of Life is a simple summary set of guidelines, outlining what it means in practise to live a God-centered life in a particular time or setting. It is like a framework to live one’s life, or a “life map.” Like a plant is free to grow in its unique way, a trellis forms it and helps give it shape. As a trellis does not make the plant grow but gives it

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43 Reed, Creating Community, 344.

44 Ibid., 570.
shape and support, so a Way of Life gives shape and support. Put another way, it guides members on how to connect with God and how to connect God with their whole life. Examples of components of a contemporary way of life, include Life-long Learning, Spiritual Journey (Soul Friend, regular retreats, pilgrimage), and a rhythm of prayer. The Way of Life is developed locally, allowing it to be sensitive to the context of the community; however, at its simplest would be a commitment to pray together daily, live simply, and make unity.\textsuperscript{45} A Way of Life could be understood in a sporting context as the “play book,” or the agreement in how the team will function together. By agreeing to be in the team, people agree to the team rules and culture.

Intentionally practicing hospitality has been a focus of many new contextual expressions of church around the world,\textsuperscript{46} and it was a significant aspect of the Celt’s life together. Hunter says, “The Irish know how to celebrate – with minimum resources and minimum reasons (in the world’s terms) to celebrate.”\textsuperscript{47} Irish Christians see the Kingdom of God in part “as a party—where the doors are thrown open like an Irish pub to anyone who would come in,”\textsuperscript{48} believing the church should feel something like an Irish pub—festive, lyrical, and participatory—with everyone welcome. He continues, “No one is going to check your credentials. Leave your attitude at the door, come in, find your place, and feel free to express your gift.”\textsuperscript{49} In Matthew 25, Jesus commends the people stating,

\textsuperscript{45} Simpson, Exploring Celtic Spirituality, 64.

\textsuperscript{46} Ward, Liquid Church, loc 1105.

\textsuperscript{47} Hunter, The Celtic Way of Evangelism, 119, 120.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
“I was a stranger, and you welcomed me in.” Ian Adams adds, “Hospitality needs to be both intentional and genuine”\textsuperscript{50} and belonging, acceptance, reconciliation, and healing can come from a community, particularly gathered around a meal. Henri Nouwen says, “Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.”\textsuperscript{51}

Practicing hospitality and eating with others is a foretaste of heaven, a partial fulfillment of the promise of eating at the table of Jesus (Lk 22:30). William Willimon comments, “Eating together is a mark of unity, solidarity, deep friendship, a visible sign that social barriers which once plagued these people have broken down . . . when a blessing is said at the table the table becomes a holy place and eating together a sacred activity.”\textsuperscript{52} Eating at the table is a vital part of the formation for de-churched people.

The concept of celebration as a spiritual exercise was attractive to the de-churched. It was their experience that Christians are not always recognised for their love of life, and celebration will help disciples live a life of joy. The intentional activity of celebration helps people not take themselves too seriously, as “It is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores. This should not be. Of all people, we should be the most free, alive, interesting. Celebration adds a note of gaiety, festivity,


\textsuperscript{52} William Willimon. \textit{Acts: Interpretation} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 41.
hilarity to our lives. After all, Jesus rejoiced so fully in life that he was accused of being a wine-bibber and a glutton.”53

Henri Nouwen describes celebration as “the acceptance of life in a constantly increasing awareness of its preciousness,”54 affirming humanity’s present condition, remembering their past in a healthy way, and looking ahead to the future in expectation. It is a simple state of thankfulness for life, and can be celebrated in many ways such as going to the beach, having a good meal, or going for a walk.

The Activities of “Out”

The exercises and activities in this project fit predominantly in the direction of “Up” towards God, “In” with each other, and “Of” the wider church. Lacking in this plan was specific activities directed “out,” designed to nurture a closer relationship with the wider community, which deserves exploration as the activities may result in closer relationships with each other, but be of no consequence to the outside world. The Church does not do mission, it is mission – it is in its DNA.55 The biblical narrative is one of missio dei, describing that mission is God’s mission in which the Church participates in rather than leads: “Whatever God is perceived to be like, the Church, if it is true and faithful, will embody and emulate. If God is encountered and experienced as supreme missionary, going before, searching out, inviting and receiving in, abiding with, then

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53 Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 243.
55 Church of England General Synod, Mission Shaped Church, 33.
those very characteristics will be found in the Church of such a God.” 56 Christ is acknowledged as the head of the Church, who then “consecrates his disciples to be sent out into the world to continue his mission.” 57 Jesus says to the Father, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them [his followers] into the world” (John 17:18). Karen Ward affirms this sense of mission in the churches’ DNA: “Everything we do has an outward trajectory. . . . Non churched people can pick up the Gospel from us as we form relationships, as the Gospel is a holy virus that is spread from person to person (the most effective means of submitting anything). We are carriers of Christ. In our very bodies, we are carrying out the life, death, and resurrection of Christ both in and for our world.” 58

Simpson writes, “The Celtic evangelists attracted the people to Christ by sharing their humanity with them, transfigured by Christ,” 59 and “went with the flow of human patterns in as far as they were not intrinsically godless,” 60 so in their posture with the wider community sought to be relational in their every-day life. John Wesley imagined perfection as a follower of Christ in this life. By perfect he meant “one in whom is ‘the mind of Christ,’ and who so ‘walketh as Christ also walked;’ and man ‘that hath clean hands and a pure heart,’ of that is ‘cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;’ one in whom is ‘no occasion of stumbling,’ and who, accordingly ‘does not commit sin.’” 61


60 Ibid., 225.

does not say a disciple will not make mistakes, but will walk in the light, and live in love, free from evil thoughts and tempers. This kind of person has a reliance on Jesus; a desire to be his apprentice; obedience to his word; pervasive inner transformation of the heart and soul; and the power to work the works of the Kingdom. Or as the writers of *New Monasticism* express, “For too long evangelism and discipleship has over-focused on an approach to ‘knowing God’ through filling people’s heads with facts. While knowing that faith is important, so is the need to know God through experience in daily life and prayer, holding to a committed relational form of catechesis and discipleship.”

With this in mind, there have been no specific community-facing activities chosen for this project. It was envisioned that with a focus on discipleship, members would naturally connect with others as part of their accompanying Jesus in their everyday lives. The Celts effectively engaged with local people and listened to them, and discovered their issues, hopes, and dreams. Then went about telling the Gospel story in a way that connects with those issues and hopes. Therefore, it seems important for members to be learning how to listen to their community and look for signs of God at work. It is possible that focusing on one’s relationship with God and each other will naturally strengthen relationship with the wider community. The risk is, if people are not intentional in looking outward (by doing community-facing activities) then the Church could become insular, but it is hoped that if members are becoming more like Christ, it will mean they naturally look outward and participate in the *misseo dei*.

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63 Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby, and Aaron Kennedy, eds., *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 470.

CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The strategy to develop a church-plant model that fosters community and discipleship activities that are attractive to de-churched New Zealanders was simple. It was to include de-churched people in the identification of activities that would potentially form Christ-like individuals and authentic community, rather than prescribe activities from the leadership of a church. De-churched people were interviewed in 2015, potential activities described in Chapter 4 were identified and engaged with over the year between Spring 2015 and Spring 2016, and participants were interviewed again. This chapter describes these activities, experiences, and learning of the participants, reflects on those experiences in why they were fruitful (or not) and evaluates the experiences drawing some implications for church models in New Zealand.

The participants of this project were de-churched people from various church backgrounds as described in the stories in Chapter 1. They had connected with the Kiwi Church community expressing a desire to reconnect with God, and to grow in their faith. I took the role of team coach, conducting interviews, and then working with participants identifying possible activities that would be helpful in this context. The process of
reflection followed the theological reflection method\(^1\) of exploring a theological catalyst, studying the ministry context, and theological analysis. This analysis engaged with Scripture, theological heritage and New Zealand culture. The theological catalyst in this project was an intentional process, although it also emerged from the experiences of individuals wanting to nurture their faith, and to investigate the decline of the Church, as described in the Introduction. This period of reflection led to the ministry implications described in this chapter.

Resources

The learning environment was created as part of the life of Kiwi Church, a Presbyterian congregation in Christchurch. The church is a young church plant created to intentionally connect with people not in formal expressions of church, particularly those who have never had any connection with church. In these early years Kiwi Church consists of mostly de-churched people, with some being out of formal church life for over a decade. Each of the activities identified in this project were explored as part of the life of Kiwi Church.

A significant factor of this project was to determine what activities help form individuals and communities, therefore it was important to assess if individuals grew. Two approaches from Ammerman’s *Studying Congregations*\(^2\) were chosen to measure this growth: Direct Observation and Interviewing.\(^3\) I created the questionnaire for

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\(^1\) Kurt Fredrickson, “Week 1: The Doctoral Project,” Fuller Theological Seminary.


\(^3\) Ibid., 199, 200.
participants at the beginning of the project, and at the end, with the final questionnaire referencing what I observed to correct any inadequacies of the observation.\textsuperscript{4} I am the senior leader in the congregation, which posed a risk that members would present themselves in a way they wished to be seen by a senior leader,\textsuperscript{5} therefore respondents’ answers were aligned with other responses and observations to check consistency. The questions in each interview were of an unstructured, ethnographic nature\textsuperscript{6} starting with general questions and allowing the conversation to flow on its own.

It soon became clear that assessing how a member had grown in their discipleship had problems. Assessment tools were evaluated to ascertain if they could be used in this particular context, but it was found that they were based on certain assumptions of what it means to be a mature Christian. For example, questions were suggested such as: how often does the participant read their Bible? How often do they pray, attend worship, and meet with others in a small group? What, and how many areas in the church do they serve in? The problem this presented was that this type of language and assessment of an individual’s growth was part of the reason the de-churched had left church, and was a very Christendom model of measurement. It was precisely the type of drive for calculability that John Drane critiques, and as described in Chapter 2, he suggests a more discerning question regarding growth is not, “how many of us are there?” but “how much

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 204.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 206.
like Christ has we become?"\(^7\) A new evaluation of growth needed to be developed that would be consistent with the methodology of this project.

It seemed important that any evaluation of growth needed to be relationally based, which in itself is very subjective. It would be like asking “do you love your wife more?” and while there would be a number of expected outward expressions that indicate the answer to the question, only the person being asked can know in their heart the answer. While it is subjective, it was decided for the purposes of the project that this was the most appropriate approach. Members of The Evangelical Covenant Church, which grew out of Lutheran Pietism in Europe, ask each other “Are you alive in Jesus?”\(^8\) This question focusing on the present day is more specific than a general question such as “Have you grown?” It is relationally based and consistent with the discipleship approach of being yoked with Jesus. The participants were asked this question, in conjunction with “Do you think you have grown as a follower of Jesus?” and if applicable, “In what ways?” and then the discussion allowed to flow from there.

**Analysis of Results**

This section describes each of the activities explored, the observations by the author and reflections of the participants. All of the participants felt that they had grown as followers of Jesus in some way over the previous twelve-to-eighteen months, although some were unsure at first. Rebecca said, “I think I’m maturing... I am becoming more authentic in the last year. I am less a people pleaser style person... that is part of what

\(^7\) Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church*, 47.

\(^8\) Conversation with Kurt Fredrickson, Associate Dean for Doctor of Ministry and Continuing Education, Fuller Theological Seminary, December 7 2015.
God is helping to do."  

9 After initial hesitant answers, further prompting asking the question in different ways resulted in participants realising they had grown, and felt they enjoyed closer relationships with others. John said reflecting on Jesus being alive in him, “I am more alive definitely than eighteen months ago, in the sense that in my own head space whether it is driving to work or mowing the lawns, I think about God stuff and where I’m at and where others are at. . . . I think the level of enquiry is slowly but surely increasing.”

10 In a written response to my performance review, John shared, “Despite being a bit of a scumbag at times I feel genuinely more acceptable to God now than ever before and Darryl has been an important part of this realization. Not too many tears or prayers but lots of debate, sharing doubts, dismay and disillusionment with each other.”

Jane said, “So I think my general awareness of God has grown, thinking about God or where other people are at, what they have or don’t have. Does that mean I’ve grown? I don’t know.”

12 While Richard felt he had grown previously, in recent months this had plateaued as life got busy, and he acknowledged he had not connected as often with the gatherings that included contemplative exercises. The contemplative had not yet become an every-day habit, and he openly acknowledged that he knew if he wanted to grow he needed to be more intentional. While he reflected on this as important, he did not seem to have any sense of failure regarding this, knowing that his spirituality was no longer a set of rules or expectations. He sensed a freedom in being himself, and a desire

9 Rebecca, final interview, November 20, 2016.

10 John, final interview, December 28, 2016.


12 Jane, final interview, December 28, 2016.
to re-visit the spiritual experiences and include them in his everyday life as he knew they would nurture his faith and relationship with God. This in itself was good progress, as previously there would have been a sense of burden or failure associated with this. In saying that, Richard had grown in others ways, and when asked about his relationship with others in the church community his response was a definitive “Absolutely, completely,” adding that relationships were much more authentic.\textsuperscript{13} He continued, “I think we have grown as a community and personally speaking [I] have developed a love for community and everyone in the community.”\textsuperscript{14}

When Richard and John initially expressed their uncertainty on if they had grown, they automatically defaulted to a previous way of measuring growth by asking themselves if they read their Bible more, or had quiet times. In hindsight, if it was anticipated how difficult this would be to create questions that measured growth suitable to this context, and for the participants to answer well, more time would have been spent discussing this at the beginning. This is a key lesson for any future connecting with de-churched people. The question, “Is Jesus more alive in you,” took some coaching and discussion before it made sense to the participants.

The activity most distinctive from customary church programs was the hike in the foothills of the Southern Alps. The Canterbury region of New Zealand has mountains, coastline, lakes, rivers, native bush, and forests with a myriad of options for walking and hiking. Rebecca is very experienced in hiking and chose a walk in the high country of New Zealand of approximately two hours each way. A group of twenty-four people, aged

\textsuperscript{13} Richard, final interview, December 19, 2016.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
between eight to their early fifties, tramped to a wide alpine valley, talking and sharing stories along the way. The track only allowed for walking in single file, and over the four-hour time period of walking, people moved around constantly as they stopped and enjoyed the views. As a result people got to know each other more as stories were told of family of origin, life experiences, hurts, hopes, and dreams.

In the valley the group stood and young people read the words of Psalm 148. As it was read people looked around at the hills and mountains, and then spent approximately ten minutes in silence while invited to look and notice things around them, with the question, “Where is God?” They were then invited to share what they had noticed with the group. Everyone talked about specific things they noticed from a distant waterfall, a mountain peak in shadow, birds, and valleys. The silence seemed quite profound to me as there seemed to be a sense of unity and common purpose in being together in silence. Feedback from people suggested they felt close to God and each other, reflecting on the fact that God is not only in a building; they experienced a real sense of all creation giving glory to God as the Psalmist describes (Ps 19).

Participants responded positively to the hike. Richard said, “Awesome, loved it, felt closer to God and closer to others in the community.” Annie said: “It’s helps to balance out your life, and having those activities brings you back to what’s important and real, as in nature . . . and I like the being still and just listening and waiting and that sort of thing, and in nature I think its easier to do that, and to see the beauty of Gods creation and you’re reminded about how big and awesome and creative he is.” Andrew reflected, “It seemed to be a good vibe. It seemed to be an adventure. There was an element of

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15 Annie, final interview, December 19, 2016.
danger and adventure that bonds people together.” He felt the whole day, including the car ride to the mountains, helped nurture relationships and a sense of community. Rebecca, however, did not feel like it helped her feel any closer to God, which was interesting given that she initiated the activity. She was focused on the detail of organizing the activity, the wellbeing and safety of the participants, which carried a sense of responsibility. This in itself brought a sense of purpose as she said,

It was one of the first things [in the life of the church community] I felt like I contributed to with my skills, and using my gifts that honored God. It [the hike] wasn’t challenging at all for me, the thing that was challenging was leading a group that was very mixed and just learning how to cater for them. It was really God with everyone else because I think that it was so good for me to see people appreciating the outdoors. The logistics were easy but it seemed to have a big impact on people who don’t get out of town much; that was encouraging. It was worthwhile, I felt blessed by serving. It was really worth that effort.

Rebecca felt blessed by serving the community, helping her grow in a sense of purpose and belonging. The response of the others towards her was encouraging as she was honored and appreciated, and it seemed to contribute to her growing sense of authenticity. It is vital to create an equalitarian culture that allows people to contribute in natural ways, to help foster a more holistic spirituality.

John and Jane wanted to meet monthly with a meal, and be intentional about connecting “vertically with God,” and as a result John named this gathering “Vertical 1.” Each month seven or eight people would have a meal together, hosted by one of the couples, and share their stories about life. During this time a number of the members were going through very difficult circumstances and freely shared details of their

16 Andrew, final interview, November 20, 2016.
17 Rebecca, final interview, November 20, 2016.
struggles. At some point in the evening an activity was shared together, often a meditation on a Gospel story, or a question about God. John reflected that “Vertical 1 is good in the sense that I feel like its something we’ve created, so we share meals and I don’t feel like we’re are being ‘worked on’ by a paternalistic other, it’s a community of normal people that stuff happens [in their lives], and different people come in and you have to make it [the gathering] work.” He described the gatherings as an ongoing conversation, which he liked, as it was not an event with prescribed and expected outcomes. It was interesting for him to name the gathering as a “conversation,” language that is relational and suggests a more intimate activity. He continued,

So you know you’re going to a certain conversation and there’s a certain enquiry—like there’s an enquiry of God, so its keeps calling you forward . . . it’s just the consistency of the conversation that is coming up—its pretty helpful . . . we want to be there [at Vertical 1], its part of our pathway and story about what we want to create more for ourselves, [which includes] is being more Christian and available to God . . . So I think what has been shared has been equitable and real, been quite present. Its not like you turn up and you [speaking to me] go through the roles and spinning out something scriptural and you tell us how we are meant to be and we align to it or we don’t.\(^\text{18}\)

He felt the freedom to share anything, and the respectfulness from others with no sense of judgment, or attempts to try to “fix” him, “does it gives permission for me to be honest, and to explore. It is safe, and its endorsing of my own spirituality.”\(^\text{19}\)

Jane felt meeting together regularly and talking about God helped her increase in her awareness of God: “I enjoy it. I quite like being contemplative. I think of the times when you’ve read that [Scripture] story and you ask what do you think was happening – I

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\(^\text{18}\) John, final interview, December 28, 2016.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid.
quite like that, it gives me time to think about things.”

Jane acknowledged that she is quiet during these conversations, often thinking things but not sharing them with others. She said, “That’s just my confidence and saying something and wanting to speak and think that what I have to say might be interesting or not.”

It was interesting to observe that one evening John initiated prayer. Even though he still expressed doubt about God and prayer, he felt that following a particularly meaningful conversation, he wanted the group to pray, suggesting relationship and trust had been built. For the de-churched, worship needs to follow relationship, when in their experience worship is usually the priority in church. Others not involved in the formal interviews, who remained members of a large Pentecostal church as they attended Vertical 1, said that they found these conversations and reflective times significant in their Christian life, more-life giving than their normal Sunday service. They appreciated the authenticity of the relationships and the opportunity to connect with God in ways not experienced before.

One final observation of Vertical 1 is that ownership of the gathering seemed to be enhanced by a member of the group giving a name to it, rather than the minister.

Richard and Annie wanted to join together for a barbecue where people gathered for a meal in a very relaxed, social environment that is very familiar to most New Zealanders. At the BBQ people would enjoy a drink, for some that included alcohol, which in itself helped break down barriers of what people expected in church. After the

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20 Jane, final interview, December 28, 2016.

21 Ibid.

22 Conversation with Diane and David, November 16, 2016.
meal there was a reflection on a story focused on the person and role of Jesus, and people had the opportunity to discuss the reflection with others. Over time I noticed a depth of relationships occurring with conversations among people becoming more authentic and intimate, covering topics that would not normally be had in social situations. One example of this was a group of men discussing sexuality and how to parent their sons in the Internet age of easy access pornography. Men between the ages of early 40s to 82 discussed various strategies without any sense of one telling another what to do. These conversations were wonderful examples of people doing life together. Richard loves the BBQ gathering, describing it as a great connection time, and contributed to the authenticity of the relationships he described earlier. Two men not interviewed as part of the project said when leaving the BBQ that, “I finally feel like I belong in a church community,” and “I still have a lot of doubts about God, but I am always pleased I came.”

Andrew and Rebecca were interested in exploring a “Way of Life,” which led to a number of conversations about the idea and gauging the impact of that on community formation. It took more time than expected for the Way of Life to be developed and owned by the group. I had suggested the idea twice in the previous year; however Andrew and Rebecca visited Lindisfarne, Holy Island, in the United Kingdom, where they met with a member of the Aidan and Hilda community and heard firsthand how this initiative formed a community among dispersed people. This experience gave impetus to

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25 Roger, personal interview, March 6, 2016.
the idea and the group agreed to experiment with it together. The group needed time to own the idea before actual rules could be identified, possibly due to expectations of previous church leaders to adhere to certain church practices (for example Sunday attendance), possibly due to the general New Zealand culture of being independent, or simply because no one had ever been part of a church community that had attempted this type of initiative; they needed time to get used to the idea. Everyone agreed it was difficult to form genuine community when members lived in different places of the city, so felt following the experience of a “dispersed community” could bear fruit.

Due to the time it took to develop the Way of Life, at the time of writing this project the conversation had only been in place around four months; not long enough to test the effectiveness of sustaining authentic community, and some members expect it may take years to test it fully. Richard said “Because we’ve been more intentional about that Way of Life [conversation] and what that means for the community, we have been thinking about that quite a lot in background mode.” He felt the conversation was helping to form community, even though a Way of Life had not been formalized to that point, saying “I’ve noticed that becoming intentional about that conversation is stepping the community forward . . . its about being intentional about identifying those values and that forms community.”

The Way of Life from the community of Aidan and Hilda was referred to for ideas, but the participants identified a majority of the rules to commit to (see Appendix A for details). To help protect the initiative from becoming a list of rules, the group

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followed Simon Reed’s lead in identifying key questions that relate to the rule as an aid in keeping each other accountable. One example of this, was agreeing to live sustainably for the good of the planet’s resources, the question members would ask themselves when they met together was “Are you using the earth’s resources in a sustainable way?”

Contemplation was immediately attractive to group members as all acknowledged their pace of life was not sustainable and wanted space for reflection. A regular evening gathering was created and Dwelling in Scripture (imaginative engagement with a Gospel story developed by St Ignatius Loyola) and centering prayer (a modernized method of silent prayer based on Lectio Divina) was practiced. An hour of silence was practiced at a weekend away, and a time of silence was introduced in the fortnightly worship gatherings. During these activities a sense of unity was experienced, and people’s demeanor relaxed. Exploring meditation and reflective exercises helped Richard and Annie both grow in their awareness of God. Annie said “I think for me over two years I’d say there is a very slow steady growth,” and various activities that she had intentionally introduced into her life, and the reflective exercises, including silence and stillness, in the church gatherings helped her be more conscious of God in her day-to-day life than before. Richard said, “I love it [the contemplative], it’s awesome, and also quite new to me. Prior to that stage I had never really come across on any in my journey, which I would say part of why we love the Kiwi Church journey, it does seem more authentic,

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27 Reed, Creating Community, loc 616.
28 Roxburgh, Joining God, loc 1325.
29 Gravity, “Centering Prayer.”
30 Annie, personal interview, December 19, 2016.
more engaging, more getting in contact with what life is really about.”

Dwelling in Scripture became a key activity in the gatherings. Annie said, it was “quite good because when I read the bible I don’t always comprehend things fully, but having it slow and drawing pictures in your mind helps you top be in the space and help you notice things you don’t normally notice when you just read it.”

Centering prayer was adding value to peoples’ lives, with Annie commenting “I like the simpleness of it, and clearing space that it creates in your mind and be able to filter everything out and stop for a while.”

One participant who was not part of the formal interview process for this project said he practiced centering prayer during the week and found it helped him relax and cope more effectively in his everyday life.

The concept of Soul Friends received a similar reaction to the Way of Life, with some uncertainty and misgiving. Initially members knew the benefits of being honest and accountable with another, but were not sure about another person dispensing any form of penance. An analogy of the Life-coach was helpful for members to grasp the idea, in that the Soul Friend was a holistic life-coach, which helped the person grow in their Christ-likeness. While these conversations seemed fruitful, there were no formal Soul Friends appointed. There were, however, more intentional connecting between individuals contributing to participants sense of authenticity in relationships.


32 Annie, personal interview, December 19, 2016.

33 Ibid.

34 Russell, conversation with author, September 22, 2015.
Learning

There were many positive observations from participants of the activities, and by myself. It is important to look deeper at why these activities seemed to connect well for the people involved. Two significant areas of learning, which seem particularly relevant for New Zealand culture, are outdoor theology and hospitality, which deserve closer attention. Other areas of learning will be referred to briefly.

The hike saw people outdoors experiencing God being revealed through creation, and enjoying closer relationships with each other. While both good reasons to participate in this type of activity, there seemed to be more going on than simply celebrating God’s creation together. Diana Butler Bass provides some insight. She studies church decline and suggests it is not about a decline in belief or spirituality, but more about how people understand and experience God, moving from a vertical understanding to a horizontal one, discovering God everywhere. She said the Industrial Revolution has, amongst others things, “fundamentally transformed how we understood the dirt. The soil became an object to be managed (in the case of productive farms) or removed (in the cases of mining and urban development). Over the decades, we moved to cities away from the land, severing both spiritual and physical connections humans had known through most of history. People became estranged from the land; the dirt became an ‘it.’”35 She says generations before the Industrial Revolution there would be no question about God and the soil, consistent with the Celts. The question for these generations was not “where is God” for they knew that God was all around them, in all things. She continues:

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Theologians call this sort of intimate with-ness “panentheism,” a word that sounds like “pantheism” but is changed by the introduction of en in the middle. Panentheism is the idea that God is with or in all things. A nuance to be sure, but an important one. Panentheism recognizes the distinctions between things, at the same time that it affirms the indwelling force of spirit (typically called God) that draws all things into relationship with all other things. To put it simply, a panentheist says, “God is not a tree; a tree is not God. But God is with the tree; and the tree is with God” (prepositions matter).36

Celts happily lived in the local community, and looked for ways to affirm the local culture rather than judge it, and “went with the flow of human patterns in as far as they were not intrinsically godless.”37 They then went a step further and “poured corrective truth into the gaps of this pagan religion”38 following Paul’s example in Athens (Acts 17). This applies significantly to the outdoors. New Zealanders love being outdoors, and acknowledge God’s creation in their worship, but it does not go much further and is largely unspoken about in the Church. The Church needs to grow in its understanding that “there is no blurring of distinction between Creator and created, no worship of nature for its own sake but rather a wonderful sense that the whole cosmos is in theophany, a marvelous revelation of the goodness and wonder and creativity of God.”39 The Church could lead the way in enjoying the outdoors as culture already does. The Church can lead outdoor education, adventure sports, ecological awareness, and environment preservation. It would identify many connection points between God and Kiwi people giving opportunity to connect others with the Gospel.

36 Ibid., loc 713.
37 Simpson, Exploring Celtic Spirituality, 225.
38 Balzer, Thin Places, 29.
Butler Bass continues saying the revolution turned land into an “object to be managed instead of a relationship to be experienced,” which made it easier to abuse the land. The intuitive God-given connection with the land was separated by culture and theology. Christians feel close to God in the outdoors, but have grown up in a world where God was found (mostly) in a building. She writes, “The soil-y God was left to mystics, monks, women, and mostly the poor—people on the margins of the religious community whose orthodoxy has always been suspect and whose institutional power was negligible.” She suggests that church decline is part of the “old God” (approached vertically through the intuitional church) fading from view and “a new God, one of intimate longing and infinite love, experienced and proclaimed by seers and prophets through the ages, has risen just over the horizon. It is a new spiritual day.” She tells the story of an Episcopal worship service that had “reoriented the direction of worship and contemplation. Instead of lifting our attention toward heaven, we were invited to see the world around us more deeply, to consider both nature and human community in new ways. The distant patriarchal God was gone, replaced by the presence of the Spirit who dwells with creation and in us.” That seems to be what happened in the alpine valley that day. People sensed that God was there with them. One could not help but imagine God smiling on that gathering.


41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., loc 4171.

43 Ibid., loc 4231.
Participants had similar reflections from the “Vertical 1” monthly meal and the BBQ, relating to the spiritual disciplines of hospitality and celebration. It is difficult to articulate what it is about hospitality that enables individuals and community to be formed, as on the face of it, it is a very normal day-to-day experience, but something much deeper happens that emanates from the heart of God. Graham Redding, the Principal of the PCANZ training centre for ministers, explored the concept that hosting people at one’s table connected deeply with the communion table observing, “They are reminded of a deeper and more profound dimension to hospitality – a dimension that originates in God and overflows from the throne of Grace, overcoming sin, binding people together in a reconciling embrace and serving as a sign of God’s intention for the world.”

Dave Dobbin, one of the most prominent and much loved singer-songwriters in New Zealand, wrote the song “Welcome Home” aimed at immigrants into the country, with a key line “See we’ve made a place for you now.” It touches the very heart of God who has made a place at God’s table for humanity, and practicing hospitality and welcoming people into one’s home and to one’s table speaks directly to what it means to be human, to be welcomed, accepted and loved.

The pace of life in New Zealand is increasing, and a common complaint of being too busy is often heard in conversations. Hospitality forces the hosts and the community to go against this trend and create space just to be together. Roxburgh comments, “A missional environment is formed by the practice of hospitality. . . . The purpose of such invitation is to treat the stranger as a guest, to experience the gracious table of God. Why

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45 Dave Dobbin, “Welcome Home” (Sony BMG, 2005).
is hospitality such an important practice? It requires one to stop a busy, demanding routine for a period of time and focus attention on the stranger for the sake of the stranger.\textsuperscript{46} Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger make similar observations when researching emerging churches noting that many have moved hospitality “from a Christian extra to a central practice.”\textsuperscript{47} Church communities understood welcoming others (particularly strangers) as welcoming Christ, and taught members how to practice hospitality as often the skills required were not intuitive, or had not been modeled for them.\textsuperscript{48}

One church described their experience with a person from another religion, and rather than discussing their differences, or trying to convert him, they “gave him a positive experience of a Christian community, which in itself is an important act of mission,”\textsuperscript{49} intentionally displaying values of respect, humility and inclusivity. Roger, an elderly member of the BBQ community who openly expresses his distrust of the institutional church, said when leaving one day, “I always feel better leaving here than when I came.”\textsuperscript{50} At a deep level Roger felt the love of God through others by simply making space for him at the meal table. Churches are prepared to display the hospitality of Jesus and include and welcome others and “leave the outcome in God’s hands.”\textsuperscript{51}

Brene Brown, affirms humanity and the simple need for each person to be noticed and to


\textsuperscript{47} Gibbs and Bolger, \textit{Emerging Churches}, 120.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{50} Roger, personal interview, October 4, 2015.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
be connected to another: “After spending a decade studying belonging, authenticity, and shame, I can say for certain that we are hardwired for connection—emotionally, physically, and spiritually.”

The meal table and the BBQ are effective places for people to connect and to belong.

Hospitality creates an environment of listening. When Alan Jamieson followed up on de-churched people he researched, he made a number of observations: “I believe the church needs to learn how to listen: listen to people and listen to our culture . . . until they are heard they cannot hear!”

Listening includes being non-judgmental, face-value (it is their truth), provisional (knowing that their view may change over time), listening for the unsaid (and maybe naming it), long-term (people’s faith questions are not resolved quickly), painful, (not minimizing pain), and incarnational (often helpful if they can be listened to by someone who represents, at least to some degree, the organization, the faith, even the God whom they are questioning, railing against and attacking). This kind of listening is powerful. At the meal table and BBQ, life stories are told, and people who are listened to, experience love of others. Roxburgh observes, “Jesus’ instructions in Luke 10 have to do with entering, receiving hospitality, and dwelling with the other. The practice at the heart of these activities is listening. . . .”

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52 Brown, Daring Greatly, loc 1873.


54 Roxburgh, Joining God, loc 1234.
need to be heard, and instead practice hearing. Specifically, we are listening to one another, listening to God, and listening to the neighbor.”

A meal and a BBQ naturally lead to the practice of celebration, which at its core involved expressing gratitude. Nouwen describes celebration as “the acceptance of life in a constantly increasing awareness of its preciousness,” affirming one’s present condition, remembering one’s past in a healthy way, and looking ahead to the future in expectation. It is a simple state of thankfulness for life, and can be celebrated in many ways such as going to the beach, having a good meal, or going for a walk. The people of Israel structured their year around festivals to remind them of God’s goodness. It is possible that joy is the most significant aspect lacking in a Christian’s life, and as it grows in people’s lives, it will be something that the average New Zealander will find hard to ignore. John Ortberg writes, “True joy, as it turns out, comes only to those who have devoted their lives to something greater than personal happiness.” One further observation regarding the meal and BBQ is the simple fellowship that is enjoyed. Willard observes, “Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence much better than scattered individuals.” At these gatherings people cared for each other, and it was an effective place to begin to express the “one another’s” of Scripture.

55 Ibid., 1278.
56 Nouwen, Creative Ministry, 95.
57 John Ortberg, The Life You’ve Always Wanted (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 68.
Participants found the various contemplative activities helpful, and understanding why comes from the monastic movement. Nouwen wrote, “Contemplative Prayer deepens in us the knowledge that we are already free, that we have already found a place to dwell, that we already belong to God, even though everything and everyone around us keep suggesting the opposite.”\textsuperscript{59} He continues, “Our society is... a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul.”\textsuperscript{60} Solitude is not a place (as some may expect) to rest, recover, and get back out in the fight; it is a “furnace of transformation,”\textsuperscript{61} “the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born.”\textsuperscript{62} It is there people can face their sin, show their wounds, meet with Christ and allow him to heal. He urges followers to create a desert to withdraw to every day and “dwell in the healing presence of the Lord,”\textsuperscript{63} and become compassionate towards others as they die to their neighbor. Nouwen writes, “Thus in and through solitude we do not move away from people... we move closer to them.” However, “the goal is not people. It is God.”\textsuperscript{64} Merton helps bring understanding that one does not to go into the desert in order to be extraordinary, the “result would be nothing but self-contemplation, and self-comparison with the negative standard of the world one has abandoned” and solitude seekers would go “out of their heads.” Rather, the ones who

\textsuperscript{59} Henri Nouwen, \textit{In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership} (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 43.

\textsuperscript{60} Nouwen, \textit{The Way of the Heart}, 13.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 16.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 18.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 30.
live to an old age went to the desert “to be themselves, their ordinary selves, and to forget a world that divided them from themselves.”

Meditation differs from silence and solitude in that it is an intentional practise to commune with God and could take the form of meditation on passages of Scripture, on creation, and on current events. Richard Foster provides the definition “Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word. It is that simple.” Tools such as Lectio Divina help with meditation. Foster continues, “Often meditation will yield insights that are deeply practical, almost mundane,” such as instructions on how to deal with daily situations and “meditation sends us into our ordinary world with greater perspective and balance.”

Leading the Dwelling in Scripture activity was difficult, and unpredictable, as everyone brought his or her previous Christian experience to the exercise. Some engage with it in a cognitive level, and want to exegete the passage and think about what it means. The prevailing church culture has valued this activity over the intuitive, emotional response to the Scripture narrative. It takes time to deconstruct the way people treat the Bible, as their black-and-white answers, claiming truth about the passage, can result in discouraging others to speak. For example, at “Vertical 1,” Jane not contributing frustrated one person. I observed over the time of the project, instances where the participant who was frustrated, expressed a certain view of what a Scripture meant, seemingly at the exclusion of other possible views. His view was expressed with an

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66 Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 21.
apparent prescriptive understanding on what it means to be a Christian. This seemed to contribute to the environment of undermining others’ confidence.

The treatment of Scripture, and how it is engaged with by the de-churched is a vital component of growing, both as a follower of Jesus in faith and in community. For the participants in this project, their experience of interpreting Scripture has been to cognitively understand it, and learn how to apply it to their life. This expectation of Scripture deserves further critique, as it seems a transactional approach to Scripture, as opposed to a relational one. Approaching Scripture as God’s living word needs to be exploring one’s relationship with God, and not a list of applications to improve one’s life. This insight is vital to name for the de-churched to bring freedom to engage with Scripture in a more life giving way. One would not expect other relationships, for example between a husband and a wife, to be measured on how they are applied to each other, and improve each other’s life. However, in the couple relating to each other, given a healthy environment, one could expect them to have a positive impact on each other, which leads them to grow. If Scripture was related to, as opposed to applied, an appropriate approach to it becomes one of sitting with, listening to, questioning, and wondering.

Leadership

Perhaps the most significant learning from this project came in the experience of leadership. It became clear during this time the type of leadership I had been trained in was not sufficient preparation to nurture this type of community. As noted in Chapter 2, Presbyterian churches tend to focus on the models of “Herald” or “Servant” in the
framework proposed by Dulles, which requires leaders to prioritize preaching and serving. Additional expectations of ministers in the denomination include: formulation and communication of vision; enabling and implementing change; and leading and influencing people to foster their enthusiasm. Dulles suggests that leadership of a “mystical communion” needs to focus on the encouragement of relationships, and the formation of “genuine Christian community” rather than the teaching of doctrine or administering of sacraments.

The de-churched people interviewed said they were not interested in a leader as the expert dispensing truth of what Scripture means and then a prescription on how people are to live. They wanted the community to be egalitarian, and a culture that gave permission to doubt and question. Perfection is not required of the leader by the de-churched, only authenticity with people being real and honest. They are not interested in a “hero” type leader that identifies the vision of the church for everyone to rally around. During the analysis phase of this project, I went through the denominations’ review process for ministers. John participated in the review and observed:

I think the formulation and communication of vision has been owned by us collectively and is gradually being worked out in an organic type of way. Our vision is loosely a small group of people who want to be connected with one another and God. We regularly, by way of intention or breakdown, reflect on what we are about and as an output our vision is gradually defined/refined. I (possibly we) don’t look to Darryl as “the minister” who has to have a vision and be the principle leader for everything. I don’t see Darryl as the “Minister”, I think we all are, and I personally don’t expect him to “enable change and make sure it is implemented and accepted by others”. Because we collectively own and have responsibility for our group the enabling of change is a slightly more chaotic and

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69 PCANZ Ministry Development Review questionnaire.

beautiful process and experience. The idea that the Minister is to “lead and influence” our efforts and keep me “enthusiastic” seems a little weird to me or at least a top down type of business model where you have a vision carrier, then mission formulation, enrolment of the troops and implementation strategies etc. From my perspective this just isn’t how our V1 community is. Darryl’s influence is certainly considerable on my life personally but mainly through conversations whilst at a pub having dinner or unloading piles of firewood. It’s his genuine interest in our lives, and him letting us into his world, that bares influence. . . . He doesn’t come to our V1 community with answers, drivers or agendas but rather as an equal part of the community.71

John being part of my ministry review highlighted an additional aspect of the life of the denomination that requires deconstruction. The expectations of ministers in the PCANZ, as identified in the review process, reinforces the expectation that ministers provide vision, direction, prescribes how to live, and lead change. To lead in this type of context, I needed to deconstruct the model of leadership received in training, and look for resources to aid the formation of community.

Forming community was not as simple as it sounded. While de-churched people did not want authoritarian leadership, many of them were also not used to participating themselves in the leadership of a community. Not only did nurturing this type of community journey require a different leadership model to one trained in as an institutional minister, institutional members, while wanting authentic community, also lacked experience in forming it. There still seemed to be an expectation for the leader to lead, which was counterintuitive as community forming requires participation from everyone involved.

Three helpful images of leadership emerged that aided community formation: modeling, environmentalist, and storytelling. Jesus modeled how to live in the Kingdom,

\[^{71}\text{Ibid.}\]
and history has shown that disciples of Jesus have followed the model given by others. One example is that those following St Anthony were inspired by “simply seeing his conduct, many aspired to become imitators of his way of life,”72 and thousands followed him into the desert. Leaders of a de-churched community are called first and foremost to follow Christ, grow in Christ, and make disciples as opposed to build a church or run a program. This invites leaders to participate in the life of the community showing evidence of fruit in their own lives, not to simply teach and preach. While this sounds an obvious expectation of one’s local church leader, if the role was simply teaching and preaching it is possible not to live the Jesus life, or grow to be more Christ-like, while doing it. The minister in the PCANZ is referred to as the “teaching elder,” which prioritizes the activity of preaching and teaching, which possibly decreases the importance of relationship. Some in the church would discourage a minister having intimate relational connections with people in the congregation as this risks undermining the professional aspect of the minister’s role. This model seems counter to the image of Abbots and Abbesses living the “Way of Life” and serving in the village. This project does not have the scope to critique the leadership model of the PCANZ in detail, but it suffices to observe that the current role of the “teaching elder” contributes to the organisation of the church prioritizing activity over relationship.

Tim Keel offers these insights for leaders:

What if leaders saw themselves less as administrators and more as environmentalists or ecologists who help to imagine and nurture the space under their influence in order that life might grow from it – not by imposing something from the outside in but rather from the ground up, in the same way that through

dependence on the Holy Spirit the manifestation of a godly life is fruit growing naturally from a healthy tree? 

An environmentalist works to maintain a healthy atmosphere for people to grow, like a farmer. Both Hirsch and Peterson use the farmer metaphor when describing the role of a leader, which depicts a person who creates the conditions for growth by tilling the soil, feeding it, weeding, sowing seeds, and watering. It requires patience, love, and understanding; God is the one who causes the seed to grow, not the leader. Ray Anderson’s insights into God creating ex nihilo (out of nothing) provide a context in which to “farm.” If a leader lived in the understanding that it is God who creates something out of nothing, it ensures against the need to set the agenda and allows God to. 

The parables of Jesus often had an agricultural theme suggesting the Kingdom grows like a plant, and Paul certainly had this understanding when he said “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth,” (1 Cor 3:6). A similar metaphor proposed by Drane is one of a midwife, described in Chapter 2. A midwife teacher, or midwife evangelist, focuses on the health and wellbeing of the individual or community and helps them deliver their own “spirituality into the world.”

Steve Taylor describes “Koru Theology” where the koru is the unfurling fern. In Maori culture it is the sign of new birth, and the young fern cannot grow unless it has


76 Drane, The McDonaldization of the Church, 205.

77 Steve Taylor, The Out of Bounds Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 48, 49.
direct access to sunlight. In the New Zealand native bush, other foliage would be cleared or burned to ensure the new fern growth had a chance to survive. Part of the environmentalists’ job is to clear the foliage above, which may still look attractive to the observer, but inhibits the new growth required. The process of deconstructing the understanding of faith by the de-churched, and understanding of church by leaders, could be an example of this bush clearing. The environment is critical for growth, and Hirsch asserts that all that is needed for church growth is already inside the current church, and rather than replace current practice, churches need to foster an environment that allows the latent DNA to emerge. His theory is that Kingdom DNA is missional and a healthy church will simply emerge given the right environment. With this in mind, an environmentalist is patient. She lovingly tends to plants and does not fret over lack of growth. She understands that healthy growth takes time, which is counter to the consumer-driven, quick fix culture of today. Patience was key in this project.

There were tasks to do, however, as any farmer would attest to. This concept, which took some time to understand, included different tasks to usual church leadership. Leaders need to be storytellers, they “say the word God accurately . . . and personally” to allow people to respond to the Kingdom. Drane writes, “After all, Jesus’ charisma derived not from trivialities of that sort, but from the simplicity and clarity of his message. He just told the truth, was not embarrassed to speak about God in simple language that even a child could understand, and welcomed to his side anyone with even

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78 Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 244.

79 Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 172.
the vaguest interest in what he was on about.”

Time needed to be taken to tell an alternative story to deconstruct the “conversion Gospel” that many Christians live by, and to cultivate the Kingdom imagination of the people of God. Teaching methods needed to evolve to be more imaginative and story based, and the perfect model for this is Jesus who spent most of his time asking questions or telling stories. The de-churched say, “The role of a pastor, explained our respondents, should be to explain, rather than judge.”

The Celts’ model of leadership saw the abbot as the teacher of the community. Aidan started the first school in Northumbria at Holy Island for twelve English boys and holistic Kingdom education was their priority. By tending to the environment which includes helping people know and understand, God will cause the seed to grow.

The environmentalist leader is concerned about space. Drane suggests, “Space will be the key factor in any rethinking of effective mission in today’s world, and we need to learn to be far more intentional than we have sometimes been about the kind of space in which we gather.” He gives the example, when people gather, notice where they are positioned and where the person leading the conversation from. It may be from above the people or among them, sending signals of who holds the power in the activity.

Roxburgh and Romanuk describe the leadership model of most churches as “Pastoral” and argue the type of leader required today is “Missional.” They describe a

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80 Drane, The McDonaldization of the Church, 188.

81 Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal why People are DONE with the Church but not their Faith (Group Publishing, 2015), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 778.


83 Drane, The McDonaldization of the Church, 105.

Pastoral leader as one who is expected to be at the meetings, provide the bulk of the care, has their time shaped by people’s needs, provides solutions, preaches and give answers, must be successful and be an expert in conflict resolution, recovery and people management. They suggest a missional leader who is a coach, one who equips and releases people into ministry, one who asks questions that cultivate imagination and creativity, preaches in a way that draws people into the story of God, facilitates, cultivates and creates an environment that releases and nourishes the missional imagination of people. They believe today’s faith communities need to be able to learn and discover new ways of being God’s people, which requires leadership that does not bring top-down solutions, but leads a “process that cultivates new imagination among people themselves,” with its foundation being able to “appropriately communicate the reality of God’s story.”\textsuperscript{85} In their research of emerging churches, Gibbs and Bolger have found common denominators in the leadership of these communities in that they are:

Leading in such a way that points to the presence of the kingdom – through servanthood and consensus expressed in collaboration – requires leaders to recognize that God’s kingdom always precedes them. They must lead as servants, facilitators and consensus builders. . . Within the church, many leaders represent a hierarchical and controlling understanding of leadership. This has resulted in a growing restlessness among many younger leaders who represent a culture of networking, permission giving and empowerment. . . .\textsuperscript{86} Emerging leaders . . . look to avoid modern forms of control at all costs. The key is that leaders emerge based on the activity at hand and are not the sole leaders of the group. All are welcome at the leadership table. Consensus decision making is the norm. If a leadership team is chosen, these leaders operate as spiritual directors, mentors and facilitators. . . .\textsuperscript{87} Modernity has taught leaders how to control, and Christians have adopted this practise rather than challenging it. . . How do we lead without control? How do we lead in such a way that we submit to the kingdom? How do

\begin{footnotes}{
\item[85]Ibid., 56.
\item[87]Ibid, 215.
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we lead so that every voice is heard, every gift is expressed, and a consensus is reached? The only acceptable tool for the leader who forgoes control is persuasion.\textsuperscript{88}

Volf draws his understanding of leadership from the Trinity observing that there is no one leader in the Godhead, no one in power over others and believes, “Within a community of perfect love between two persons who share all of the divine attributes, a notion of hierarchy and subordination is inconceivable.”\textsuperscript{89} He concludes that ecclesiastical office is to be exercised collegially: “The symmetrical reciprocity of the relationships of the Trinitarian persons finds its correspondence in the image of the church in which all members serve one another with their specific gifts of the Spirit in imitation of the Lord and through the power of the Father. Like the divine persons, they all stand in a relation of mutual giving and receiving.”\textsuperscript{90} George Cladis follows similar thoughts in his work on team leadership. He proposes the team following the image of the \textit{perichoresis} (image of the Trinity meaning ‘circle dance’), “requiring harmony, shifting together, a kind of give and take in dynamic flow. This movement is a kind of collaboration, a sharing and giving, in purposeful rhythm.”\textsuperscript{91} This is a very effective picture of the dynamics of a team working together in community serving the body.

These reflections on leadership in theory seem biblically sound, attractive in theory, and consistent with the ecclesiology expressed in Chapter 3, which leads to identifying the characteristics of the environment, which leads to participants growing in

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{89} Volf, \textit{After Our Likeness}, 217.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 219.
\textsuperscript{91} George Cladis, \textit{Leading the Team-Based Church} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 93.
their discipleship and relationships with each other. Jamieson suggests nurturing an environment that is “leaver sensitive” by providing places for people to explore, question and doubt; help understand a theology of journey; come alongside them and resource them while in their dark places; help provide models of other theological understandings; provide models of a honest life rather than a list of expectations; and provide room for emotions and intuitions. Fostering an environment like this could be attractive to many a spiritual seeker, and the inability for inherited model leaders to create this type of environment has contributed to many people leaving church (and possibly a barrier for people joining).

These images of leadership were wonderful on paper, but very difficult to foster in practice and there was tension within the group that I seemed to be passive and not doing what was expected. It took time and many conversations together describing and cultivating a healthy environment, plus exploring what it meant to have an environment that fostered growth. In addition to the conversations required to nurture a new environment, it was challenging to know what to actually do day-by-day. It was attractive to talk about environmental conditions, but as stated a number of times in this project, the leadership training received in the institutional model did not identify, nor develop the necessary skills for this type of role. Asked simply, how does a leader know what to do? Steve Taylor took a holistic approach to the leadership required for innovation suggesting that effective collaboration required a number of different leadership expressions: a servant, gardener, builder, resource manager, fool, and parent. He suggests twelve different tasks of the leader, notably the first on the list is listening. He writes, “When we...”

listen, we are putting aside our own agenda, and beginning with the people, groups and systems in which we participate. This is an act of service, in which the ‘we’ and the ‘other’ trump the ‘I’ and the ‘me.’” From the place of listening, a leader connects others together, and helps the community envision and explore.

Creating a healthy environment took subtle, but significant shifts in language and leadership posture. “Language shapes thought,” and by paying attention to the language used in the community, and intentionally asking questions, having conversations, listening, and in some cases correcting language, or introducing other ways of expression, the environment gradually changed. Any deliberate change in language required simplicity, not because people were unintelligent, but because a different way of seeing the church world took time to be discovered by people, rather than simply talking about it. There were several examples of the change in language or posture that were explored.

One of the main changes in language was to explore what it meant to accompany Jesus, rather than follow. Naming this kind of shift in language leads people to examine their predominant understanding of what it meant to follow Jesus, and then to explore what it would mean to accompany him in daily life. It helped participants deconstruct their own expectations of what it meant to become like Christ, which often included failure and frustration, and introduced an image of being yoked with Jesus, learning how to do life from him.


94 Ibid., Chapter 7.

95 Moynagh, Church for Every Context, 113.
Gatherings were given a name to reflect the nature of the activity to aid reframing what was at the center of the community’s’ life. The key example of this is that the fortnightly Sunday worship gathering was named “Thin Place,” using the Celtic notion of God being especially close, and a place that invites transformation in people as they connect with God.\(^{96}\) Naming the gathering required explanation of what “Thin Place” meant, helping form the culture of the gathering. It also meant that members did not “go to church” on a Sunday, they went to “Thin Place.” The phrase “where do you go to church” would have puzzled the first-century Christian\(^ {97}\) as “Christians do not go to church. They are Church – sometimes gathered, sometimes scattered, but always interdependent. For good or ill.”\(^ {98}\) Members were gently and light-heartedly corrected if they used the phrase going to church, which in time helped shift people’s understanding of what it meant to be church.

The participants were attracted to the concept of having relationship at the center of the community, not the Sunday worship service. Gibbs and Bolger write, “In Christendom, the Sunday meetings were the centre of corporate spiritual expression for the community. In a post-Christendom context . . . the practice of community forming itself is more central.”\(^ {99}\) It took time to attempt to nurture this type of environment as others in the community, and not the participants in this project, resisted the move to a more relational way of being. In hindsight, this was to be expected as they had spent their


\(^{97}\) Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 100.


\(^{99}\) Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 44.
entire Christian life with the Sunday worship service at the center of their understanding of church. The most resistant to the change were those who had only been out of a formal expression of church for a short time (if at all) and this process of deconstructing peoples’ expectations of the centrality of Sunday to a relational center continues repeatedly as Christians join the community. Pete Ward comments on this:

If we are to envisage a liquid church, then movement and change must be part of its basic characteristic. We need to let go of a static model of church that is based primarily on congregation and buildings. In its place we need to develop a notion of Christian community, worship, mission, and organization that is more flexible and responsive to change. The idea of flow is central in this shift in emphasis. Liquid church would work to express itself as a series of movements or flows. As with a liquid, there would be a spreading, oozing, spilling character to these flows.¹⁰⁰

Other language that was intentionally changed regarded the Kingdom of God. For many in the community the rhetoric of the need to “build and extend” the Kingdom was familiar, and this expectation had ceased to be an attraction to them in their previous church life and had moved to being more of a burden. When it is pointed out that the verbs “to build and to extend are not found in the New Testament grammar of the reign of God. The New Testament employs the words receive and enter,”¹⁰¹ it led to quite a different, and often energizing conversation. Participants felt pressure lifted as they realized growing the Kingdom was no longer their responsibility, which brought with it a sense of guilt and failure, and heard in a fresh way the invitation to join in with God whose responsibility it was to grow the Kingdom. These conversations helped create a


culture of invitation and response, rather than expectation of certain behavior and activity.

One example of the importance of a healthy environment is from the Vertical 1 experience. Jane expressed her lack of confidence when considering sharing during the Dwelling in Scripture activity. I observed that others expected Jane to contribute, an expectation leading to some frustration, and highlighted that their expectations were for her to be someone she is not able to be. They took offence at her silence, assuming it to mean she was disinterested, whereas it is about her confidence and uncertainty whether what she had to say is acceptable and meaningful. The environment is not safe for her, even though others would say it was and would be surprised to hear her say that as she appears to be confident overall. But there is something in Jane’s story that led her to think there was a certain intellectual or mature standard that needed to be reached, and with the risk of others’ reactions, she did not sense the environment was safe enough to speak.

This creates a complicated environment, which is not easy to facilitate. When one person speaks, and another reacts, it could cause the person to remain silent fearing that reaction again. This scenario rose the question of what part of Jane’s Christian story has made speaking in groups unsafe? It may not have happened in the Vertical 1 group, but the fear is transferred into this group form a previous experience. For Jane to grow in confidence, she needs others to accept her and create an environment for her to take a risk in speaking. What happens after she speaks will determine how she behaves next time she is faced with the opportunity to take another risk.
Creating a safe environment in New Zealand culture is challenging. Brown researches shame, and the effects it has on people, and encourages the reader to be courageously vulnerable:

As children we found ways to protect ourselves from vulnerability, from being hurt, diminished, and disappointed. We put on armor; we used our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as weapons; and we learned how to make ourselves scarce, even to disappear. Now as adults we realize that to live with courage, purpose, and connection—to be the person whom we long to be—we must again be vulnerable. We must take off the armor, put down the weapons, show up, and let ourselves be seen.¹⁰²

Brown acknowledges the significant courage required for a person to show others his true selves, including fears, insecurities, and failures, plus, in some cases his dreams and aspirations. It is vital that a church community finds ways for people to be themselves, and be accepted by others, requiring an environment that models vulnerability, and encourages people to take risks. This is a key role for the leader to nurture a safe environment for people.

One final environmental observation is the four-directional approach of the Church of England. It is a helpful framework, but incomplete. The experience of this project has shown the need to expand on two of the directions, and add an additional arrow to “OUT” and “IN.” A healthy church nurtures relationships in an outward trajectory with the wider community, in addition to that is the need for a healthy relationship outwards with the land and the environment. Members must understand their relationship with the outdoors, the soil, the trees and the rivers, and how that is a valid expression of their spirituality. This neglected aspect of Christian spirituality is a natural

part of Maori culture, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and the Church has much to learn from them. The second addition is in the ‘IN’ trajectory. Authentic community requires being intentional in nurturing relationships within the church community, and this also needs to include a healthy relationship with oneself. Discipleship includes growing to become self-aware, or who an individual is in Christ, and areas of one’s life that require healing. This involves vulnerability, and self-disclosure, which are not easy, and authentic, loving community and individuals’ growth go hand-in-hand.

Dulles’ understanding of the team of leaders required is helpful in terms of the dynamics a team requires, but it still falls short for a leader who does not consider themselves to be especially skilled in the area of community formation. The terms pastor, priest, preacher, and servant leader all carry a certain amount of Christian expectation of what they mean, or to put it colloquially they all carry a lot of “baggage.” It is difficult to have a conversation with de-churched people (or any Christian) using these terms as they all mean certain things to certain people. Reflecting on the journey of this project has led to the view that new leadership language is required to allow the conversation to start afresh, and to nurture an environment where de-churched people can grow.

A leadership model from New Zealand culture that continues the sports team analogy in this project is one of coach. A coach teaches and trains the athlete in how to perform, and a team in how to play the game. This model is weak when it comes to participating in activities, as in the church environment the leader is not a spectator, so to extend this image further a model of “player-coach” is proposed. A player-coach is a member of the team, and participates in the activity in an equal level as the rest of the participants, but also is recognised by other members as having experience and
knowledge in the area that they want to grow in. “Team members” give authority to the player-coach in recognition of experience, gifting, and calling, but as far as playing the game, all participants have equal authority and responsibility for the wellbeing of the team, and the pursuit of team goals. There may be times where decisions are made by the player-coach. However, successful sports teams in New Zealand refer to the leadership group within the team, acknowledging that one player never has all of the responsibility in making decisions. This model allows for all of the leadership characteristics needed that are identified in this chapter and the player-coach has the responsibility to ensure the environment is healthy. The largest challenge for this project was to make the transition from the previous leadership model in an institutional role that was clear, comfortable, provided training, to a more fluid, environmentalist type, player coach role.

**The Marks of the Church**

A majority of the focus of this project has been on the essence of church, and identifying activities that de-churched people find helpful in their individual and community formation. The four-directional approach of the Church of England, with the additional two arrows proposed in the previous section, has been used to ensure there is a breadth of activities; however, ecclesiologists would argue that unique marks of the church need to be present for it to be described as fully church, namely the assembly of all believers where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments administered.\(^{103}\) Van Gelder suggests that in the Reformers’ passion to address perceived abuses in the ministry of the Roman Catholic Church, they moved towards ensuring these marks were

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\(^{103}\) Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, loc 866.
present, and focused on “insuring that these tasks were carried out properly under the leadership of officially credentialed ordained ministers.”\textsuperscript{104} The result, no doubt unintended but significant in the Protestant understanding of church, was that “this formulation tended to shift attention from what the church is to what the church does.”\textsuperscript{105} There is no doubt that the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments need to be evident in the life of a church, however it is natural for organisations to drift toward the activity and organisation of itself. Communities of faith must be intentional to prioritize relationship over activity, and ensure that any activity nurtures healthy relationship between God, each other, the wider community and the wider church. For example, the focus of Holy Communion needs to be on nurturing a closer relationship with God, and each other, otherwise it risks becoming a meaningless activity. Baptism can become a rite of passage to belong to an organisation, rather than a public confession of faith and joining in the baptism and a life of relationship with Jesus. Care and ongoing reflection is required to ensure this relational priority of participating in the sacraments is maintained.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 881.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, 905.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Church in the New Zealand context can, and needs to be simple, doing life with Jesus and each other. Sunday worship should not be at the center of the community’s life together, rather authentic relationship with God and each other is vital as the heart of a healthy faith community. Christians are invited to gather around Jesus, encounter him, and as part of that encounter hear his invitation to come, abide, learn, and accompany him participating in God’s mission. This project started with the question “If we started with a ‘clean slate’ to explore a new expression of being church, what could that look like in our Kiwi context?” It is difficult to start with a clean slate as everyone brings experiences and expectations along with them; however, there has been much to learn from this journey with de-churched friends.

Generation X people have left established church in New Zealand, due to many different factors. Some were disheartened, disillusioned, and disgruntled, with a growing sense of not being able to be themselves. They did not have the opportunity to grapple with their questions and felt pressure to accept simple answers, and explanations about God and faith. Others found that unless they were part of running the church, they no longer felt like part of the family and did not fit in for various reasons. People experienced life challenges, which caused a disconnect between life and church, leading them to experience church more like a machine, rather than being a community. Others questioned why the church was not engaging in critical issues such as the environment, housing, food and inequality, and Sunday tended to feel more like a play to attend, which was disconnected from every-day life. They found church to be unchallenging, and simply a nice place to be with nice people, but not really making the world a better place.
People did not want to serve an institution; they wanted a community in which to live out the Gospel together. Everyone involved in this project wanted a faith expression that was real where they could be themselves, one that fosters authentic relationships, and one that does not leave members with the feeling of being subjugated by others expectations.

In 2005, numbers at worship in the Presbyterian Church of Aoteroa New Zealand had declined 71 percent since 1960; the decline has continued in the decade since. Those local congregations that survived or flourished tended to be committed to an orthodox Christian faith, and intentionally adapted their life and message to relate to the changing context around them. While society has changed significantly in that time, New Zealand families still hope for a safe, caring community for their children, and an environment for them to flourish to be all that they can be. They hunger for connection with others, and healthy relationships. Culturally, New Zealand people value tolerance, respect, individual freedom, independence, equality, informality, and inclusivity. Kiwi culture remains spiritual, with 58 percent of people believing in God, and 37 percent praying several times a week or more. People are moving to a more individualized expression of faith, have significantly less time available in their week, so want meaningful activity and authentic community for their families.

Literature suggests that the model of church that aids de-churched people growing in the faith needs to focus on relationship, and communion with God and each other. Any activity that people do together needs to be relational in nature, and must help nurture healthy relationships between people and God, each other, those in the wider community and with the wider church. Relationships outwards must include a relationship with the land and environment, and relationship inwards must include a healthy relationship with
oneself. Church must help people connect with God and each other, and help people reach out to others who are searching for the meaning of life. Maybe membership numbers are no longer a priority for church calculability, but priority given to growing to become like Christ. People want authenticity in their relationships with each other and in their experience of God, which means experiences will be different for different people, and unpredictable. People have left churches because the model has inhibited their faith, and as they grow in faith they need to deconstruct what they have believed growing up, and then go about reconstructing a new belief system. If a church does not allow for this process, including freedom to doubt, question, express emotion, and to participate and feel like they belong, then people will leave.

Not all church leavers can be regarded the same, and the identification of where they are in their dismantling and rebuilding of their “faith house” could be a helpful image to connect with their story, although as Jamieson regularly points out, this is not a linear or straight forward journey. His faith house building analogy helps de-churched people identify with their journey, and the language of “stuck,” “dismantling,” “building, and “settled” aids engagement with de-churched people.  

I could describe all of our participants interviewed in this project as “building,” and moving towards “settled,” suggesting they are maturing in their faith, an observation alone that is encouraging (and in some cases surprising) to the participants. One participant who was initially interviewed for the project did not continue in this process, and on reflection, due to sad circumstances it is likely she is “stuck” in her original faith house. The activities identified in this paper were not easy for her to engage with, so it is possible the

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1 Jamieson, A Churchless Faith, 94.
outcomes and learning from this project are more applicable for those dismantling and building in their faith journey.

Focus needs to be on discipleship, rather than mission. This goes against the bulk of missional material being written and talked about, but this experience suggests everything in the Christian walk is about being an apprentice of Jesus, growing to be like him, and accompanying him in every day life. Church must help people to discover what it means to confess “Jesus is Lord” on a daily basis, which will lead to living an authentic Jesus life, and naturally reaching out to others, sharing their Christ-like humanity with them. History has shown this to be an effective evangelistic strategy, and one that I believe would be effective in the New Zealand context.

The essence of church should continually be revisited—what the church is, before discussing what the church does or how it is organized. Only when there is clarity about the essence of church can the question be asked of what the church could look like in a particular context. This project has found that the church can do any kind of activity to be authentic church, providing it nurtures healthy relationships between God, each other, the wider community, and the wider church. Through listening to the context the church finds itself in, the church finds it can express itself in a way that connects with people. The church is simply people in relationship with God and each other, invited to participate with God in reconciling all things, and restoring creation to the way God originally intended. The community is modeled on the community of the Triune God, as humanity is invited into the embrace of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and then sent into the world. People encounter the risen Christ, then move toward (or away) from him. They then have the opportunity to come to him and rest in him in relationship, accepted
for who they are without the weight of unrealistic religious expectations. They are able to
abide with him, receive living water that refreshes, heals and restores, and to be the
person God created them to be. They learn from him as an apprentice learns from their
master, and then accompany him in day-to-day living in a relationship as friend, not as a
slave or a robot.

People need each other to sustain this kind of living with Christ, and are yoked
together in community with him. Church in the New Zealand context has the potential to
be like the Celtic community, with people transfigured like Christ, living with people
around them to witness to the Jesus way of life, living as God-intoxicated people in
community that is an anticipation of Paradise. It is possible that by living by a “Way of
Life,” having intentional “Soul Friends,” and joining in a daily rhythm of prayer will help
form community and make disciples, and early indications suggest that this is the case,
however considerable more time is required for fruit to emerge. Membership of such a
community should not be complicated, and could be as simple as a person using the word
“we,” identifying themselves with the church.

The church in New Zealand needs to create new ways for people to be formed
that emerge out of the context, such as BBQ meals, celebrations, and being intentionally
in the outdoors. Our community wants to be doing life with Jesus and each other, living
in daily response to an invitation rather than under burdensome expectations, supporting
each other, intentionally growing together in our Christlikeness, living meaningful and
purpose-filled lives, and being part of God ushering in Shalom. Classical spiritual
exercises, such as silence, solitude, daily prayer rhythm, and contemplative prayer, are
vital to be intentional about learning and growing. The environment needs to encourage
exploration, questioning, with freedom to doubt, no pressure to serve, being equalitarian, having room for individual expression, and most important of all, being authentic.

Language creates culture, and communities need to be intentional in creating an environment that is safe and authentic, using language to form and cultivate the environment. Examples of changes in language from this project include: the invitation to accompany Jesus and not follow; relationship is more important that activity; encourage courageous vulnerability; no “shoulds” or expectations to believe a certain way; Scripture is to be related to, not applied; and “you are OK.” Leaders need to be trained to understand their role as environmentalists, midwives, or player-coaches, and help create teams of people who will cultivate a healthy environment. To be part of forming such a leadership team requires deconstructing most, if not all the leader, and the members’ understanding of what it means to lead a church, and help reconstruct an understanding of leading in community which requires love, vulnerability, acceptance, forgiveness, and a significant amount of courage.

This experience has given me hope. If church is simple, then the main thing missing in the ecclesiastical landscape of New Zealand is imagination. Doing life with Jesus and each other can, and should be expressed in many different ways responding to the context in which each community is located. The opportunity to be part of a community where people want to be intentional about their faith in daily life is exciting, and gives optimism for the future of the Church in New Zealand. Our community hopes to live more God-intoxicated authentic lives, in healthy church communities that are part of lives and society being transformed.
APPENDIX A

**Way of life**
A Way of Life is a simple summary set of guidelines, outlining what it means in practice to live a God-centred life in a particular time or setting. It is how to connect with God, and each other, with the whole of life. A “map for life” for how we intend to live.

We will commit to:

1. Living sustainably – of planet resources, plus the pace of life. As individuals and as a community
2. Intergenerational life long learning – we will grow in our discipleship accompanying Jesus, be a spirit led people, joining God in mission
3. Authentic relationships and unity
4. Holistic spirituality (retreats, pilgrimages, contemplative, soul friends)
5. Rhythm of Prayer, Work, and Recreation
6. Live generously
7. Seek transformation and healing of people relationships, communities, and places

In relation to these, we will ask questions of ourselves, and each other.

1. What steps do I take to live in a sustainable way – to ensure I am healthy, and the planet is healthy? Am I using the earth’s resources in a sustainable way?
2. How am I being an apprentice of Jesus? How am I seeking to grow in knowledge? How am I connecting with other generations?
3. How do I experience companionship on my spiritual journey, and be intentional in being committed to others in authentic relationships?
4. Am I taking time out to be intentional in special times to seek God (retreats, pilgrimages, contemplative) and being transparent with another person? (soul friends)
5. What is my personal rhythm of prayer, work, and rest?
6. How do I express generosity, welcome, and hospitality to other people? What are my guiding principles in my use of money and possessions?
7. How do I help others find healing, faith in Jesus, and restoration to be the person they were created to be?
APPENDIX B

Initial interview questions.

1. Tell me about your level of connection with church, as a child, teenager and adult.

2. Tell me your story about leaving your previous church. What were the circumstances leaving, your reflections afterwards, etc. How long was the gap between leaving your previous church and being part of the Kiwi Church community?

3. How would you describe your faith journey after leaving the church? (and before joining Kiwi Church)

4. How would you describe your current thoughts about God? About Jesus?

5. Acknowledging any possible doubts, and issues with the church, do you have any suggestions about what activities could help you in your relationship with Jesus, and your relationship with others?

Final questions

1. Think about now compared to a year ago. Would you say Jesus is more alive in you, less, or about the same?

2. Do you think you have grown as a follower of Jesus? If so, what ways have you grown?

3. If you have grown, what has contributed to that growth do you think?

4. Do you think you have grown closer in relationship with other members of this community?

5. Do you think you have grown in the “one anothers?” Love, encourage, provide hospitality for, accept, forgive etc

6. What activities have helped/hinder your life and faith?
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